

## The Genesis Creation Stories Some Symbols and Deeper Messages

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### Creation Stories (Genesis 1,1 - 2,4 and Genesis 2,5 – 2,25)

Were written by people who already believed in one God, who revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants in

- the forces of nature
- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's covenant relationship with God
- the Exodus of God's chosen people from Egypt with Moses
- Israel's entry into the Promised Land
- Israel's victories over her enemies

### Some of the Symbols in the Creation Stories:

The Jewish people were once a small tribe known as the *Hebrews*. They were surrounded by other tribes, in a part of the world known as the *Near East*. Each tribe had its own gods and creation stories. In one such story, the blood of one god, defeated in a primordial battle with another, was mixed with clay to form the first humans. Others explained that the earth, its plants, animals and people emerged out of a kind of big soupy chaotic mess. Some Near Eastern creation stories spoke of creation in terms of battles waged between winged creatures, serpents, the sun and moon, each with their own supernatural (god-like) powers.

**A garden** was a special place of beauty in the Near East. Amid the dry plains and hills, it was the closest thing to creation's perfection. People living in that part of the world could understand the perfection of God's creation before original sin in terms of a garden.

**The tree** had a special significance in many Near Eastern creation stories. In some cases, the gods ate the fruit of a special tree to keep from dying. In Genesis, there were two trees: the *tree of life*, and near it, the *tree of knowledge of good and evil* (Gen 2, 9). God commanded Adam and Eve to stay away from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. By doing this, they would receive the benefits of the tree of life, and live forever. In this story, **eating is a symbol for knowing (ie. experiencing)**. Adam and Eve chose to know what it was to disobey God. By eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, they chose and experienced evil. After this, they could no longer stay in this place of everlasting beauty and live. To choose against God is to choose against life.

**The snake** represented different things in different tribes. It was used in the pagan ceremonies of the Canaanites, who were enemies of the Hebrew people. Thus, for the Hebrews, it was a symbol of evil, and of the devil, who deceives with false promises of happiness and power.

The Genesis creation stories used these and other symbols to explain the truths about creation that they (and we) believe.

## The 2 stories of Creation

### 1<sup>st</sup> Creation Story: Genesis 1,1 – 2,4

-Takes place over 6 days:

1<sup>st</sup> 3 Days –WORKS OF SEPARATION

-Day 1 God separates light from darkness

-Day 2 God separates sky from sea

-Day 3 God separates earth from sea, God makes plants

2<sup>nd</sup> 3 Days –MOVING CREATIONS

-Day 4 God creates sun (greater light to rule the day)

God creates moon (lesser light to rule night)

God creates stars

-Day 5 God creates Animals

-Day 6 God creates people (Adam and Eve) in the divine image

Seventh Day –GOD RESTS

### The First Creation Story shows us:

1. There is only *one* God (the God of the Hebrews) who freely created everything.
2. God created everything in a planned and purposeful way; it did not just happen or emerge haphazardly out of chaos.
3. God made everything good.
4. God made the Sabbath holy. God's pattern of working 6 days and resting on the 7<sup>th</sup> is reflected in Jewish Law. The God who created everything –the earth and all it contains, the sun and stars- is the God of the Hebrew people, who reigns supreme over all peoples, over all creation and over all other tribes' gods.
5. God made human persons in the divine image: we are the masterpieces of God's creation, and are more like God than any other creature, because we can reason and choose between good and evil. God accordingly gives humankind dominion over the earth, its plants and creatures.

### The Second Creation Story: Genesis 2,4 – 2,25

-God forms Adam from the clay of the ground, and breathes His divine life into his nostrils. (The name *Adam* means **man**; the Hebrew word *Adamah* means “**earth**”)

-God creates the Garden of Eden and places Adam there, telling him not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

-God creates animals to keep Adam company and gives Adam the power to name them.

-God forms Eve from Adam's rib (the name **Eve** is closely related to the Hebrew word for “**living**.” She is called “**Eve**” because she is “**mother of all the living**.”)

### The second Creation Story shows us:

1. God shares His life with us (He breathes His own life into Adam)
2. Man and woman are different from one another, but have equal dignity before God, and together, are made in God's image.
3. God shares His power with us (God allows Adam to name all creatures)

### **Story of Original Sin:**

Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden. God tells them they may eat of the fruit of every plant except for the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Eve is tempted by a serpent (snake), who tells her she will be like God if she eats the fruit of the tree. Eve tries the fruit and then passes it to Adam. They become ashamed of their bodies and hide. Adam admits to God that he has eaten the fruit of the tree, but blames Eve, who blames the serpent. God drives Adam and Eve out of the garden and says they will have to work hard to grow their crops, because of weeds and lack of water. Eve will experience pain when giving birth to children, and they will no longer live forever, but will one day die.

### **What is this story trying to explain?**

#### **Free Will:**

1. Our first parents had free will. God, in His goodness, gave them the power to choose between good and evil.

#### **Pride and Disobedience:**

2. Our first parents became proud, and wanted to be more than God's greatest creatures, to be like God Himself.
3. Our first parents disobeyed God's laws, and brought sin into the world.

#### **The Consequences of Original Sin**

4. Original sin brought suffering, disease, pain, natural disasters and death into the world. None of these things were intended by God.

### **The Consequences of Sin**

Adam blames Eve for his sin – a common occurrence. One of the consequences of original sin is that **we tend to blame others for our mistakes and wrongs.**

**Sin alienates us from nature.** Adam and Eve can no longer stay in the garden. They have to fight with nature to bring crops forth from the soil. This was not God's original intention in putting humankind on earth. Original sin brings death, suffering and disease into the world. People's lives become shorter as sin spreads.

**Sin alienates us from one another.** Cain kills Abel. One of the consequences of original sin is hatred and envy. When we give in to these kinds of temptations, people get hurt, we can lose good friends; others lose lives fighting one another and in wars.

**Sin alienates people from themselves.** Adam and Eve are ashamed of their nakedness, and cover themselves up in the garden.

**Sin destroys what is good.** Eventually sin spreads so much that the harmony of the earth and its people, and humankind's communion with God is ruined. God sends a great flood to destroy evil – a foreshadowing of our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection that conquered the power of sin and death in the world.