

January: Reading Genesis 1-12

Did you realise that there are two creation stories? The most famous one is Chapter One with its seven days of creation and rest.

The two are different but the editors of the Bible chose to include both, treating both as the word of God.

An early lesson for us is that the writers of the Bible were not worried by seeming contradiction, and that the Bible has been edited many times through the ages.

In the Pentateuch, The Torah, The Law, the first five books of the Bible, scholars see four sources for the material. Priestly, Deuteronomical, J(Y)ahwist, and Elohist, and commonly known as J, E, P, and D. The first Creation story was essentially Priestly and of a later date than the second, essentially Jahwist.

Chapters 1-12 are often described as 'mythical,' which is not what we might think. 'Muthos' in Greek means 'story', and so these chapters are the search for why humans are as they are, behave as they do, relate to God in a particular way, told in story form. They are the search for the causes of how we live our lives, and the causes of our problems. The Creation stories are therefore about the origins and state of our relationship with God. The first two chapters are our perfect beginnings. The third, our fall from grace as a result of jealousy and ambition, which ends with us being thrown out of paradise.

The whole Bible is about our journey, pilgrimage, back to that state of grace.

God comes to help us on our journey back and repeatedly offers us help, most clearly expressed in agreements known as covenants. Covenant is an essential element throughout the Bible, and it defines our relationship with God. Some of these depend on our response, in others God promises without any requirements on our part, as in Noah's story.

Noah's story is a renewal of creation and brings us to the first of many of these covenants marked by a rainbow. (The greatest expression of Covenant in the Old Testament is at Mt. Sinai, with Moses.) You might notice in the Noah story that there are contradictions in the story. Do the animals come in two by two or in seven pairs for the clean? These are caused by the merging of original source material.