Genesis creation narrative

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The **Genesis creation narrative** is the [creation myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creation_myth) of both [Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism) and [Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELeemingLeeming2009113-1) The narrative is made up of two stories, roughly equivalent to the first two chapters of the [Book of Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Genesis). In the first, [Elohim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elohim" \o "Elohim) (the Hebrew generic word for [God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God)) creates the heavens and the earth in six days, then rests on, blesses and sanctifies the [seventh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_Sabbath). In the second story, God, now referred to by the personal name [Yahweh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahweh), creates [Adam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam), the first man, from dust and places him in the [Garden of Eden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden_of_Eden), where he is given dominion over the animals. [Eve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve), the first woman, is created from Adam and as his companion.

Borrowing themes from [Mesopotamian mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamian_mythology), but adapting them to the [Israelite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israelites) people's [belief in one God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism),[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESarna199750-2) the first major comprehensive draft of the [Pentateuch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentateuch) (the series of five books which begins with Genesis and ends with [Deuteronomy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deuteronomy)) was composed in the late 7th or the 6th century BCE (the [Jahwist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jahwist" \o "Jahwist) source) and was later expanded by other authors (the [Priestly source](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priestly_source)) into a work very like the one we have today.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDavies200737-3) The two sources can be identified in the creation narrative: Priestly and Jahwistic.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBandstra200837-4) The combined narrative is a critique of the Mesopotamian theology of creation: Genesis affirms monotheism and denies polytheism.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWenham2003b37-5)[Robert Alter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Alter) described the combined narrative as "compelling in its archetypal character, its adaptation of myth to [monotheistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheist" \o "Monotheist)ends".[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAlter2004xii-6)

Misunderstanding the [genre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genre) of the Genesis creation narrative, meaning the intention of the author(s) and the culture within which they wrote, can result in a misreading.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAndersen1987142-7) [Bruce Waltke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Waltke), a well-known evangelical scholar, cautions against one such misreading, the approach which reads it as history rather than theology and so leads to [Creationism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creationism) and the denial of [evolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution).[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWaltke19916%E2%80%939-8) As noted scholar of [Jewish studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_studies), [Jon D. Levenson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jon_D._Levenson), puts it:

How much history lies behind the story of Genesis? Because the action of the primeval story is not represented as taking place on the plane of ordinary human history and has so many affinities with ancient mythology, it is very far-fetched to speak of its narratives as historical at all."[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELevenson200411-9)

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Contents

1 Composition

1.1 Sources

1.2 Structure

1.3 Mesopotamian influence

1.4 Creation by word and creation by combat

2 Genesis 1:1–2:3

2.1 Background

2.2 Pre-creation: Genesis 1:1–2

2.3 Six days of Creation: Genesis 1:3–2:3

2.3.1 First day

2.3.2 Second day

2.3.3 Third day

2.3.4 Fourth day

2.3.5 Fifth day

2.3.6 Sixth day

2.4 Seventh day: divine rest

3 Genesis 2:4–2:25

4 Creationism and the genre of Genesis 1–2

5 See also

6 Citations

7 References

8 External links

8.1 Biblical texts

8.2 Mesopotamian texts

**Sources**

*See also:*[*Documentary hypothesis*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_hypothesis)

Although tradition attributes Genesis to [Moses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses), biblical scholars hold that it, together with the following four books (making up what Jews call the [Torah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah) and biblical scholars call the Pentateuch), is "a composite work, the product of many hands and periods."[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESpeiser1964xxi-10) A common hypothesis among biblical scholars today is that the first major comprehensive draft of the Pentateuch was composed in the late 7th or the 6th century BCE (the [Jahwist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jahwist" \o "Jahwist) source), and that this was later expanded by the addition of various narratives and laws (the [Priestly source](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priestly_source)) into a work very like the one existing today.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDavies200737-3)

As for the historical background which led to the creation of the narrative itself, a theory which has gained considerable interest, although still controversial, is "Persian imperial authorisation". This proposes that the Persians, after their [conquest of Babylon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon#Persia_captures_Babylon) in 538 BCE, agreed to grant Jerusalem a large measure of local autonomy within the empire, but required the local authorities to produce a single [law code](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ancient_legal_codes) accepted by the entire community.

It further proposes that there were two powerful groups in the community – the priestly families who controlled the Temple, and the landowning families who made up the "elders" – and that these two groups were in conflict over many issues, and that each had its own "history of origins", but the Persian promise of greatly increased local autonomy for all provided a powerful incentive to cooperate in producing a single text.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESka2006169,_217%E2%80%9318-11)

**Structure**

The creation narrative is made up of two stories, roughly equivalent to the two first chapters of the [Book of Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Genesis).[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAlter1981141-12) (There are no chapter divisions in the original Hebrew text, see [Chapters and verses of the Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapters_and_verses_of_the_Bible).) The first account (1:1 through 2:3) employs a repetitious structure of divine fiat and fulfillment, then the statement "And there was evening and there was morning, the [*x*th] day," for each of the six days of creation.

In each of the first three days there is an act of division: day one divides the darkness from light, day two the "waters above" from the "waters below", and day three the sea from the land. In each of the next three days these divisions are populated: day four populates the darkness and light with sun, moon and stars; day five populates seas and skies with fish and fowl; and finally land-based creatures and mankind populate the land.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTERuiten20009%E2%80%9310-13)

[Consistency](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/consistency) was evidently not seen as essential to storytelling in ancient Near Eastern literature.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-14) The overlapping stories of Genesis 1 and 2 are contradictory but also complementary, with the first (the Priestly story) concerned with the creation of the entire cosmos while the second (the Yahwist story) focuses on man as moral agent and cultivator of his environment.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAlter1981141-12) The highly regimented seven-day narrative of Genesis 1 features an omnipotent God who creates a god-like humanity, while the one-day creation of Genesis 2 uses a simple linear narrative, a God who can fail as well as succeed, and a humanity which is not god-like but is punished for acts which would lead to their becoming god-like.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTECarr199662%E2%80%9364-15) Even the order and method of creation differs.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTECarr199662%E2%80%9364-15) "Together, this combination of parallel character and contrasting profile point to the different origin of materials in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, however elegantly they have now been combined."[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTECarr199664-16)

The primary accounts in each chapter are joined by a literary bridge at Genesis 2:4|, "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created." This echoes the first line of Genesis 1, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth", and is reversed in the next phrase, "...in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens". This verse is one of ten "generations" ([Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language): תולדות‎ *[toledot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toledot" \o "Toledot)*) phrases used throughout Genesis, which provide a literary structure to the book.[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTECross1973301ff-17) They normally function as headings to what comes after, but the position of this, the first of the series, has been the subject of much debate.[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEThomas201127%E2%80%9328-18)

**Mesopotamian influence**

*See also: [Panbabylonism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panbabylonism" \o "Panbabylonism)*

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Marduk_and_the_Dragon.jpg)

[Marduk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marduk), god of Babylon, destroying [Tiamat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiamat" \o "Tiamat), the dragon of [primeval chaos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaos_(cosmogony))

[Comparative mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_mythology) provides historical and cross-cultural perspectives for [Jewish mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_mythology). Both sources behind the Genesis creation narrative borrowed themes from [Mesopotamian mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamian_mythology),[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELambert_1965-19)[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELevenson20049-20) but adapted them to [their belief in one God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_in_Judaism),[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESarna199750-2) establishing a monotheistic creation in opposition to the polytheistic creation myth of [ancient Israel's](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_ancient_Israel_and_Judah) neighbors.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELeeming2004-21)[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESmith2001-22)

Genesis 1–11 as a whole is imbued with Mesopotamian myths.[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELambert_1965-19)[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKutsko200062,_quoting_J._Maxwell_Miller-23) Genesis 1 bears both striking differences from and striking similarities to Babylon's national creation myth, the [Enuma Elish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enuma_Elish" \o "Enuma Elish).[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELevenson20049-20) On the side of similarities, both begin from a stage of chaotic waters before anything is created, in both a fixed dome-shaped "firmament" divides these waters from the habitable Earth, and both conclude with the creation of a human called "man" and the building of a temple for the god (in Genesis 1, this temple is the entire cosmos).[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMcDermott200225%E2%80%9327-24)

On the side of contrasts, Genesis 1 is [monotheistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism), it makes [no attempt to account for the origins of God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theogony), and there is no trace of the resistance to the reduction of chaos to order (Gk. [theomachy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theomachy" \o "Theomachy), lit. "God-fighting"), all of which mark the Mesopotamian creation accounts.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESarna199750-2) Still, Genesis 1 bears similarities to the [Baal Cycle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baal_Cycle) of Israel's neighbor, [Ugarit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ugarit).[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESmith2001Chapter_6-25)

The Enuma Elish has also left traces on Genesis 2. Both begin with a series of statements of what did not exist at the moment when creation began; the Enuma Elish has a spring (in the sea) as the point where creation begins, paralleling the spring (on the land – Genesis 2 is notable for being a "dry" creation story) in Genesis 2:6 that "watered the whole face of the ground"; in both myths, Yahweh/the gods first create a man to serve him/them, then animals and vegetation. At the same time, and as with Genesis 1, the Jewish version has drastically changed its Babylonian model: Eve, for example, seems to fill the role of a [mother goddess](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_goddess) when, in Genesis 4:1, she says that she has "created a man with Yahweh", but she is not a divine being like her Babylonian counterpart.[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEVan_Seters1992122%E2%80%9324-26)

Genesis 2 has close parallels with a second Mesopotamian myth, the [Atra-Hasis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atra-Hasis" \o "Atra-Hasis) epic – parallels that in fact extend throughout Genesis 2–11, from the Creation to the [Flood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah%27s_ark) and its aftermath. The two share numerous plot-details (e.g. the divine garden and the role of the first man in the garden, the creation of the man from a mixture of earth and divine substance, the chance of immortality, etc.), and have a similar overall theme: the gradual clarification of man's relationship with God(s) and animals.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTECarr199664-16)

The Garden of Eden story is compared to the [Sumerian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer) myth in which the goddess [Ninhursag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninhursag" \o "Ninhursag) created a beautiful garden full of lush vegetation and fruit trees, called [Edinu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinu" \o "Edinu), in [Dilmun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dilmun" \o "Dilmun), the Sumerian earthly Paradise, a place which the Sumerians believed to exist to the east of their own land, beyond the sea.[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-27)[[*page needed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_sources)] Ninhursag charged [Enki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enki" \o "Enki), her lover and half brother, with controlling the wild animals and tending the garden, but Enki became curious about the garden, and his assistant, [Adapa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adapa" \o "Adapa), selected seven plants (eight in some versions) and offered them to Enki, who ate them. This enraged Ninhursag, and she caused Enki to fall ill. Enki felt pain in his rib, which is a [pun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pun) in Sumerian, as the word "*ti*" means both "rib" and "life".

The other deities persuaded Ninhursag to relent. Ninhursag then created a new goddess (seven or eight to heal his seven or eight ailing organs, including his rib), who was named [Ninti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninti" \o "Ninti), (a name composed of "*Nin*", or "lady", and "*ti*", and which may be translated both as "Lady of Living" and "Lady of the Rib"), to cure Enki[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative" \l "cite_note-28)Some scholars suggest that this served as the basis for the story of Eve as "the mother of life" and lady of the rib, created from [Adam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam)'s rib in the [Book of Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Genesis).[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-Meagher_1995-29)[[*page needed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_sources)]

**Creation by word and creation by combat**

The narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 were not the only creation myths in ancient Israel, and the complete biblical evidence suggests two contrasting models.[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDolansky2016-30) The first is the "[logos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logos)" (meaning speech) model, where a supreme God "speaks" dormant matter into existence. The second is the "[agon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agon" \o "Agon)" (meaning struggle or combat) model, in which it is God's victory in battle over the monsters of the sea that mark his sovereignty and might.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFishbane200334%E2%80%9335-31)[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-32) Genesis 1 is an example of creation by speech, while [Psalm 74](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_74) and [Isaiah 51](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaiah_51) are examples of the "agon" mythology, recalling a Canaanite myth in which God creates the world by vanquishing the water deities: "Awake, awake! ... It was you that hacked Rahab in pieces, that pierced the Dragon! It was you that dried up the Sea, the waters of the great Deep, that made the abysses of the Sea a road that the redeemed might walk..."[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHutton2007274-33)

Genesis 1:1–2:3

[The Ancient of Days](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ancient_of_Days) ([William Blake](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake), 1794)

**Background**

The cosmos created in Genesis 1 bears a striking resemblance to the [Tabernacle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabernacle) in Exodus 35–40, which was the prototype of the Temple in Jerusalem and the focus of priestly worship of [Yahweh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahweh); for this reason, and because other Middle Eastern creation stories also climax with the construction of a temple/house for the creator-god, Genesis 1 can be interpreted as a description of the construction of the cosmos as God's house, for which the Temple in Jerusalem served as the earthly representative.[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELevenson200413-34)

The word *bara* is translated as "created" in English, but the concept it embodied was not the same as the modern term: in the world of the [ancient Near East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Near_East), the gods demonstrated their power over the world not by creating matter but by fixing destinies, so that the essence of the *bara* which God performs in Genesis concerns bringing "heaven and earth" (a [set phrase](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merism) meaning "everything") into existence by organising and assigning roles and functions.[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWalton2006183-35)

The use of numbers in ancient texts was often [numerological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Significance_of_numbers_in_Judaism) rather than factual – that is, the numbers were used because they held some symbolic value to the author.[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHyers198474-36) The number seven, denoting divine completion, permeates Genesis 1: verse 1:1 consists of seven words, verse 1:2 of fourteen, and 2:1–3 has 35 words (5x7); Elohim is mentioned 35 times, "heaven/firmament" and "earth" 21 times each, and the phrases "and it was so" and "God saw that it was good" occur 7 times each.[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWenham19876-37)

**Pre-creation: Genesis 1:1–2**

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *[was]* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.[[38]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-38)

Although the opening phrase of [Genesis 1:1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_1:1) is commonly translated in English as above, the Hebrew is [ambiguous](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambiguous), and can be translated at least three ways:

1. as a statement that the [cosmos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmos) had an absolute beginning ("In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.");
2. as a statement describing the condition of the world when God began creating ("When in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was untamed and shapeless."); and
3. essentially similar to the second version but taking all of Genesis 1:2 as background information ("When in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the earth being untamed and shapeless, God said, Let there be light!").[[39]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBandstra200838%E2%80%9339-39)

The second seems to be the meaning intended by the original Priestly author: the verb *bara* is used only of God (people do not engage in *bara*), and it concerns the assignment of roles, as in the creation of the first people as "[male](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Male) and [female](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female)" (i.e., it allocates them [sexes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexes)): in other words, the power of God is being shown not by the creation of matter but by the fixing of destinies.[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWalton2006183-35)

*The heavens and the earth* is a [set phrase](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Set_phrase) meaning "[everything](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everything)", i.e., the [cosmos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmos). This was made up of three levels, the habitable earth in the middle, the heavens above, an [underworld](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underworld) below, all [surrounded by a watery "ocean" of chaos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmic_ocean) as the Babylonian *[Tiamat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiamat" \o "Tiamat)*.[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESpence201072-40) The earth itself was a flat disc, surrounded by mountains or sea. Above it was the [firmament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firmament), a transparent but solid dome resting on the mountains, allowing men to see the blue of the waters above, with "windows" to allow the rain to enter, and containing the sun, moon and stars. The waters extended below the earth, which rested on pillars sunk in the waters, and in the underworld was [Sheol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheol" \o "Sheol), the abode of the dead.[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKnight1990175%E2%80%9376-41)

The opening of [Genesis 1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_1) continues: "And the earth was formless and void..." The phrase "formless and void" is a translation of the Hebrew *[tohu wa-bohu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tohu_wa-bohu" \o "Tohu wa-bohu)*, ([Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language): תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ‎), chaos, the condition that *bara*, ordering, remedies.[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWalton2001-42) *Tohu* by itself means "emptiness, futility"; it is used to describe the desert wilderness; *bohu* has no known meaning and was apparently coined to rhyme with and reinforce *tohu*.[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAlter200417-43) The phrase appears also in Jeremiah 4:23 where the prophet warns Israel that rebellion against God will lead to the return of darkness and chaos, "as if the earth had been 'uncreated'".[[44]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEThompson1980230-44)

The opening of Genesis 1 concludes with a statement that "*darkness* was on the face of the *deep*" ([Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language): תְהוֹם‎ *[t](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tehom" \o "Tehom)[e](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tehom" \o "Tehom)[hôm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tehom" \o "Tehom)*), [the] "darkness" and the "deep" being two of the three elements of the [chaos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaos_(cosmogony)) represented in *[tohu wa-bohu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tohu_wa-bohu" \o "Tohu wa-bohu)* (the third is the "formless earth"). In the [Enuma Elish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enuma_Elish" \o "Enuma Elish), the "deep" is personified as the goddess [Tiamat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiamat" \o "Tiamat), the enemy of [Marduk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marduk" \o "Marduk);[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWalton2001-42)here it is the *formless body of primeval water surrounding the habitable world*, later to be released during the [Deluge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deluge_myth), when "all the fountains of the great deep burst forth" from the waters beneath the earth and from the "windows" of the sky.[[45]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWenham2003a29-45)

The *Rûach* of God moves over the face of the *deep* before creation begins. *Rûach* (רוּחַ) has the meanings "wind, spirit, breath", and *elohim* can mean "great" as well as "god": the *ruach elohim* may therefore mean the "wind/breath of God" (the storm-wind is God's breath in Psalms 18:16 and elsewhere, and the wind of God returns in the Flood story as the means by which God restores the earth), or God's "spirit", a concept which is somewhat vague in Hebrew Bible, or it may simply signify a great storm-wind.[[46]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBlenkinsopp201133%E2%80%9334-46)

**Six days of Creation: Genesis 1:3–2:3**

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Creation_-_Bible_Historiale_(c.1411),_vol.1,_f.3_-_BL_Royal_MS_19_D_III.jpg)

The Creation – [Bible Historiale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_Historiale) (c. 1411)

God's first act was the creation of undifferentiated light; dark and light were then separated into night and day, their order (evening before morning) signifying that this was the liturgical day; and then the sun, moon and stars were created to mark the proper times for the festivals of the week and year. Only when this is done does God create man and woman and the means to sustain them (plants and animals). At the end of the sixth day, when creation is complete, the world is a cosmic temple in which the role of humanity is the worship of God. This parallels Mesopotamian myth (the *Enuma Elish*) and also echoes chapter 38 of the [Book of Job](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Job), where God recalls how the stars, the "sons of God", sang when the corner-stone of creation was laid.[[47]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBlenkinsopp201121%E2%80%9322-47)

**First day**

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

4 And God saw the light, that [it was] good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.[[48]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-48)

Day 1 begins with the creation of light (and, by implication, time). God creates by spoken command and names the elements of the world as he creates them. In the ancient Near East the act of naming was bound up with the act of creating: thus in Egyptian literature the creator god pronounced the names of everything, and the Enûma Elish begins at the point where nothing has yet been named.[[49]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWalton2003158-49) God's creation by speech also suggests that he is being compared to a king, who has merely to speak for things to happen.[[50]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBandstra200839-50)

**Second day**

6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *[were]* under the firmament from the waters which *[were]* above the firmament: and it was so.

8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.[[51]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-51)

*Rāqîa‘*, the word translated as [firmament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firmament), is from *rāqa‘,* the verb used for the act of beating metal into thin plates.[[52]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHamilton1990122-52) Created on the second day of creation and populated by luminaries on the fourth, it is a solid dome which separates the earth below from the heavens and their waters above, as in Egyptian and Mesopotamian belief of the same time.[[53]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESeeley1991227-53)In Genesis 1:17 the stars are set in the *raqia‘*; in Babylonian myth the heavens were made of various precious stones (compare Exodus 24:10 where the elders of Israel see God on the sapphire floor of heaven), with the stars engraved in their surface.[[54]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWalton2003158%E2%80%9359-54)

**Third day**

9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry *[land]* appear: and it was so.

10 And God called the dry *[land]* Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that *[it was]* good.

11 And God said: 'Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth.' And it was so.

12 And the earth brought forth grass, *[and]* herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed *[was]* in itself, after his kind: and God saw that *[it was]* good.

13 And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.[[55]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-55)

On the third day, the waters withdraw, creating a ring of ocean surrounding a [single circular continent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flat_Earth).[[56]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTESeeley1997236-56) By the end of the third day God has created a foundational environment of light, heavens, seas and earth.[[57]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBandstra200841-57) The three levels of the cosmos are next populated in the same order in which they were created – heavens, sea, earth.

God does not create or make trees and plants, but instead commands the earth to produce them. The underlying theological meaning seems to be that God has given the previously barren earth the ability to produce vegetation, and it now does so at his command. "According to (one's) kind" appears to look forward to the laws found later in the Pentateuch, which lay great stress on holiness through separation.[[58]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKissling2004106-58)

**Fourth day**

14 And God said: ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years;

15 and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so.

16 And God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars.

17 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

18 and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good.

19 And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.[[59]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-59)

On Day Four the language of "ruling" is introduced: the heavenly bodies will "govern" day and night and mark seasons and years and days (a matter of crucial importance to the Priestly authors, as religious festivals were organised around the cycles of the sun and moon);[[60]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative" \l "cite_note-FOOTNOTEBandstra200841%E2%80%9342-60) later, man will be created to rule over the whole of creation as God's regent. God puts "lights" in the firmament to "rule over" the day and the night.[[61]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWalsh200137_(fn.5)-61) Specifically, God creates the "greater light," the "lesser light," and the stars. According to Victor Hamilton, most scholars agree that the choice of "greater light" and "lesser light", rather than the more explicit "sun" and "moon", is anti-mythological rhetoric intended to contradict widespread contemporary beliefs that the sun and the moon were deities themselves.[[62]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHamilton1990127-62)

**Fifth day**

20 And God said: ‘Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let fowl fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.’

21 And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that creepeth, wherewith the waters swarmed, after its kind, and every winged fowl after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

22 And God blessed them, saying: ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.’

23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.   
—([Genesis 1:20–1:23](http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0101.htm" \l "20))

In the Egyptian and Mesopotamian mythologies, the creator-god has to do battle with the sea-monsters before he can make heaven and earth; in Genesis 1:21, the word *tannin*, sometimes translated as "sea monsters" or "great creatures", parallels the named [chaos-monsters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaos_(cosmogony)#Chaoskampf) [Rahab](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rahab_(Egypt)" \o "Rahab (Egypt)) and [Leviathan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan) from Psalm 74:13, and Isaiah 27:1, and Isaiah 51:9, but there is no hint (in [Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Genesis)) of combat, and the *tannin* are simply creatures created by God.[[63]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWalton2003160-63)

**Sixth day**

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cria%C3%A7%C3%A3o_dos_Animais_(1506-11)_-_Vasco_Fernandes_(Museu_de_Lamego).png)

*The Creation of the Animals* (1506–11), by [Grão Vasco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gr%C3%A3o_Vasco" \o "Grão Vasco)

24 And God said: ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind.’ And it was so.

25 And God made the beast of the earth after its kind, and the cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

26 And God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.’

27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

28 And God blessed them; and God said unto them: ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.’

29 And God said: ‘Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed—to you it shall be for food;

30 and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is a living soul, [I have given] every green herb for food.’ And it was so.

31 And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.[[64]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-64)

When in Genesis 1:26 God says "Let us make man", the Hebrew word used is *adam*; in this form it is a generic noun, "mankind", and does not imply that this creation is male. After this first mention the word always appears as *ha-adam*, "the man", but as Genesis 1:27 shows ("So God created man in his *[own]* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."), the word is still not exclusively male.[[65]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAlter200418%E2%80%9319,_21-65)

Man was created in the "[image of God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image_of_God)". The meaning of this is unclear: suggestions include:

1. Having the spiritual qualities of God such as intellect, will, etc.;
2. Having the physical form of God;
3. A combination of these two;
4. Being God's counterpart on earth and able to enter into a relationship with him;
5. Being God's representative or viceroy on earth.[[66]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKvam_et_al._199924-66)

The fact that God says "Let *us* make man..." has given rise to several theories, of which the two most important are that "us" is [majestic plural](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Majestic_plural),[[67]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDavidson197324-67) or that it reflects a setting in a [divine council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Council#Hebrew) with God enthroned as king and proposing the creation of mankind to the lesser divine beings.[[68]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELevenson200414-68)

God tells the animals and humans that he has given them "the green plants for food" – creation is to be vegetarian. Only later, after the Flood, is man given permission to eat flesh. The Priestly author of Genesis appears to look back to an ideal past in which mankind lived at peace both with itself and with the animal kingdom, and which could be re-achieved through a proper sacrificial life in [harmony with God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-established_harmony).[[69]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTERogerson199119ff-69)

Upon completion, God sees that "every thing that He had made ... was very good" ([Genesis 1:31](http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0101.htm#31)). This implies that the materials that existed before the Creation ("*[tohu wa-bohu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tohu_wa-bohu" \o "Tohu wa-bohu)*," "darkness," "*[tehom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tehom" \o "Tehom)*") were not "very good." [Israel Knohl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Knohl) hypothesized that the Priestly source set up this dichotomy to mitigate [the problem of evil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_problem_of_evil).[[70]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKnohl200313-70)

**Seventh day: divine rest**

1 And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

2 And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

3 And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all His work which God in creating had made.[[71]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-71)

Creation is followed by rest. In ancient Near Eastern literature the divine rest is achieved in a temple as a result of having brought order to chaos. Rest is both disengagement, as the work of creation is finished, but also engagement, as the deity is now present in his temple to maintain a secure and ordered cosmos.[[72]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWalton2006157%E2%80%9358-72) Compare with Exodus 20:8–20:11: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a sabbath unto the LORD thy God, in it thou shalt not do any manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."

Genesis 2:4–2:25

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nuremberg_chronicles_-_f_5v.png)

Seventh Day of Creation (from the 1493 Nuremberg Chronicle)

Genesis 2–3, the [Garden of Eden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden_of_Eden) story, was probably authored around 500 BCE as "a discourse on ideals in life, the danger in human glory, and the fundamentally ambiguous nature of humanity – especially human mental faculties".[[73]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEStordalen2000473%E2%80%9374-73) The Garden in which the action takes place lies on the mythological border between the human and the divine worlds, probably on the far side of the [Cosmic ocean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmic_ocean) near the rim of the world; following a conventional ancient Near Eastern concept, the Eden river first forms that ocean and then divides into four rivers which run from the four corners of the earth towards its centre.[[73]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEStordalen2000473%E2%80%9374-73) It opens "in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens", a set introduction similar to those found in Babylonian myths.[[74]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEVan_Seters199822-74) Before the man is created the earth is a barren waste watered by an *ed*; Genesis 2:6 the [King James Version](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_James_Version) translated this as "mist", following Jewish practice, but since the mid-20th century Hebraists have generally accepted that the real meaning is "spring of underground water".[[75]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAndersen1987137%E2%80%9340-75)

In Genesis 1 the characteristic word for God's activity is *bara*, "created"; in Genesis 2 the word used when he creates the man is *yatsar*, meaning "fashioned", a word used in contexts such as a potter fashioning a pot from clay.[[76]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAlter200420,_22-76) God breathes his own breath into the clay and it becomes *nephesh*, a word meaning "life", "vitality", "the living personality"; man shares *nephesh* with all creatures, but the text describes this life-giving act by God only in relation to man.[[77]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDavidson197331-77)

Eden, where God puts his [Garden of Eden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden_of_Eden), comes from a root meaning "fertility": the first man is to work in God's miraculously fertile garden.[[78]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTELevenson200415-78) The "tree of life" is a motif from Mesopotamian myth: in the [*Epic of Gilgamesh*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_of_Gilgamesh) the hero is given a plant whose name is "man becomes young in old age", but a serpent steals the plant from him.[[79]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDavidson197329-79)[[80]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-80) There has been much scholarly discussion about the type of knowledge given by the second tree. Suggestions include: human qualities, sexual consciousness, ethical knowledge, or universal knowledge; with the last being the most widely accepted.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKooij201017-81) In Eden, mankind has a choice between wisdom and life, and chooses the first, although God intended them for the second.[[82]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEPropp1990193-82)

The mythic Eden and its rivers may represent the real Jerusalem, the [Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_of_Solomon) and the Promised Land. Eden may represent the divine garden on [Zion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zion), the mountain of God, which was also Jerusalem; while the real [Gihon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gihon" \o "Gihon) was a spring outside the city (mirroring the spring which waters Eden); and the imagery of the Garden, with its serpent and cherubs, has been seen as a reflection of the real images of the Solomonic Temple with its copper serpent (the [nehushtan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nehushtan" \o "Nehushtan)) and guardian cherubs.[[83]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEStordalen2000307%E2%80%9310-83)

Genesis 2 is the only place in the Bible where Eden appears as a geographic location: elsewhere (notably in the Book of Ezekiel) it is a mythological place located on the holy Mountain of God, with echoes of a Mesopotamian myth of the king as a primordial man placed in a divine garden to guard the tree of life.[[84]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDavidson197333-84)

"[Good and evil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_and_evil)" is a [merism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merism" \o "Merism), in this case meaning simply "everything", but it may also have a moral connotation. When God forbids the man to eat from the tree of knowledge he says that if he does so he is "doomed to die": the Hebrew behind this is in the form used in the Bible for issuing death sentences.[[85]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAlter200421-85)

The first woman is created to be *ezer kenegdo* – a term notably difficult to translate – to the man. *Kenegdo* means "alongside, opposite, a counterpart to him", and *ezer* means active intervention on behalf of the other person.[[86]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAlter200422-86) God's naming of the elements of the cosmos in Genesis 1 illustrated his [authority over creation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divinity); now the man's naming of the animals (and of Woman) illustrates Adam's authority within creation.[[87]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTETurner200920-87)

The woman is called *ishah*, "Woman", with an explanation that this is because she was taken from *ish*, meaning "man"; the two words are not in fact connected. Later, after the story of the Garden is complete, she receives a name: *Hawwah* (Eve). This means "living" in Hebrew, from a root that can also mean "snake".[[88]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHastings2003607-88) The word traditionally translated "rib" in English can also mean "side", "chamber", or "beam".[[89]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJacobs200737-89)

A long-standing exegetical tradition holds that the use of a rib from man's side emphasizes that both man and woman have equal dignity, for woman was created from the same material as man, shaped and given life by the same processes.[[90]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHugenberger1988184-90) Medieval homilies about marriage as a sacrament stated that Eve was made from a more noble material (*the better half*) than Adam;[[91]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative#cite_note-91)