**Adam’s Rib 07**

Every so often somebody drops a special treat in my dish – something with a new ad intriguing flavor. So it was when Intervarsity Press recently published an essay entitled “Genesis 2:20-23: Why From a Rib?”. It considers that very question – they ask why, if Adam was created “from the dust of the ground”, was Eve formed from “one of the man’s ribs”, essentially wondering about the reason for the distinction.

This is one of those things in Scripture that people never think about, let alone research in any depth. As a group of 21st-century hurry-up Christians, we gloss over the whole creation business and accept the details of what’s been said without any more than a few seconds worth of rumination (except, maybe, for pondering just how long God’s “days” were).

But whenever Intervarsity poses a question, the make a serious attempt to provide a well-thought-out answer. In this case, they opine that the idea of the rib could well have been based on ancient mythology emanating from Sumer – specifically, from the Sumerian epic “Enki and Ninhursag”. This intricate tale is recorded in what is known as “The Dilmun Poem”, Dilmun being a city-state and trade center in Sumer, now known to have stood where the island nation of Bahrain is today. And with Dilmun, we’re going back about 5500 years to some of the oldest clay tablets still in existence.

The poem has been translated from the cuneiform by antiquities specialists at Oxford University, and can be accessed in that form on line. (Yes, I read the whole thing – and, lo and behold, the part of it that figures in the rib discussion doesn’t come until the very end; sections 254-280 out of 281.)

Anyway, the tablets say that Enki, the god of water, fell sick, body part by body part, and to cure him, the goddess Ninhursag delivered out of each of his hurting areas a different offspring. These were to become eight new gods and goddesses. When it came to his ribs, she gave birth to Nin-ti, who was declared to be “The Lady of the Month”, even though her name literally means “Lady” (Nin) “Rib” (ti).

Apparently, scholars have not considered it much of a stretch to connect the Nin-ti and Eve accounts when it comes to the origin of woman. They make an educated guess that Genesis 2:20-23 borrowed the rib idea from the Sumerians, and who’s to say it didn’t?

Thinking about Eve, there’s also a theory that the rib connotes the intended side-by-side relationship between man and woman while avoiding any suggestion of female subjugation by - or innate inferiority to – the male of the species; i.e., that woman was made to be mam’s companion, not his subordinate.

So if we can handle the notion of such a *non sequitur* origin situation as dust versus rib, we should be able to fathom the meaning of the rib on the most fundamental of psycho-social levels - shouldn’t we? I mean, this story is a little more than we had before.

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