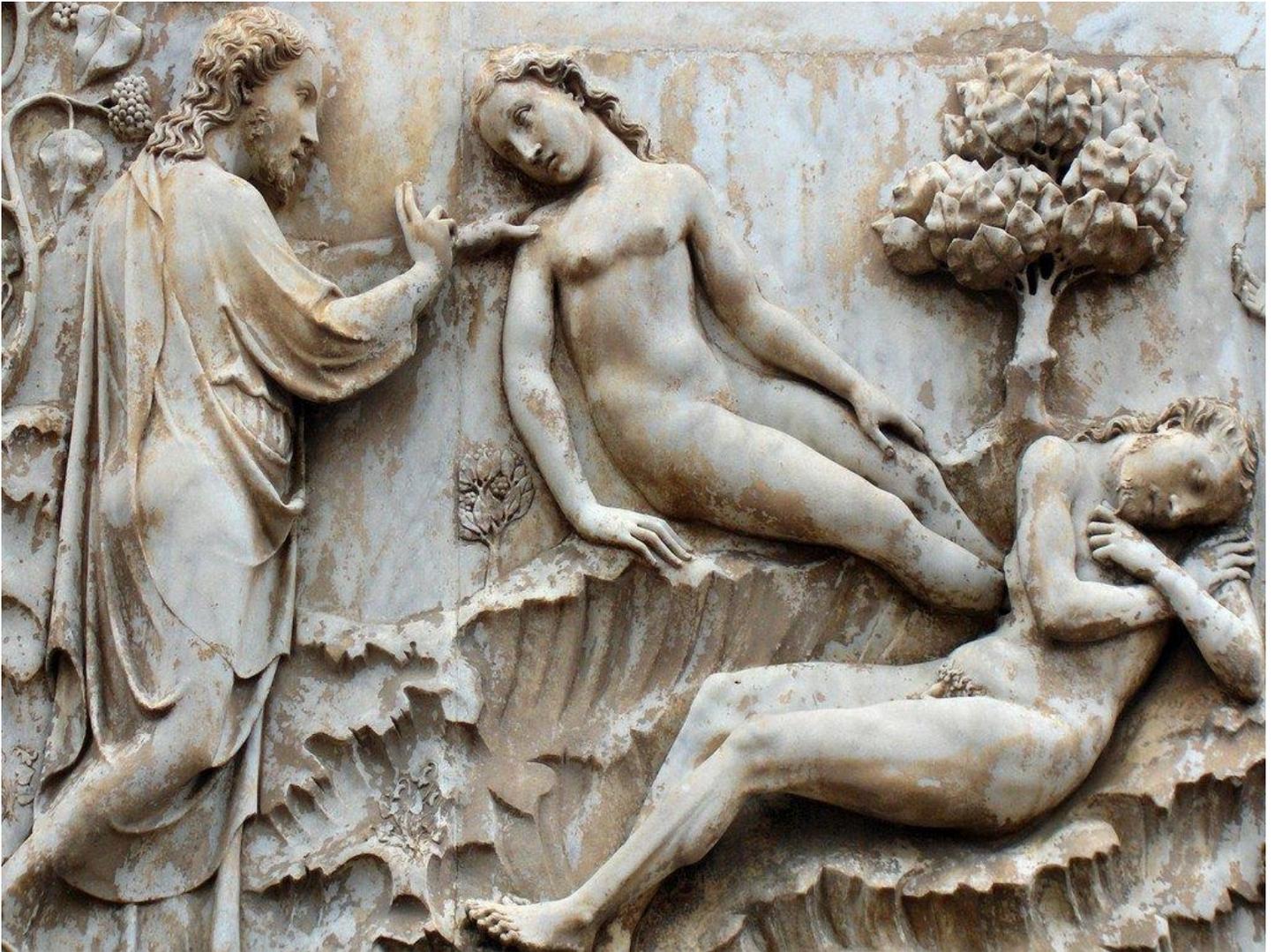# THE HUMAN (HA'ADAM), MAN (ISH) AND WOMAN (ISHSHAH) IN GENESIS 2

This relief of the creation of Eve depicts a traditional understanding of Genesis 2:21-22.

WAS THE FIRST HUMAN BEING MALE?

In Genesis 2 we read the creation account of the first human being.[1] In many English translations of Genesis 2, the first human is simply called "man." This "man" is understood by many people as referring to a male human rather than to a generic human. However, in the Hebrew text, the first "man" is not specifically referred to as a male human (*ish*) until after the "operation" mentioned in Genesis 2:21-22 when a part, or side, is taken out of him.[2]

After the "operation," the now undoubtedly male human sees the female human and says, "This one is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh! She will be called 'woman' (*ishshah*) because she was taken out of 'man' (*ish*)" (Gen. 2:23). The first woman (*ishshah*) and the first man (*ish*) may have both been a part of, or one side of, the first human being (*ha'adam*).[3]

ADAM CAN MEAN "HUMAN" AND "HUMANITY"

The Hebrew word *adam* can mean "human being," and not necessarily a male human being.[4] For instance, in the Hebrew of Genesis 5:2, humankind—both men and women—are referred to as "*adam*" by God. In Genesis 1:27 it says that "God created humankind (*ha'adam*) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male

and female he created them." In Genesis 2, the first human is consistently referred to as *ha'adam* (הָאָדָם), especially before the "operation".[5]

In the screenshots below, I have highlighted every incidence of *ha'adam* (the human) in yellow. (N.B. In verse 5 there is no article but the context indicates that *adam* is not a proper noun.)[6] I have also highlighted every incidence of *ish* (man) with blue, and *ishshah* (woman) with pink. Looking at the screenshots below, we clearly see an *ish*, a male person, after the side that is made into the woman is taken out of *ha'adam*, and not before. Have a look. Is it clear?

ד אֵלֶּה תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, בְּהִבָּרְאָם: בְּיוֹם, עֲשׂוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים-- אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמָיִם.

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

ה וְכֹל שִׂיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה, טֶרֶם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ, וְכָל-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה, טֶרֶם יִצְמָח: כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים, עַל-הָאָרֶץ, וְאָדָם אַיִן, לַעֲבֹד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה.

5 No shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground;

ו וְאֵד, יַעֲלֶה מִן-הָאָרֶץ, וְהִשְׁקָה, אֶת-כָּל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

6 but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

ז וַיִּיצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם, עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה, וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו, נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים; וַיְהִי הָאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.

7 Then the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

ח וַיִּטַּע יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים, גַּן-בְּעֵדֶן--מִקֶּדֶם; וַיָּשֶׂם שָׁם, אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר.

8 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward, in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed.

. . . .

טו וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים, אֶת-הָאָדָם; וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ בְגַן-עֵדֶן, לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ.

15 And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

טז וַיְצַו יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים, עַל-הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר: מִכֹּל עֵץ-הַגָּן, אָכֹל תֹּאכֵל.

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying: 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat;

יז וּמֵעֵץ, הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע--לֹא תֹאכַל, מִמֶּנּוּ: כִּי, בְּיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ--מוֹת תָּמוּת.

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'

יח וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים, לֹא-טוֹב

18 And the LORD God said: 'It is not good that the man

הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ; אֶעֱשֶׂה-לּוֹ עֵזֶר, כְּנֶגְדּוֹ.

should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.'

יט וַיִּצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן-הָאֲדָמָה, כָּל-חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וַיָּבֵא אֶל-הָאָדָם, לִרְאוֹת מַה-יִּקְרָא-לוֹ; וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא-לוֹ הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, הוּא שְׁמוֹ.

19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof.

כ וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁמוֹת, לְכָל-הַבְּהֵמָה וּלְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּלְכֹל, חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה; וּלְאָדָם, לֹא-מָצָא עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ.

20 And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him.

כא וַיַּפֵּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים תַּרְדֵּמָה עַל-הָאָדָם, וַיִּישָׁן; וַיִּקַּח, אַחַת מִצַּלְעֹתָיו, וַיִּסְגֹּר בָּשָׂר, תַּחְתֶּנָּה.

21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the place with flesh instead thereof.

כב וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַצֵּלָע אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם, לְאִשָּׁה; וַיְבִאֶהָ, אֶל-הָאָדָם.

22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from the man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.

כג וַיֹּאמֶר, הָאָדָם, זֹאת הַפַּעַם עֶצֶם מֵעֲצָמַי, וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי; לְזֹאת יִקָּרֵא אִשָּׁה, כִּי מֵאִישׁ לֻקֳחָה-זֹּאת.

23 And the man said: 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'

כד עַל-כֵּן, יַעֲזָב-אִישׁ, אֶת-אָבִיו, וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ; וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ, וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד.

24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.

כה וַיִּהְיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִּים, הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ; וְלֹא, יִתְבֹּשָׁשׁוּ.

25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Hebrew/English texts used with permission from mechon-mamre.org. Colored highlights added, verses 9-14 omitted.

EQUALITY, NOT HIERARCHY

I believe the Genesis 2 creation account was designed to show the equality, compatibility and unity of the first man and woman. It may be we are even meant to understand that they both had the same source, *ha'adam,* and shared the same flesh made from the same ground that had been personally enlivened by God's own breath (Gen. 2:7).[7] Genesis 2 thus gives further insight regarding the equality of men and women already stated in Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:26-28 tells us that men and women had the same status, the same authority, and the same purpose at creation. And in both Genesis 1 and 2, no one, man or woman, was given authority over another person. There is no hint of any gender hierarchy, or a difference in status, among humankind before sin entered the world.

Evidence of a so-called "creation order" in the Genesis 2 creation account, often used to support the notion of male-only authority, is not clear cut. Though we may say that Adam was created first, he was a considerably different person after the "operation" than before. A chunk of him was now missing. It had been taken out by God and had become an integral part of the first woman. Since a significant part of the first woman was a part, or a side, of the first human, the concept of "the created order" is not clear cut or decisive.

We miss the purpose of the Genesis 2 story when we read a gender hierarchy into it.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The story of Adam and Eve may not be the story about the very first humans, or the only humans, God created, but the story of the couple who were the first people created in an ancestral line that would include Israel.

To some, the idea may be new that God created human beings other than Adam and Eve, but the biblical text shows us that Adam and Eve's oldest son Cain was aware of humans other than those of his family. He was worried they would attack him when God drove him away from his farmland (Gen. 4:13-15). Furthermore, Cain went to live in a land called Nod, a land with a name and, therefore, presumably an inhabited land (Gen. 4:15). And he may have found his wife there (Gen. 4:16). Cain later built a city called Enoch. Who were the inhabitants of this city? Were they only Cain's descendants?

[2] Some argue that because *ha'adam* says in Genesis 2:23 that *ishshah* ("woman") was taken out of *ish* ("man"), this indicates that *ha'adam* was indeed a man. However, the use of *ishshah* and *ish* in Genesis 2 may be a play on words, a pun, rather than intended to convey that *ha'adam* was originally male. There are a few puns in the Genesis 2-3 story using the following words:

Adamah אֲדָמָה (dirt, earth) H127—*Adam* אָדָם (human, man) H120, in Genesis 2:7
Arom עָרוֹם (naked) H6174 Genesis 2:25—*Arum* עָרוּם (cunning, wise) H6175, in Genesis 2:25-3:1
Ish אִישׁ (man) H376—*Ishshah* (woman) אִשָּׁה H802, in Genesis 2:23-24.

[3] An integral part of the first woman was literally taken out of the first human. The Hebrew word traditionally translated as "rib" typically means "side." In the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament), the Greek word for "side" (*pleura*) is used, a word that typically refers to a side of the body. An English translation from the Septuagint is that God "took one of his sides . . . and he built the side into a woman" (Gen. 2:21-22).

[4] In Numbers 31:11, 26, 28, 30, 35, 40, 46, 47, *adam* refers exclusively to female human beings who were prisoners of war. By referring to them as *adam* ("human"), they are distinct from the animals that were also plundered.

[5] The man continues to be mostly called *ha'adam* of Genesis 3, except for Genesis 3:6 & 16 where *ish* is used with the sense of "husband."

[6] In the early chapters of Genesis, *adam* is typically used with the definite article, *ha'adam*, meaning "the human being." Occasionally, however, *adam* serves as the proper name "Adam," typically written without the article. The

first unambiguous instance in the Hebrew text of the first human being called "Adam" is not until Genesis 4:25, though perhaps the proper name also occurs in Genesis 3:17. (See here.)

In Genesis 2:20 the article is hidden by the inseparable preposition *bet*. I suspect English translations of "Adam" in verse 20 are incorrect and based on the Masoretic pointing that was not part of the original or "inspired" biblical text. I am happy to be corrected on this. Many English translations use the proper name "Adam" in Genesis 2:20. Here are a few translations that don't.

Unfortunately, the Septuagint transliterates (rather than translates) the Hebrew *adam* into the proper noun "Adam" several times in Genesis 2.

[7] Several Jewish writers and rabbis, both ancient and modern, had the understanding that *ha'adam* was originally both male and female. For example, the *Genesis Rabbah*, a Midrash of ancient rabbinic interpretations of Genesis compiled in the fifth century, states,

Rabbi Jeremiah b. Eleazar said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, He created him an hermaphrodite [bi-sexual] {or, androgyne}, for it is said, "Male and female created He them and called their name Adam" (Gen. 5:2). Rabbi Samuel b. Nahman said: "When the Lord created Adam He created him double-faced {or, with two faces}, then He split him and made him of two backs, one back on this side and one back on the other side." *Genesis Rabbah* 8.1 (Source p. 53) (My use of braces.)

Rabbi Samuel b. Nahman thought Adam and Eve had been joined along the back, but when separated they then each had their own back.

IMAGE

"The Creation of Eve": A marble relief on the left pier of the façade of the cathedral in Orvieto, Italy. © Georges Jansoone 2008 (Wikimedia Commons).

by Marg Mowczko – December 2013

Here's a little bit about me. My first name is Margaret, or Marg (with hard "g"), and my last name is pronounced "Moss-koh." I'm married to Peter and we have two grown sons, a daughter-in-law, and two adorable grandchildren. (I love being a Nana!) We all live on the Central Coast of New South Wales, about 60 kilometres north of Sydney, Australia.

I first learned about what it means to be a Christian at a camp approximately 45 years ago, when I was about 10 years old. A speaker at the camp told me that being a Christian wasn't primarily about believing in a certain set of values or beliefs; it was about having a real relationship with God himself, which Jesus made possible by dealing with the problem of sin with his sacrificial death on the cross. It was also in that meeting that I heard about the Holy Spirit for the first time. This message of Christianity made perfect sense to me.

The Good News of Jesus still makes sense to me as I keep learning, and as my relationship with God deepens, and as I've been involved in various ministries.

Source: https://margmowczko.com/human-man-woman-genesis-2/