

God Formed Man from the Dust of the Ground, and Breathed into His Nostrils the Breath of Life

2: 5-7

DIG: Can Satan create life out of nothing? Can mankind create life out of a test tube? Who holds the universe together? No one but God, who is infinitely superior in strength and power, knows all things, and sustains the universe. That's mighty! El Shaddai, God Almighty, reveals Himself by special deeds of power. How does He reveal Himself in a special way in these verses? How is man different from the animals?

REFLECT: In your relationship with God, is He more like a distant relative, divine lover, or perfect stranger? How might you draw closer to Him? How would your life be different if you fully appreciated that your very life and breath was a gift from Elohim? Would your time be spent differently? Would you spend your money differently? How would your relationships change?

This section is the detail of the sixth day of creation and is one long sentence in Hebrew. It is divided into three circumstantial clauses beginning with the Hebrew word *when* and *the conclusion*.

When no shrub (siah) of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant (heseb) of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth (2:5a). From the special perspective of this chapter, this beginning verse agrees with 1:1-2 that in the beginning, the earth was formless and void. The wild growth (*siah*) had not appeared, let alone the edible crops (*heseb*).⁴³

When there was no man to work the ground (2:5b). Why was there no plant life in the beginning? Because there was no man to work the ground. All was not ready.

When streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground (2:6). Elohim separated the seas, which at one time covered the whole surface of the earth, from the land on the third day. The narrative skips the work of the fourth and fifth days. And finally, by the sixth day, the stage was set for the creation of man and woman. There will be no rain until the Flood.

The conclusion: ADONAI formed (yatzar) the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (2:7). This verse, with profound simplicity, matches and completes 1:27. So God created man in His own image, **formed from the dust of the ground**; in the image of Elohim He created

him, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; male and female He created them, and the man became a living being (1:27 and 2:7).

The word **formed** (*yatzar*) means *to mold or shape by design*. The word **created**, (*bara*) *out of nothing*, is not used here because **ADONAI, God** is forming **man** out of something that **He** has already **created**, namely **the ground**. So **formed** here means *out of something*, but it was still something only **God** could do. Elsewhere in the Bible the word **formed** is used of a potter shaping his clay (1 Samuel 17:28; Isaiah 29:16; Jeremiah 18:1-17), a goldsmith who makes idols (Isaiah 44:9; Habakkuk 2:18), the shaping of the Messiah's body in the womb (Isaiah 49:5), and the things formed by **Elohim** (Psalm 33:15, 94:9, 119:73).

It is interesting that the word **formed** has a defect in the Hebrew text. It is spelled with a double *yad* here, but is spelled correctly in 2:19. **This is something that the Rabbis loved to pick up on and comment about. Some said it represents the two inclinations of man, good and evil. Some said it represents the material and spiritual aspects of man, while others said it represents a double forming, once for this world and once for the resurrection.** They loved to debate things like this.

ADONAI, Elohim formed the man (adam) from the dust of the ground (adamah). The Hebrew text displays a beautiful pun in this verse. In English it would be something like: *God formed the earthlings out of the earth.* The pun reminds us that our origins are **earthly**. As Rabbi Sha'ul puts it: **The first man was of the dust of the earth, he was an earthy man (First Corinthians 15:47-48).** In fact, the Bible compares us to the **earthy** substance of clay many times (Job 4:19, 19:8-9, 33:6; Isaiah 41:25, 45:9; Jeremiah 18:4-6; Romans 9:21; Second Corinthians 4:7). The emphasis here is the humble origin of **man formed out of the ground. The rabbis teach that the dust was collected from all parts of the world. As a result, some dust was collected from the future site of the altar, where God said: Make an altar of the earth for Me (Exodus 20:24). Because the Hebrew word for ground (adamah) in Genesis 2:7 and earth (adamah) in Exodus 20:24 are the same in the Hebrew text, they say it symbolizes that the altar would make atonement for man's sins.**

Genesis 2:7 also teaches us that **man's nature is both physical and spiritual. God not only formed the man from the dust of the earth; He also breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Elihu, the young upstart in the book of Job said this: The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of Shaddai, God Almighty, gives me life (Job 33:4).** Since it is **God's breath and Spirit** that gives us life, if **He** were to withdraw **His life-giving power** from us all mankind would **perish together and man would return to the dust (Job 34:15).** Abraham said that apart from **God we are nothing but dust and ashes (18:27).** But the **LORD** took the lifeless body of **the man and breathed His own breath into his lungs, which**

distinguishes **the man** from all the other creatures. We are much more than a **God-shaped** piece of **earth**. We have within us the gift of life, which is a gift from **ADONAI Himself**. The act of breathing life into **Adam** has the face-to-face intimacy of a kiss and portrays the personal intimacy of the relationship between **God** and us. We were created with a capacity for serving and fellowshiping with our **Maker**.⁴⁴

It was only when both of the actions were completed that **man became a living being** (*nephesh*), literally *a living soul*. **Adam** needed to be energized. **His** breathing needed to be activated, **his** heart needed to start pumping, and so on. But life can only come from life. And because there was only **Elohim in the beginning**, it must ultimately come from **Him**. This *living soul* is also shared by animals (**1:24**), and refers to the consciousness of the mind and emotions. So **man's** uniqueness does not rely on **the breath of life** itself because the same is said of the animals. **Man's** uniqueness lies in the fact that **he** was made in the image of **God** (**1:27**) and the animals were not. Sorry PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). The point here is that **man became a living soul** when **ADONAI gave man the breath of life**. This was not a long, drawn out evolutionary process because **Adam** was not **a living soul** before this. **So it is written: The first man Adam became a living being (1 Corinthians 15:45)**. Not only did **Adam** receive **his soul** directly from **God** rather than evolving from the animal kingdom, but **Adam** was also **the first man**. There were no others before **him**.

No doubt about it, Elihu was right. Although the breath of **God** can produce ice (**Job 37:10**) or set a fire pit ablaze (**Isaiah 30:33**), it also gives us life. To **ADONAI** and to **Him** alone, we owe our very **life and breath**. In **Him** and to **Him** alone **we live and move and have our being** (**Acts 17:25 and 28**).⁴⁵ If we really believe this, the implications for our lives are huge. How would this change your outlook on life? How would this change your prayer life?