

A Parallel Structure in Genesis 1 and 2: Reinterpreting Adam's Creation on Day Three and Eve's on Day Six

Introduction

The traditional interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 holds that Adam and Eve were both created on the sixth day, as described in Genesis 1:26–27, with Genesis 2:4–25 providing a detailed account of this event. This view, rooted in the *toledot* formula and narrative unity, has dominated biblical scholarship and exegesis (e.g., Wenham, 1987; Walton, 2001). However, a fresh reading of the text in both Hebrew and English reveals a compelling alternative: Genesis 1 and 2 present parallel accounts of creation, with Genesis 2 retelling the creation week from a human-centric perspective. In this framework, Adam (*ha-adam*), the individual, is created on the third day (Genesis 2:7), before the sprouting of cultivated plants (*eseb hassadeh*), while Eve is formed on the sixth day (Genesis 2:21–22), completing the plural “male and female” humanity of Genesis 1:27. This parallel structure not only aligns with a plain reading of the text but also mirrors the theological transition from the plural *Elohim* to the singular *YHWH Elohim*, reflecting the shift from singular Adam to plural humanity. This paper argues that this interpretation is textually robust, theologically profound, and critical for understanding the creation narrative’s deeper patterns, challenging traditional readers to reconsider the chronology of human creation.

Textual Foundations: Genesis 1 and 2 in Hebrew and English

Genesis 1: The Cosmic Framework

Genesis 1 provides a structured, day-by-day account of creation.

- **Day Three (Genesis 1:11–12):** “Then God said, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation (*deshe*, דֵשֶׁת), plants yielding seed (*eseb mazria zera*, עֵשֶׂב מֵזְרִיעַ זֶרַע), and fruit trees bearing fruit...’ And it was so” (ESV). The verb *vattotse* (וַתּוֹצֵא, “brought forth”) indicates the initial appearance of vegetation, though not necessarily full sprouting or cultivation.
- **Day Six (Genesis 1:26–27):** “Then God (*Elohim*, אֱלֹהִים) said, ‘Let us make man (*adam*, אָדָם) in our image, after our likeness... So God created man (*ha-adam*, הָאָדָם) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’” The term *adam* is generic, meaning “humankind,” while *ha-adam* can denote “the human” or “the man.” The phrase “male and female” suggests a collective humanity, completed on day six, followed by the blessing to “be fruitful and multiply” (1:28).

Genesis 2: The Anthropocentric Parallel

Genesis 2:4–25, often attributed to the Jahwist source, shifts focus to human creation and relationships. Key verses include:

- **Genesis 2:4–5:** “These are the generations (*toledot*, תּוֹלְדֹת) of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God (*YHWH Elohim*, יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) made the earth and the heavens. When no bush of the field (*siah hassadeh*, שִׁיחַ הַסָּדֵה) was yet in the land and no small plant of the field (*eseb hassadeh*, עֵשֶׂב הַסָּדֵה) had yet sprouted (*tsamach*, צַמַּח), for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man (*adam*, אָדָם) to work the ground.”
- **Genesis 2:7:** “Then the LORD God formed the man (*ha-adam*, הָאָדָם) of dust from the ground (*adamah*, אֲדָמָה) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”
- **Genesis 2:8–9:** “And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden... and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground

the LORD God made to spring up (*tsamach*, תַּסְמַח) every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.”

- **Genesis 2:19:** “So out of the ground the LORD God formed (*yatsar*, יָצַר) every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.”
- **Genesis 2:21–22:** “So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs... and made it into a woman (*ishshah*, הַשָּׁׁחָה) and brought her to the man.”

The Parallel Structure Thesis

The core revelation of this interpretation is that Genesis 2 retells the creation week of Genesis 1 as a parallel narrative, with Adam created on day three (2:7) and Eve on day six (2:21–22), completing the plural humanity of Genesis 1:27. This structure is grounded in three key arguments:

1. Linguistic Connection of *Eseb* and Day Three

Genesis 2:5 states that no “small plant of the field” (*eseb hassadeh*) had sprouted (*tsamach*) because there was no rain and no man to work the ground, immediately followed by Adam’s creation in 2:7. The term *eseb* links directly to Genesis 1:11–12, where *eseb mazria zera* (plants yielding seed) is created on day three. The verb *tsamach* (sprout) in 2:5 suggests a pre-sprouting state, aligning with the initial creation of vegetation in 1:11 (*vattotse*, “brought forth”), which may not yet have fully germinated. This places Adam’s creation (2:7) in the context of day three, before cultivated plants sprouted, as the “man to work the ground” (2:5). The subsequent “springing up” (*tsamach*, 2:9) of the Garden’s trees reinforces this alignment, as God causes vegetation to develop after Adam’s formation, paralleling day three’s events.

2. Sequential Creation in Genesis 2 Mirrors Genesis 1’s Days

Genesis 2's narrative sequence supports a parallel chronology:

- **Day Three (Genesis 2:7–9):** Adam is formed (2:7) in a pre-sprouting state (2:5), and God plants the Garden, causing trees to “spring up” (2:8–9), matching Genesis 1:11–12’s vegetation.
- **Days Four/Five (Genesis 2:19):** God forms animals and birds (2:19), paralleling Genesis 1:20–25 (days five and six). The verb *yatsar* (“formed”) in 2:19 is in the simple past, suggesting animals were created after Adam, not before, as in Genesis 1’s sequence.
- **Day Six (Genesis 2:21–22):** Eve is formed from Adam’s rib (2:21–22), completing the “male and female” of Genesis 1:27, followed by the blessing to “be fruitful and multiply” (1:28).

This sequence suggests Genesis 2 retells the creation week, with Adam as the initial human (day three) and Eve completing humanity (day six).

3. Theological Parallel: From Singular to Plural

The transition from *Elohim* (plural, Genesis 1) to *YHWH Elohim* (singular with plural, Genesis 2) mirrors the shift from singular Adam (*ha-adam*, 2:7) to plural humanity (Adam and Eve, 2:22; Genesis 1:27’s “male and female”). This reflects the theological pattern of unity-in-diversity in God’s image (1:26). Adam’s creation on day three establishes him as the “base layer” (cf. Genesis 2:7, formed from *adamah*), while Eve’s creation on day six enables the “fruitful multiplication” mandated in 1:28. This parallel underscores the relational purpose of humanity, culminating in the plural community that reflects God’s nature.

Addressing the Traditional View

The traditional view—that Genesis 2 elaborates on Genesis 1:26–27’s sixth-day creation—relies on the *toledot* formula (2:4) as a marker of narrative continuity and the assumption that *ha-adam* in both chapters refers to the same event. However, this interpretation overlooks the parallel structure and textual clues supporting a day-three creation for Adam:

1. Reinterpreting the *Toledot* Formula

The *toledot* in Genesis 2:4 (“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth”) need not indicate a strict continuation of Genesis 1:26–27. Instead, it can introduce a parallel account summarizing the creation week from a human perspective (Cassuto, 1961). The phrase “in the day that the LORD God made” (2:4) uses *yom* (day) in a broad sense, encompassing the entire creation period, not a single day. This allows Genesis 2 to retell the week’s events, with Adam’s creation (2:7) aligned with day three’s pre-sprouting state (2:5) and Eve’s with day six (2:21–22).

2. Resolving the Animal Creation Discrepancy

Traditionalists argue that Genesis 2:19’s animal creation occurs before Adam, as in Genesis 1:20–25, citing the pluperfect possibility of *yatsar* (“had formed”). However, a plain reading of 2:19 (“then the LORD God formed”) places animal creation after Adam’s formation (2:7), supporting a day-three creation for Adam before animals (days five/six). This aligns with Genesis 2’s sequence: Adam is formed, animals are created and named, and Eve is formed last, paralleling Genesis 1’s days.

3. Vegetation and the Pre-Sprouting State

Genesis 2:5’s “no small plant of the field had yet sprouted” is often interpreted as referring to cultivated plants requiring human tillage (Walton, 2001). However, the use of *eseb* links directly to Genesis 1:11’s day-three vegetation, suggesting a pre-sprouting state before Adam’s creation. The Garden’s trees “springing up” (2:9, *tsamach*) after Adam’s formation reinforce this, indicating that vegetation develops post-Adam, aligning with day three’s events.

4. New Testament References

Traditionalists cite New Testament passages like Mark 10:6 (“from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female”) and 1 Timothy 2:13 (“Adam was formed first, then Eve”) to support a sixth-day creation.

However, these focus on the relational order (Adam before Eve) and humanity's role, not the specific day. Your interpretation accommodates this: Adam is formed first (day three), and Eve later (day six), fulfilling the "male and female" of Genesis 1:27 without contradicting New Testament theology.

Theological and Exegetical Significance

This parallel structure offers profound insights:

- **Theological Depth:** The shift from singular Adam to plural humanity mirrors the *Elohim/YHWH Elohim* transition, emphasizing God's relational nature and humanity's purpose in community. Eve's creation on day six completes the image of God, enabling "fruitful multiplication" (1:28).
- **Narrative Coherence:** The parallel framework unifies Genesis 1 and 2 as complementary accounts, with Genesis 2 providing a human-centric retelling that highlights Adam's role as caretaker (2:5, 2:15) and Eve's as helper (2:18).
- **Challenging Tradition:** By prioritizing a plain reading, this interpretation frees exegesis from assumptions of sequentiality, inviting readers to see Genesis 2's sequence (Adam, animals, Eve) as mirroring Genesis 1's days.

Countering Potential Objections

- **Lack of Day Markers in Genesis 2:** Critics may argue that Genesis 2's lack of explicit day markers undermines a day-three creation. However, the text assumes contextual understanding, with *eseb* (2:5) and the sequence of events (Adam, Garden, animals, Eve) paralleling Genesis 1's days. The absence of markers reflects Genesis 2's thematic focus, not a denial of chronology.
- **Narrative Unity:** Traditionalists see Genesis 1–2 as a unified narrative. The parallel structure maintains unity by retelling the same events differently, with Genesis 1 as cosmic and Genesis 2 as

anthropocentric, both culminating in humanity's completion on day six.

- **Scholarly Consensus:** While scholars like Wenham (1987) and Walton (2001) favor a sixth-day creation, their sequential view relies on assumptions not mandated by the text. A plain reading of Genesis 2:5–7 prioritizes its internal sequence, challenging tradition with a textually grounded alternative.

Conclusion

The parallel structure thesis—that Genesis 2 retells Genesis 1's creation week, with Adam created on day three (2:7) and Eve on day six (2:21–22)—offers a compelling reinterpretation of the creation narrative. Grounded in the linguistic link of *eseb* (1:11, 2:5), the sequential events of Genesis 2, and the theological parallel between divine and human plurality, this view aligns with a plain reading of the text in Hebrew and English. It challenges the traditional sixth-day consensus by proposing that Genesis 2 is a human-centric retelling of the creation week, with Adam as the pre-existing “base layer” and Eve completing humanity's plural purpose. This interpretation not only resolves apparent discrepancies (e.g., animal creation order) but also enriches the theological significance of humanity's creation in God's image. For traditional readers, this thesis invites a fresh engagement with the text, unencumbered by sequential assumptions, revealing a deeper pattern that mirrors God's relational nature. Future studies should explore how this parallel structure informs other *toledot* sections in Genesis and its implications for Christological readings, particularly the preexistence of Yeshua as the eternal Word (John 1:1–3).

References

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