

SESSION 16: A SPECIAL CREATION

Genesis 2:7

February 4, 2024

Before we dig into our text, I want to address the question that arose last week in class regarding the two “heavens” in v4. Specifically, why is the second “heavens” singular in some versions. For example, from the LSB,

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh God made earth and heaven.

Out of all of our common versions, only the NASB and LSB (which is the most recent faithful iteration of the NASB) make the second “heaven” singular; all the rest make both plural. I have no explanation for why the NASB and LSB make it singular, but both “heavens” in the original Hebrew are plural. I also could not find a commentator willing to discuss this. So, from the textual evidence, we can only conclude that the second “heavens” should indeed be plural—meaning, the two created heavens: space and the earth’s atmosphere, or sky.

Read Genesis 2:7.

7

Then Yahweh God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and so the man became a living being.

In our last session we just began our look at v7; there is much more for us to consider in this important verse. Last week we looked at how the first man was created: he was “formed,” “molded,” as a potter will form damp clay into a utilitarian vessel or a work of art. I pointed out that we need not lose ourselves in anthropomorphizing this admittedly very tactile verb—that God literally dug His “hands” into the soil to shape and mold the first human. The important takeaway for us is the contrast between God’s previous creations and the attention He gives to this very important, intimate creation.

But the second part of this creation is just as important, and even more intimate than the first.

...and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;

Here once again man is set apart from the rest of the created beings. Of course “the birds [that] fly above the earth” (v1:20) and all the other “living creatures” (v1:24) had breath, but man is singled out for receiving it personally, intimately from his Maker. And it is expressed in a manner even more intimate than the forming of his flesh, as if the Lord God embraced His creation, pressed His lips to the inanimate face, and exhaled life into him.

But, again, we will not conjecture how this was physically accomplished; possibilities abound, none of which can be proven. It is enough that Yahweh God did it, and He did it in a manner which was exceptional compared to the other living beings in His Creation.

JFB: Respiration being the medium and sign of life, this phrase is used to show that man’s life originated in a different way from his body—being implanted directly by God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). ❏

Some will say that this in v7 is God imparting His *Spirit* to man, but the Hebrew for “spirit” is *ruach*, which was used in the second verse of the Bible: “...and the Spirit of God [*Ruach Elohim*] was hovering over the surface of the waters,” and in Psalm 51 when David cries out, “...and do not take Your Holy Spirit [*Ruach HaKodesh*] from me.”

However, later in Genesis, in 7:22, although some versions leave it out, the spirit is indeed associated with the “breath of life”; the Hebrew reads

All in whose nostrils was **the breath of the spirit of life**—of all that was on the dry land—died.

That is, not as in v7, *nishmath chayyim*, but *nishmath ruach chayyim*. And what did Jesus impart to His disciples when He breathed on them in John 20:22?

And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

So in a sense we might suppose that, being created in His image, in God’s breath of life imparted to man was also some of His Spirit. Whether that is the case or not, what sets this apart from the other created beings is that

- the animals were *created as living beings*—that is, they were created with air in their lungs, but the lifeless body of the first man was personally and intimately given life by God Himself;

Ecclesiastes 12:7

...then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit (breath) will return to God who gave it.

- and, as many scholars point out, what Man received from God was not just air or oxygen, nor was it human breath, but literally *God's* breath—“His own vital breath” (Leupold).

...and so the man became a living being.

We want to be careful not to make too much of this—but we also do not want to ignore the full depth of what this event means.

The same phrase is used to describe the creatures in the sea and the birds: “living creature”.

Read Genesis 1:20-21.

The same phrase is used to describe the land creatures.

Read Genesis 1:24.

The Hebrew is *hay-yah nephesh*, a living creature or being. It would be much simpler if that was *all* it meant, but the complicating factor is that (as the KJV translates v2:7) the word *nephesh* also means “soul.”

Does this mean that *all* the creatures have a soul, like humans? The problem is with that question—not the answer. The question assumes the existence of *a soul*, a “thing” dwelling inside humans, a concept not found in the Bible. That is a holdover from Hellenistic philosophies. At its most basic—and how it is used in the Creation text of Chapters One and Two—*nephesh* (*psyche* in Greek) means soul, living being, life, self, person, desire, passion, appetite, emotion.



David Guzik claims that we can see it both ways.

Guzik: The King James Version reads: “man became a living soul.” This makes some wonder if man *is* a soul, or if man *has* a soul. This passage seems to indicate that man *is* a soul, while passages like 1Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 seem to indicate that man *has* a soul. It seems that the Scripture speaks in both ways, and uses the term in different ways and in different contexts.

soul

“The English word soul comes with lots of baggage from ancient Greek philosophy. It's the idea that the soul is a non-physical, immortal essence of a person that's contained or trapped in their body to be released at death. It's a 'ghost in the machine' kind of idea. This notion is totally foreign to the Bible. It's not at all what *nephesh* means in biblical Hebrew.”
(bibleproject.com)

While some of what Guzik says is true, I would respectfully contend that the use of *psyche* in the NT—same as *nephesh* in the OT—is not that different; it does not need to refer to a separate component *within* the human. Take the Thessalonian passage as an example:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your **spirit and soul and body** be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That can be easily interpreted to reflect what we have learned in Genesis 2, that the physical body is something separate from the life given it by God—God created man, but it was lifeless until He breathed into it life: *nephesh*. There is no *effective, practical* difference between these two definitions, these two ways of thinking of “soul,” just a *perceptual* difference. When we die, our lifeless body remains on earth and gradually decays. This flesh was nothing more than the container for *who we were in life*: our personality, our reason, our beliefs, our likes and dislikes—our essential being. *That* is the part of us that is eternal and goes to be with the Lord. You may think of that as a discrete object, a “soul” that leaves your body, but it is actually just everything you were separate from your flesh—it is your *nephesh*. ➡

nephesh

“the animal life, or that principle by which every animal, according to its kind, lives; hence life, vital principle, animal spirit, which is often translated soul or spirit.”

(William Wilson)

We have just spent the bulk of our time examining the literal text of v7. I would like to now spend our remaining time considering some of the *ramifications* of this verse—some of which are of a more philosophical bent, food for thought, musings, as it were.

There is much more to contemplate here, for this verse is filled with profound dichotomies. Just as there is more to the second part of this creative verse than literal oxygen, there is something more poetic—even ironic—to be found in the “dust” or soil God chooses with which to form this first man.

Man is made in God’s image, but he is also made from the soil that comprises his dwelling place. Who is—or will soon be; it is difficult to pinpoint that moment in a timeline—who is the ruler of this dwelling place? Satan. ➡ Thus in this particular creative act God is purposely setting in place the environment and capabilities in which the conflict between our two natures will do battle—the battle that will hound believers every day they are on this earth: righteousness vs. sin, holiness vs. sin, walking by the Spirit vs. sin.

“the god of this world”

Luke 4:5-6

1 John 5:19

John 12:31

2 Corinthians 4:4

We are created in God's image, yet bonded to this fallen earth by our physical substance.

It at once expresses God's gracious condescension to man, in His choice to create us in His image and bring us to life with His own breath, and the purposeful design of His economy that man will never be able to commune with Him without a Savior, a go-between, an Advocate, a sacrificial Lamb. It will not matter that we were created in God's image, that our lungs are filled with His breath; we will each be born with a nature, an earthly bent, that will be a barrier to His righteous and holy ideal.

This apparent paradox *seems* to indicate—in His choice of material for the creation of man—God not just anticipating, but setting the stage for man's approaching Fall. But look at what He says in the next chapter:

Read Genesis 3:17-19.

It is not the earth, the soil, that has corrupted man, but man, in his rebellion against God, that has corrupted the earth! The "groaning" of this earth even today (Romans 8:22) is the result of man's sin against his Maker.

Whether we choose to call it "soul" or "spirit" or just "life-essence," we all have a measure of God within us. It is that that the apostle Paul refers to when he writes to the Romans that man is without excuse in recognizing the evidence for his Creator.

Read Romans 1:18-20.

And it was this Paul referred to when he declared to the council at the Areopagus in Athens, "...He [God] is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring'" (Acts 17:27-28).

Because of His very personal creation of man, every person on earth, whether believer or not, is His offspring.

SESSION 16

The First “Generation” Genesis 2:7

Interlinear for v7

LSB	formed	dust	breathed	breath of life	man	living being
Hebrew	<i>yatsar</i>	<i>aphar</i>	<i>naphah</i>	<i>nishmath chayyim</i>	<i>adahm</i>	<i>hayyah nephesh</i>
interpretation	molded	damp soil	blow into	breath of God to man	man	animate life

God's Breath

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God's Spirit?

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