

In the beginning

Part 7 – Adam and Eve’s fatal mistake

Adam and Eve’s fatal mistake was not grasping what God had created man and woman for.

And that was a great pity, because it was only in their relationship as man and woman that the training program for rulership of this planet by humans could be successfully completed. Up to the point of God bringing a woman to the man the training program was progressing beautifully all through Genesis 2, but there was something still lacking in the man, however, because in **Genesis 2:18**, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” A man on his own was not fit to rule God’s creation. He would need, in God’s own words again, “a helper suitable for him.”

Proper and successful rulership of the planet, therefore, also meant finding the man a helper that was perfectly suited to him. Up to this point God was quite happy working with the man alone when it came to taking care of the garden and naming the birds and animals. But God had another reason for focusing the man’s attention on the creatures he brought to him to name. It was to prepare the man for the next stage in his education in rulership, that rulership by humans requires the relationship of male and female together.

Was the man actually aware of God’s purpose in bringing animals and birds to him to name? It seems so, because in **verse 20** no suitable helper was “found” for the man, so FINDING a suitable helper was obviously the main purpose of the exercise. And concentrating Adam’s attention on all these creatures, all needing males and females to reproduce, and all of them so naturally pairing up together, was bound to get Adam’s juices flowing as far as finding himself a mate too. It would be a mate very similar to himself as well, because that was the pattern with all the other creatures. There were noticeable differences between the males and females, yes, but structurally and anatomically it was easy to pick which female went with which male, and which creatures obviously suited each other. It would also have been noticeable that each bird or animal sought the company of its own kind or breed, and that the males were the ones seeking out the females, all of which were tuning the man’s mind very nicely for the “suitable helper” he needed that God was about to present to him.

But what did God mean by that phrase, “suitable helper”? Well, if you were an Israelite reading this - to whom it was originally written and for whose benefit it was originally intended - you’d be reading it in Hebrew, so what did “suitable helper” mean in Hebrew?

The Hebrew word for “helper” was **ezer**, the true meaning of which has probably shocked any woman who actually looked into what **ezer** means and how it’s used in the Old Testament. I quote one such woman who wrote: “My first serious encounter with my calling as an **ezer** happened in the middle of the night. I was smuggling books out of my husband’s study, (because) for years I’d been troubled by interpretations of Eve that left me and a lot of other women out in the cold. I was looking for answers, but I was not at all braced (or prepared) for what I was about to find.”

In other words, what she read came as a complete surprise, because she very quickly discovered that GOD is an **ezer** too. One of Moses’ sons, for instance, was named **Eliezer** - because, as Moses explains in **Exodus 18:4**, “My father’s God was my helper (**ezer**); he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.” Moses named his son in response to GOD being an **ezer**.

And when God was being an **ezer** it was directly connected to rescuing and saving Israel from a deadly enemy. This was more than God merely assisting Israel, therefore, it was saving their skin by some powerful intervention. And it was this kind of **ezer** that Israel was **looking to God** for too, as we see in **Deuteronomy 33:7**, when Moses cries out to God, “Hear O Lord the cry of Judah...Oh, be his help (**ezer**) against his foes.” In other words, come to us Lord with the kind of power and might that we can meet our enemies on an equal footing and beat them. That’s what **ezer** meant to those Israelites.

And it’s constantly with that meaning that the word **ezer** is used in Scripture, as we see in **verse 26** when Moses cries out again, “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help (**ezer**) you,” and in **verse 29**, “Blessed are you, O Israel. Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and helper (**ezer**) and your glorious sword.” When Moses uses the word **ezer**, therefore, he’s talking about God coming alongside with the kind of power that would deliver, rescue, save and protect Israel from her enemies and make her a force to be reckoned with. Moses knew all too well that **without** that kind of **ezer** help from God Israel would never survive on her own, a point that Israel would be constantly reminded of through the years.

Imagine, then, what an Israelite would be thinking when the word **ezer** was used to describe a WOMAN. Imagine what any woman today might be thinking too, on discovering **ezer** is also used of God and his powerful, saving, protecting help being utterly necessary for the Israelites' survival, because they'd be facing enemies they could not withstand on their own.

You mean God created such an **ezer** in a woman for a man? You mean she's an indispensable warrior on a man's behalf, specifically and deliberately and beautifully equipped by God himself to provide the same kind of help for a man that he, God, provided for Israel? And that's what he created a woman for? Well, yes, that's what Genesis 2:18 says - but why would a man **need** such help in the first place?

For exactly the same reason that Israel needed that kind of help from God. Israel was about to enter the land of Canaan, where they would be facing powerful opposition from the inhabitants and their highly seductive gods. But wasn't that the same powerful and highly seductive opposition that Adam and Eve would also be facing from the serpent? The parallel between what Adam and Eve were about to come up against and what Israel was about to come up against was exact, so any Israelite reading about man needing an **ezer** woman in Genesis 2:18 could easily make the connection between that and themselves needing that same kind of **ezer** help from God in Canaan.

What we see happening in Genesis, therefore, is God preparing Israel for opposition, just as he prepared Adam and Eve for opposition. God obviously knew opposition was coming for Israel, because he knew what Canaan was like, and he was taking them straight into the lion's den on purpose. But he also knew opposition was coming for Adam and Eve, because he knew what the serpent was like (having also created it), and he was letting the serpent loose on them on purpose too. In both cases God was **allowing** opposition - and highly cunning and powerful opposition too - because it was an essential part in Adam and Eve's training, and in Israel's training too, for rulership of the world.

But he was also **preparing** them for their opposition by providing them with the secret in dealing with it. It was all in that word **ezer**, first of all, which got the point across to Adam, and to Israel, that **they could not do this alone**. On his own the man wouldn't be able to fend off the serpent, but with the **ezer** help of a woman he could, just as Israel would never be able to fend off the seductive gods of Canaan on their own, but with the **ezer** help of God they could.

And to an Israelite reading this it would have made total sense, having just been rescued by God's *ezer* help from the weird gods and despotic rule of Egypt. They knew now how God worked, that he'd allowed them to be overwhelmed by the power of Egypt on purpose, but when they called out to him he came to their rescue. And what a rescue it was: God took on the might of Egypt and smashed it.

Imagine being an Israelite, then, and being told by Moses you're on your way to yet **another** weird society in Canaan, full of more overwhelming and highly seductive gods and even nuttier ideas. And the reason God was sending you into the lion's den in Canaan was to show those Canaanites how great YOUR God was compared to all their gods and how great you as a nation became when you trusted and obeyed him.

But by now you had it tucked away in your brain what God could and would do as your helper, your *ezer*. So God had prepared you very nicely as an Israelite for the job he'd given you to do in Canaan, by telling you the story through Moses in Genesis how he'd prepared Adam very nicely for the job he'd given him to do in Eden, by bringing him an *ezer* helper too. God was still working the same way, in other words, allowing opposition still but also the means of dealing with it.

And his means of dealing with it was in that Hebrew word for helper, because just as God as Israel's *ezer* helper was powerful enough to smash all opposition, so was the *ezer* helper God provided in the woman he brought to Adam. God had provided the means in the relationship of the man and woman, therefore, to deal with all opposition to his plan.

It was quite a challenge God was giving them, because opposition to his plan was real. The book of Genesis opens with a strong hint, for instance, that something horrible had happened to this planet that rendered it formless and empty. And clearly that was not good, because it was only after God reformed the world in six days into a beautifully functioning planet that he called it good. It wasn't good before, in other words; something 'not good' had happened, suggesting the presence of an evil force at work as well.

But God dealt with it by recreating the world out of its chaotic state and then taking up residence on this planet himself (pictured by him resting on the seventh day) to supervise the process of creating and maintaining order on the Earth so that it would not return to its chaotic state. And then he created male and female humans in his likeness to carry on from there.

The reason, therefore, that he created male and female humans was to maintain order in his dwelling place, and to guard it against disorder, chaos and evil returning. But as Moses shows us, it was primarily in the **relationship** of the man and woman, and what God had equipped them both with, that human beings would be able to take on chaos and beat it. That was the key.

And this was the tremendous challenge God faced those first two humans with. It was going to be tough, yes, and there were hints of that already in their original job description, in the terms “ruling” and “subduing” in Genesis 1:28. The word “subduing” especially was a strong hint that the challenge would include opposition as well. Opposition was also hinted at in the job God gave Adam to do, of taking care of the garden, which in the wording also meant **guarding** it (the same language was used of the cherubim guarding the tree of life in Genesis 3:24.) It was Adam’s job, therefore, to serve as guardian and protector of this very special place of God’s residence on Earth, to keep it pure, in the same way that Israel was expected to guard and protect their nation against all false gods, and keep themselves pure. And this was the way God designed things, that from this pure base in Eden, and later in the nation of Israel, he would bring order, productivity, beauty and joy to this planet through human beings, and in a way that would also prevent the Earth becoming ‘tohu and bohu’ again.

God could, of course, have provided his **ezer** help directly to Adam, but instead he provided it in a woman. Woman would be man’s **ezer**, his shield and defender, his warrior-queen, deploying in his defense all that the man needed to stand by the job God had begun in him, enabling him to stand tall against all opposition. Woman would be to man, therefore, what God would be to Israel. That was her role and God had equipped her perfectly for it. She would be a force to be reckoned with, because that’s what God meant her to be.

And it’s all there in the meaning of “helper” in Hebrew. Christian tradition, however, has really got stuck on that word, preferring anemic translations for it like ‘help meet’ and ‘help mate’ instead, which reduced the meaning of **ezer** to a mere helper, a subordinate assistant, and the wife being nothing more than the ‘little wifey back home’ picking up after her husband, having his dinner ready exactly when he wants it, and meekly submitting to his every wish.

And how many girls and women have grown up in Christian homes like that, thinking that was the way God wanted them to be? No wonder it’s such a shock to women when they find out what the Hebrew word **ezer** really means.

It shouldn't be a shock, though, after reading the story of Zipporah in **Exodus chapter 4**. Zipporah was the non-Israelite wife of Moses. She could be well excused, therefore, for being the typical submissive wife taught in Christian tradition, because here she was married to a prince in Pharaoh's court, on whose shoulders God had now placed the huge responsibility of leading his one and only chosen nation in the entire world. And she wasn't even a native of Israel herself either, so if anyone should be the meek wife shuffling in the shadows of her husband's enormous aura and not saying a peep, it was Zipporah.

But when God threatened to kill her husband, out sprang the **ezer** in her. She was no drooping wallflower of typical Christian tradition when she saw her husband in conversation with God and it was clear that Moses was in deep trouble. She knew why too. Moses had been shirking his duties toward their son by putting off having him circumcised, a total no-no for the leader of Israel when the sign of God's personal covenant with Israel was circumcision.

Before God had a chance to slice Moses into little pieces, however, Zipporah grabbed their son with one hand and a flint knife in the other and circumcised the boy right there and then, chucking the foreskin in Moses' direction as proof of it, while yelling at him, "You bloody husband you, look what you made me do to save your life, buddy." And if Moses wasn't impressed, God was, because here was the kind of woman he'd crafted for Adam, the kind who, when her man faltered in his duties, stepped in to save him.

Moses was very fortunate, then, having an **ezer** wife step in as his shield and defender, his rescuer and deliverer, because without her he'd be dead. She was literally, then, his **lifesaver**, and she wasn't afraid one bit to call her husband a total idiot either, and in front of God too. And it must be a real shocker to Christian tradition that God didn't correct her. Instead, he totally respected what she did and let go of Moses' throat and spared his life, because this is exactly what he'd created a woman to be for her man. She is his lifesaver.

We can get into how that plays out for Christian men and women today, but before that we'd better touch on the **other** word describing the woman in Genesis - the word "suitable." The woman God brought to Adam wasn't just a strong and powerful lifesaving helper; she was a "suitable" helper too. And the word for "suitable" in Hebrew in that verse is **kenegdo**. The two times it's used here in Genesis 2 are the only times it's used in all Scripture, and there is no equivalent in any ancient Near East literature either.

So **kenegdo** was something completely unique, that only God came up with to solve this problem of the man ON HIS OWN not being able to rule God's world, or project God's image properly, or guard and protect the garden where God dwelt.

What the man needed was a **kenegdo**, something that could fill in everything that he wasn't but desperately needed. So it had to be something human and similar to the man, but not another man or an animal or bird, because there was also the matter of God wanting humans to produce children too.

So God came up with a woman, but used the word **kenegdo** to describe her. It's rooted in three Hebrew words, **ke** meaning 'like or similar', **neged** meaning 'in front of or in sight of', and **o** or **ow** meaning 'it or him'. Putting them together we end up with 'similar to him in full view in front of him'.

One obvious analogy would be looking at oneself in the mirror. What you see in full view in front of you is something very similar to you. It's not fully similar because it's the opposite way round, but in every other way it's equal. It's not a lesser or smaller version of you, it's exactly the same size and substance, and that's what **kenegdo** gets across, that a woman is every bit a man's equal. She can stand face to face with her husband, or beside him, knowing she has complete equality with him according to God's original design.

And when **neged** meaning 'in front of' becomes a noun it can mean 'out front' too, like a leader leading troops into battle, meaning a woman could take that role as well. She could easily take charge and be out front leading the way and leading the pack, because in God's design she was every bit a man's match. It's a good thing, then, that the word 'helper' is attached to the word **kenegdo**, so that a woman directs her considerable God-given abilities toward helping her man, because she knows men on their own are lacking.

It's clear, then, that God never intended women and men to compete or forge ahead on their own paths of self-fulfillment, nor did he give any hint in Genesis 2 that there is some sort of hierarchical order with men in charge and women as subordinate assistants. All that stuff and nonsense came about AFTER Adam and Eve failed in their face-off with the serpent. That's when the relationship between men and women changed into what we're still experiencing today, with war between the sexes, gender identity issues, women being abused and underpaid, men thinking they rule the roost, and divorce rates increasing.

It's horrible that all this is happening between male and female, but now we know the fatal mistake that Adam and Eve made: It was not grasping what God had created man and woman for.

There was a moment when Adam **did** grasp it, when he yelled at first sight of the woman God brought to him in **Genesis 2:23**, "Finally, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" (The Message). When he sees her for the first time he doesn't think, "Wow, she's a bit spongy and weak looking, but here's hoping she's got enough meat on her to do my laundry and skin a beaver." Nor does he comment on the obviously different body bits she's got either. All he can think of is, he's met his match, in both senses of the phrase, not only his match as a perfect companion, but also his match as an equal, and he is thrilled with both.

And the word "rib" in **verse 21** brings this out too. In Hebrew it's the word **tsela**, which everywhere else in the Old Testament is translated as 'side'. God, in other words, split Adam right down the middle into two equal sides, one of which became woman. The woman, therefore, was **literally** bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, with exactly the same anatomical structure from head to toe the man had. Again, it makes the point clear that the man and woman were equals, a point Adam himself jubilantly confirmed when he yelled out in **verse 23**, "she shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man." He used the word **ishah** for woman and **ish** for man in that verse, using exactly the same root word for both. Oh, he knew all right that she was just like him, his equal, his other half, and made of the very same stuff he was.

And whether God did this by literally anesthetizing Adam and surgically slicing him in two and filling the empty half of him with new flesh, or that putting Adam into a "deep sleep" meant it was simply a vivid vision or dream, either way the English translation for "rib" fails miserably in conveying what God was setting up here. Out of one person he was creating **two equal people**, perfectly matched for companionship and producing children, in preparation for bringing order to the world, and keeping opposition and disorder at bay.

Which is why **verse 24** says, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united with his wife." It was in the UNITY of the man and woman as husband and wife that humans would rule the world successfully. It was this final lesson in unity between husband and wife, therefore, that would complete their training in rulership. Side by side now as powerful and perfectly matched equals they would face their first test and first taste of opposition together.

For Israel, also about to face their first major opposition in Canaan, the message in Genesis was obvious, that when temptation comes, which it will, they would not be able to resist it alone. They would need their ***ezer kenegdo***, their ever-present, powerful and perfectly equipped helper God with them.

The message for husband and wife is clear too, that it's in the husband recognizing and valuing his wife as his ***ezer kenegdo*** that he will find the ever-present, powerful and perfectly equipped help he needs in a world that often threatens to overwhelm him too. He's the one God chose to bring order to the world and keep the opposition at bay, but right beside him is his God-given lifesaver, the only creature on Earth perfectly designed to keep him hacking away at the dragons and picking him up when he's down. And it's in that relationship as co-equals together they are literally practicing the secret to successful human rulership of the planet in their lives right now.

And in the New Testament that relationship between man and woman takes on even more meaning, because Paul compares it to the relationship between Christ and the church. As Paul has explained elsewhere, Christ and the church now make up God's temple on Earth. In Genesis all God's creation was his temple, with the garden in Eden being the holiest place of all, pictured later in the tabernacle as the place that only the High Priest could enter. It was job of the High Priest to keep the temple and himself absolutely pure and guard against impurities entering, just as it was Adam's job as Eden's High Priest to keep himself and the garden free of all evil.

But that, Paul says, is the job that Christ and his church now have. Christ was the first to successfully keep evil at bay, and he's the one who now leads the charge to humans purifying and ruling the planet, but he's not doing it without **his** very own perfectly designed and perfectly equipped ***ezer kenegdo*** too. Jesus is not doing this alone, any more than God left Adam to do the job alone. Jesus has his helper too, his very own bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh ***ezer kenegdo*** here on the ground in the trenches giving their all in service to him.

And it's in that same relationship of Christ and HIS helper now that successful rulership of the planet will be accomplished, so that one day the Earth will be a pure place for the Father to dwell in and all opposition will have been defeated. But the message of Genesis is clear, that rulership is done by relationship, first in the relationship of Adam and Eve, and now in the relationship of Christ and his church. And it's now our mistake if we don't realize that's how God has set things up, just as he did in the beginning.