

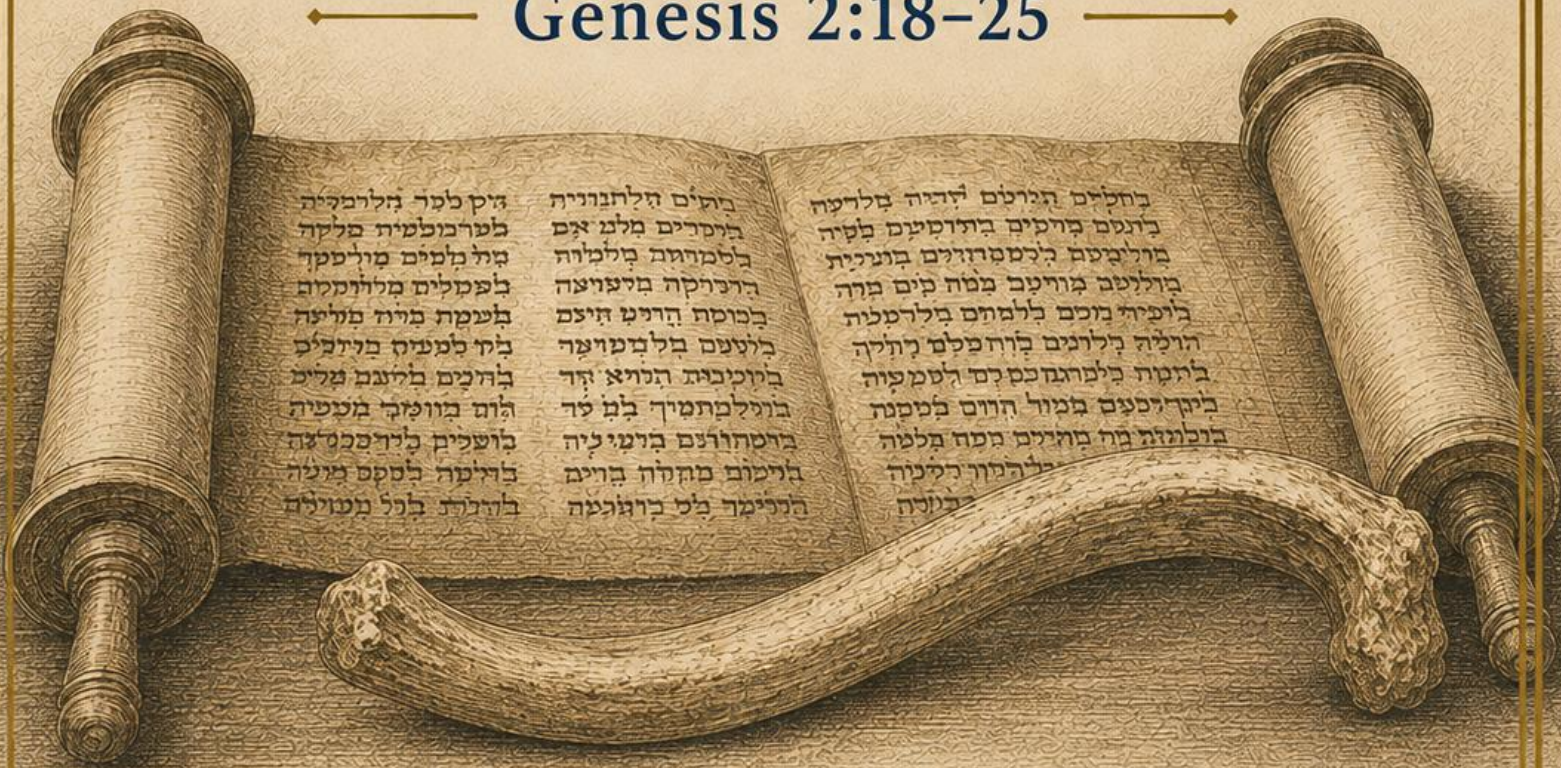


REASON TOGETHER
— CHURCH —

ADAM'S RIB

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE HEBREW

Genesis 2:18-25



— Sermon & Pastor's Commentary —

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Pastor & Teacher

Aloha, church family.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you have worshiped with us many times or this is your first Sunday with us, we are thankful that God has brought you here.

At Reason Together Church, we believe that honest questions do not threaten the truth of God's Word.

When we bring those questions to the Bible with humility, patience and prayer, they can help us see more clearly what God has said.

Our invitation is simple: Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

If you are visiting with us for the first time, there is a guest card available for you.

We ask only for your first name and your email address.

We will not sell your information, place you on a long mailing list or pressure you in any way.

We simply want the opportunity to thank you for worshiping with us and to let you know that you are welcome here.

After the service, I hope you will join us at the Reason Together Café.

We would be honored to give you an RTC mug and fill it with locally grown coffee.

The coffee comes with free refills, and the conversations do too.

Before we pray, let me also say a word about giving.

At Reason Together Church, our members support the work of this ministry.

We do not pass an offering plate and we do not want our guests to feel any pressure to give.

If you are visiting from another church, we encourage you to support your home church faithfully.

For those who call RTC home, information about giving is available, and we thank you for your faithfulness.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing us together today.

Thank You for the privilege of opening Your Word.

Give us minds that are willing to learn, hearts that are willing to obey and spirits that remain humble before You.

Protect us from careless conclusions.

Protect us also from holding so tightly to a familiar picture that we fail to notice the words You have placed on the page.

Help us distinguish between what Your Word clearly says, what it may allow and what it does not authorize us to claim.

May this study increase our confidence in Scripture, deepen our respect for one another and turn our attention toward Christ.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Our primary passage today is Genesis chapter 2, verses 18 through 25.

I will be reading from the King James Version.

Genesis 2:18 says, "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."

Verse 19: "And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof."

Verse 20: "And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him."

Verse 21: "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;"

Verse 22: "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."

Verse 23: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Verse 24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Verse 25: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

May God bless the reading of His Word.

The title of our study is "Adam's Rib: A Closer Look at the Hebrew."

The question before us is this:

When our English Bibles say that God made Eve from Adam's rib, does the word "rib" fully convey what Moses intended us to understand?

Let me address one concern about that wording before we go any further.

When we ask what Moses intended, we are not placing the authority of Moses above the authority of God.

We believe that God gave His Word through human writers.

Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God."

Moses was the human writer of Genesis, but God is the divine Author of Scripture.

Therefore, asking what Moses meant in the words he wrote is one way of asking what God has communicated through the inspired text.

Our final authority is not an article on the internet.

It is not a preacher's favorite illustration.

It is not a piece of artwork from a children's Bible.

It is not even a Hebrew dictionary standing alone.

Our final authority is the Word of God understood carefully in its context.

Most of us have carried one very familiar picture of Genesis 2 for a long time.

Adam is asleep.

God removes one curved bone from his chest.

God closes the incision.

Then God uses that single bone to make Eve.

That picture may be exactly what happened.

The King James Version has taught generations of believers to call what God took a rib, and there is a legitimate reason translators have used that word.

But sometimes we remember the picture that was drawn for us more clearly than the words that were written for us.

When a picture becomes familiar, we can begin to add details that the Bible itself never supplies.

We may imagine the size of the part God removed.

We may imagine the exact procedure.

We may imagine how many ribs Adam had before and after.

We may even imagine what the rest of Adam's body looked like.

Then, without realizing it, we begin defending our imagined details as though every one of them appeared in the verse.

This study is not an attempt to tear down the familiar account.

It is an attempt to slow down and ask what the actual words will bear.

We do not want to replace one picture that may be too narrow with another picture that is far more speculative.

We want to let the text tell us what we can know.

We also want to let the text remain silent where God has chosen not to explain.

Before we focus on the rib, notice why this event occurs.

Genesis 2:18 begins, "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone."

These are the first words “not good” in the creation account.

Again and again in Genesis 1, God sees that His work is good.

At the end of that chapter, God sees everything that He has made and calls it “very good.”

Yet here the Lord identifies something that has not reached its intended completion.

“It is not good that the man should be alone.”

That does not mean Adam had no relationship with God.

It means God had designed human life to include a human counterpart.

The Lord says, “I will make him an help meet for him.”

The old English phrase “help meet” does not mean a servant who merely runs errands.

It means a helper suitable for him, corresponding to him, standing before him as the answer to what is lacking.

The animals pass before Adam.

He studies them.

He names them.

He sees the order of creation and recognizes every kind.

But verse 20 ends with this conclusion: “but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.”

The cattle were alive, but they did not correspond to him.

The birds were part of God’s good creation, but they did not share his humanity.

The beasts could accompany Adam in one sense, but none could stand with him in the covenant relationship God intended.

The need in the passage is not merely another living organism.

The need is someone who shares Adam’s nature while being personally distinct from Adam.

That is the setting in which God causes the deep sleep to fall.

Adam does not assist with Eve’s creation.

He does not advise God about the design.

He does not choose the material.

He sleeps while God works.

The woman is not Adam’s invention.

She is God’s provision.

Verse 21 says that the Lord “took one of his ribs.”

The Hebrew word translated “ribs” is commonly written in English as tsela.

You may also see it spelled tzela.

We are not going to build a sermon around how impressively we can pronounce a Hebrew word. The value of the word is not in making us sound scholarly.

The value is in helping us notice the range of meaning that an English word may not display by itself.

The Hebrew word can refer to a rib.

It can also refer to a side.

In other passages it describes the side of an object, the side of a structure, side chambers and structural boards or sections.

For example, Exodus 26:20 says, “And for the second side of the tabernacle on the north side there shall be twenty boards.”

The word translated “side” there comes from the same Hebrew word family used in Genesis 2.

In Exodus, no one imagines that the tabernacle had a human rib cage.

The word identifies a side or structural section.

The same word is used when Scripture speaks about the sides of the ark and about side chambers in the temple.

That tells us something important.

The Hebrew word has a broader range than the English anatomical word “rib.”

However, we must say the next sentence just as clearly.

A broader range does not automatically prove that “rib” is wrong in Genesis 2.

Words take their specific meaning from context.

The English word “side” can mean the left side of a building, one side of an argument, a side dish at dinner or the side of a person’s body.

We do not choose the meaning by counting definitions.

We choose it by looking at how the word functions in its sentence.

Genesis 2 is the one place where this Hebrew word is used in an unmistakably human anatomical setting.

That is one reason ancient and modern translators have understood it as “rib.”

The Greek translation used before the time of Christ used a term that could refer to the side or the ribs.

The Latin tradition did something similar.

The King James translators did not invent the interpretation in 1611.

They inherited an ancient and defensible understanding of the passage.

So let us be fair to our Bible.

We should not stand in the pulpit and announce, “The King James Bible got it wrong.”

That conclusion goes beyond the evidence.

At the same time, we should be fair to the Hebrew word.

The English word “rib” may identify what was taken while still giving us a narrower mental picture than the Hebrew expression allows.

This is why “part of Adam’s side” is a helpful explanatory phrase.

It honors the KJV translation.

It acknowledges the broader Hebrew range.

It does not pretend that we know the exact size of what God removed.

The grammar tells us that God took one from Adam’s sides or side-parts.

It does not place a ruler beside the object.

It does not provide a surgical diagram.

It does not tell us whether God took a single rib with surrounding flesh, a larger portion from Adam’s side or something else that the word could appropriately describe.

A literal rib remains a reasonable reading.

A rib together with flesh and tissue remains possible.

A more substantial portion of Adam’s side is also within the word’s range.

What is not responsible is to choose one possibility, add many details to it and then tell the church that we have discovered the secret anatomy of the first man.

Genesis is restrained about the anatomy but unmistakably clear about the relationship.

That sentence will keep us steady through the rest of this study.

Verse 22 says, “And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman.”

The Hebrew verb translated “made” is a form of banah.

Its ordinary sense is to build.

It is used when Scripture speaks of building houses, cities, altars and the temple.

The Holy Spirit could have chosen many words to describe the act, but here the text pictures God as the One who builds.

God takes what He has removed from the man and intentionally builds the woman.

She is not an accident.

She is not a leftover.

She is not a hurried repair to a plan that surprised God.

She is the deliberate workmanship of the Creator.

Yet even the word “built” does not reveal the method.

It tells us that God acted with purpose.

It does not tell us how He transformed the taken material into every part of Eve's body.

We know that the God who formed Adam from the dust and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life was fully able to build Eve from whatever portion He chose to take.

The miracle does not become easier or harder depending on the size of the material.

If God could form a whole man from dust, God could form a whole woman from a rib.

If God chose to take a larger portion of Adam's side, God could build from that as well.

The power belongs to God in either case.

The meaning of the event is not that God needed enough biological material to finish the job.

The meaning is that God chose for the woman to come from the man.

Then the verse gives us one of the most beautiful movements in the whole account.

God "brought her unto the man."

Adam awakens, but he does not wake up merely to inspect a medical result.

God presents a person to him.

The Lord who recognized Adam's need provides the one who corresponds to him.

Adam's first recorded words in Scripture are poetry.

"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."

That statement raises an excellent question.

If God removed only a bone, how can Adam say both "bone of my bones" and "flesh of my flesh"?

Where did the flesh come from?

We should never be afraid of a question that arises from paying attention to the verse.

There are at least two sound observations that help us.

First, God may have taken flesh along with the rib.

Verse 21 says that God "closed up the flesh instead thereof."

That wording makes flesh part of the scene.

The text does not say that God cleaned every trace of tissue from a bare bone before building the woman.

If a rib with surrounding flesh was taken, Adam's statement fits naturally.

If a larger part of his side was taken, it fits naturally as well.

Second, "bone and flesh" is also Biblical language for shared family identity and kinship.

The phrase does not always require that the speaker is describing an immediate act of surgery.

In Genesis 29:14, Laban says to Jacob, "Surely thou art my bone and my flesh."

Laban did not mean that Jacob had been physically removed from his body.

He meant, “You are my own family. You are my kin.”

In Judges 9:2, Abimelech tells the men of Shechem to “remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.”

In 2 Samuel 5:1, the tribes come to David and say, “Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh.”

In 2 Samuel 19:12, David asks, “Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh.”

In each case, the language expresses shared identity, nearness and kinship.

Therefore, Adam’s words can be more than an inventory of materials.

They are a cry of recognition.

The animals have passed before him, but none was his bone and flesh.

Now Adam sees someone who shares his humanity.

“This is now.”

We might hear the relief and joy in those words.

At last, here is the one who corresponds to me.

Here is not another creature merely near me, but a person who is of me and with me.

Here is family before there was any other human family.

“Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” is literally true in Eve’s unique origin.

It is also the language of the closest possible kinship.

These two meanings do not compete.

They reinforce one another.

God made Eve from Adam’s own humanity, and Adam received her as one who truly shared his humanity.

This helps us answer the question without forcing the text.

The word “rib” can account for the bone.

The surrounding language leaves room for flesh.

The Biblical expression “bone and flesh” also says more than anatomy.

It announces relationship.

Now we need to consider an interpretation that has become popular in some articles and videos.

Ancient Jewish teachers sometimes imagined the first human as a two-sided or double-faced being, later divided by God into male and female.

Versions of that discussion appear in later rabbinic writings such as Genesis Rabbah and the Talmud.

Those writings show that Jewish interpreters also wrestled with the meaning of tsela and with the

relationship between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2.

That history is interesting.

It proves that our question is not new.

But an old interpretation is not automatically an inspired interpretation.

Those discussions were written long after Genesis.

They record debate among rabbis, not additional verses of Scripture.

Even within that tradition, the explanations were not uniform.

Some spoke of two faces or two sides.

Others defended a rib-like part or another appendage.

The disagreement itself should make us cautious about presenting one rabbinic picture as “the hidden Hebrew truth.”

Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

Genesis 5:2 says, “Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.”

These verses affirm that both male and female belong fully to the humanity God created and blessed.

They do not say that Adam originally walked through the garden with a male body on one side and a female body on the other.

Genesis 1 gives us the great summary of humanity’s creation.

Genesis 2 gives us the closer account of how the woman was formed and brought to the man.

We do not need to invent a double person in order to harmonize those chapters.

Someone may ask, “If God took one of Adam’s sides, could Adam originally have been four-legged like the animals?”

It is a creative question, and a careful study should answer it rather than simply laugh at it.

The answer is that Scripture gives us no reason to believe Adam was four-legged.

An ordinary two-legged human body already has two sides.

The word “side” does not require two complete sets of limbs.

Genesis deliberately distinguishes Adam from the animals that pass before him.

Nothing in the text describes him as animal-shaped, double-bodied or joined back-to-back with another person.

Could we imagine such a creature?

Yes, human imagination can picture almost anything.

But the ability to imagine something is not evidence that the Bible teaches it.

Once we add faces, arms, legs and a body plan that the passage never mentions, we have left exegesis and begun writing a different story.

This is exactly the science-fiction feeling we want to avoid.

We can acknowledge the history of the interpretation without preaching it as fact.

There is another question that naturally follows if we understand the KJV wording as one actual rib.

How many ribs did Adam have?

Most men and women today normally have twelve pairs, for a total of twenty-four ribs.

Genesis says that God took one of Adam's ribs and "closed up the flesh instead thereof."

It does not say that God replaced the rib.

If one whole rib was removed and never restored, Adam would have had one fewer rib afterward than he had before.

That much follows logically.

But the Bible does not tell us his number before or after.

Perhaps he began with twenty-four and afterward had twenty-three.

Perhaps God created him with twenty-five and afterward he had the twenty-four that is common today.

Perhaps the part taken later regenerated.

Perhaps what was taken was not an entire rib.

Those are possibilities, not revelations.

We should label them honestly.

There is medical evidence that portions of ribs can regrow under certain conditions, especially when the surrounding tissue called the periosteum is preserved.

That is an interesting fact about the body God designed.

It is not proof of what happened to Adam.

Genesis does not tell us whether regeneration occurred.

We also should not repeat the old myth that men today have fewer ribs than women.

They normally have the same number.

An injury or operation in a parent does not rewrite the ordinary anatomy inherited by every child.

If a man loses a finger, his children are not born missing that finger.

In the same way, even if Adam lived the rest of his life with one fewer rib, that would not require all men after him to inherit the same acquired loss.

The rib-count question is thoughtful.

It helps us notice what the verse says and what it does not say.

But it cannot settle whether tsela should be understood as one bare rib or a broader part of the side.

God did not preserve Adam's medical chart for us.

He preserved the creation account.

The point of that account now comes into focus.

Adam says, "she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

He recognizes both sameness and distinction.

She shares his bone and flesh.

She is genuinely human as he is human.

Yet she is not Adam repeated.

She is woman, personally distinct and corresponding to man.

Then verse 24 moves from the first couple to every marriage that follows.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Notice the word "therefore."

The creation of Eve explains the marriage bond.

Because the woman was taken from the man, a man and his wife are joined in a covenant union described as one flesh.

The passage moves from one to two, then from two into one flesh.

The emphasis is not that every woman is an incomplete half searching for a man.

The emphasis is the unique covenant union of husband and wife.

Single people are not lesser human beings.

Jesus was never married, yet He is the perfect man.

Paul served God faithfully as an unmarried man.

Genesis is explaining the origin and nature of marriage, not declaring that an unmarried person possesses only half a soul.

The one-flesh union is not merely physical.

It includes loyalty, covenant, shared life and a new family bond strong enough that a man leaves father and mother and cleaves to his wife.

That word "cleave" speaks of holding fast.

Marriage is not a casual arrangement that survives only while everything feels easy.

It is a joining in which two people are called to live with faithfulness toward God and toward one another.

The creation account gives equal dignity without erasing distinction.

It gives unity without erasing personhood.

It gives companionship without turning either person into property.

It gives a covenant, not a competition.

The clearest interpreter of this passage is not a viral article or even an ancient rabbi.

It is Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 19, religious leaders question Jesus about divorce.

Jesus answers by going back before human customs, before legal arguments and before the brokenness introduced by sin.

He goes back to creation.

Matthew 19:4 says, “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,”

Verse 5 continues, “And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?”

Then verse 6 says, “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Jesus does not stop to settle the dimensions of the part removed from Adam.

He directs us to the truth the event established.

God made them male and female.

God established the one-flesh bond.

God joins husband and wife.

Human beings are not to treat lightly what God has joined.

That does not make the Hebrew question unimportant.

It shows us how to keep the question in proportion.

The word study should lead us toward the purpose of the passage, not away from it.

If our study of *tsela* produces a strange new Adam but never strengthens our understanding of faithfulness, we have missed the direction Jesus gives us.

If our study wins an argument about “rib” or “side” but leaves us careless about marriage, we have gained vocabulary and missed wisdom.

Jesus makes the relationship central.

The apostle Paul does the same in Ephesians 5.

Ephesians 5:28 says, “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.”

Verse 29 says, “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:”

Verse 30 says, “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”

Verse 31 returns directly to Genesis: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.”

Verse 32 says, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Then verse 33 brings the truth into the home: “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”

Paul hears Genesis 2 as a call to covenant love.

A husband is not invited to use Adam’s priority in creation as an excuse for selfishness.

He is commanded to love his wife as his own body.

He is to nourish and cherish her.

The language of Adam’s flesh becomes a command to care.

The relationship between husband and wife points beyond itself to Christ and the church.

Christ loves His church.

Christ gave Himself for His church.

Christ nourishes and cherishes His people.

Marriage is called to bear witness to that faithful love.

The mystery is greater than anatomy.

It is greater than translation history.

The first woman brought to the first man becomes part of the Biblical pattern through which God helps us understand the covenant love of Christ.

This is why we must handle the passage with reverence.

It is not material for sensational headlines.

It is not a hidden code that overturns the rest of the Bible.

It is the foundation of a relationship that ultimately points us toward the Gospel.

What, then, should we take home from this study?

First, we should read familiar verses slowly.

Familiarity is a blessing, but it can also make us stop looking.

Many of us could quote “one of his ribs” without ever asking what the Hebrew word means elsewhere.

Many of us could quote “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” without noticing that the same family language appears later in Scripture.

The answer is not to distrust our English Bible.

The answer is to keep studying it.

The King James Version has carried the Word of God faithfully into generations of homes and churches.

A closer look at Hebrew does not have to be an attack on the KJV.

It can help us appreciate why translators made a choice and where an English word may not display the whole range of the original.

Second, we should distinguish certainty from possibility.

The Bible certainly says that God took something from Adam and built the woman from it.

The Bible certainly says that she was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.

The Bible certainly says that she was taken out of man.

The Bible certainly presents her as the human counterpart God provided.

The Bible certainly uses this event to explain the one-flesh bond of marriage.

It is possible that one ordinary rib, with some surrounding flesh, was taken.

It is possible that the word identifies a more substantial portion of Adam's side.

It is possible that Adam had one fewer rib afterward.

It is possible that the rib regenerated.

But possibilities should be introduced with the words “may,” “could” and “perhaps.”

Certainties should be introduced with “the Scripture says.”

That simple discipline protects the church from speculation presented as revelation.

Third, we should refuse sensational claims.

An article may tell us that the Hebrew proves it was never a rib.

That is too strong.

Another teacher may insist that considering “side” is an attack on the Bible.

That is also too strong.

Careful study often requires us to stand in the space between two loud claims.

We can say that “rib” is a defensible translation.

We can also say that “side” belongs to the Hebrew word's range.

We can explain that “part of Adam's side” may communicate the scene more fully without pretending that the exact anatomy has been revealed.

Truth does not need exaggeration to make it interesting.

Fourth, we should recognize the dignity God gave to both man and woman.

Genesis 1:27 says that God created humanity in His image, “male and female created he them.”

Genesis 2 shows that the woman was not found among the animals and was not fashioned as a lower order of life.

She was built by God from the man’s own humanity.

Adam recognized her as his bone and flesh.

Both are created by God.

Both bear God’s image.

Both receive God’s blessing in Genesis 1.

Both are responsible to God.

The text gives us no permission to demean women.

It also gives us no permission to turn the passage into a modern political slogan and ignore everything else Scripture teaches.

We honor the text by receiving its full witness, not by recruiting one Hebrew word for a cause we brought with us.

Fifth, those who are married should hear the call to one-flesh faithfulness.

Husbands, your wife is not an opponent to defeat.

She is not a convenience to use.

Paul says to love her as your own body.

Nourish her.

Cherish her.

Give yourself in love that reflects Christ.

Wives, Scripture calls you to reverence your husband and to share in the faithful covenant God established.

Both husband and wife should guard the union God has joined.

That means telling the truth.

That means practicing forgiveness.

That means refusing contempt.

That means seeking help before distance becomes destruction.

That means remembering that covenant love is not measured only by the emotion of an easy day.

It is displayed through faithful action over a lifetime.

Sixth, all of us should learn to see other people as fellow human beings who bear God’s image.

Adam’s declaration is the opposite of dehumanization.

He looks at the woman and recognizes shared humanity.

Our world becomes cruel whenever we stop doing that.

We reduce people to categories.

We speak about them as problems instead of persons.

We forget that the person across from us was made by God and is accountable to God just as we are.

The language of bone and flesh reminds us that human relationships require recognition, responsibility and care.

Finally, we should allow the passage to point us to Christ.

The first Adam received his bride after a deep sleep and the opening of his side.

We should be cautious about pressing every detail into an allegory that Scripture does not explicitly construct.

But Paul does explicitly tell us that marriage speaks concerning Christ and the church.

Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it.

At the cross, He bore our sin.

He died, was buried and rose again.

Through faith in Him, sinners are forgiven, made new and brought into His people.

The church is not saved by solving a Hebrew word study.

We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

There may be someone here who understands the familiar story of Adam and Eve but has never personally trusted the Savior to whom the whole Biblical story points.

You know about creation.

You know about the fall.

But you have never received the forgiveness Christ purchased for you.

The Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

He was buried and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

The invitation of the Gospel is not that you repair yourself and then approach God.

It is that you turn to Christ in repentance and faith.

Trust the One who did for you what you could never do for yourself.

Before we close, let us return to the question with which we began.

When our English Bibles say that God made Eve from Adam's rib, does the word "rib" fully

convey what Moses intended us to understand?

Here is the answer I believe the evidence supports.

The word “rib” may accurately describe what God took, but it does not necessarily convey everything the Hebrew word allows us to see.

The Hebrew word can refer to a rib, but it also commonly refers to a side or structural part of a side.

For that reason, it is responsible to explain that God took a part of Adam’s side without claiming that the KJV is wrong.

Scripture does not give us enough anatomical detail to reconstruct the exact procedure.

It does give us enough theological clarity to understand the result.

Eve came from Adam’s own humanity.

She corresponded to him as the helper God provided.

Adam recognized her as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.

God established the covenant in which a man and his wife become one flesh.

A rib may be part of the answer.

A side may help us see more of the picture.

But the heart of the passage is not what Adam lost.

It is whom God gave him.

Genesis is restrained about the anatomy but unmistakably clear about the relationship.

Let us be just as restrained where Scripture is restrained.

Let us be just as clear where Scripture is clear.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You that we do not have to fear careful questions.

Give us humility when the text does not answer every detail we would like to know.

Give us courage to release assumptions that we have mistaken for Scripture.

Give us wisdom to resist sensational claims and grace to speak truth without pride.

Thank You for creating man and woman in Your image.

Thank You for the dignity, purpose and responsibility You give to every person.

Strengthen the marriages in our church.

Teach husbands to love with the self-giving care of Christ.

Teach wives to walk in faithfulness, wisdom and respect.

Bring healing where relationships are wounded and guidance where decisions are difficult.

For those who are unmarried, remind them that their worth and completeness are found in You, not in a marital status.

For anyone who has never trusted Christ, open that heart today.

Help that person understand the seriousness of sin, the sufficiency of the cross and the hope of the resurrection.

Draw each of us closer to Jesus and make our lives faithful witnesses to His love.

We ask all of this in Jesus' name, amen.

If you would like to talk about today's study, if you have questions about salvation or if you simply need someone to pray with you, please speak with me after the service.

You do not have to settle every question alone.

This is a church where we can open the Bible together and reason together from the Word of God.

And now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

To our first-time guests, Aloha Nui Loa.

We hope you will join us at the Reason Together Café for locally grown coffee, an RTC mug and a conversation that can continue as long as the refills do.

God bless you, and have a wonderful week.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

ADAM'S RIB: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE HEBREW

Genesis 2:18–25

And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. Genesis 2:22

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Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION The KJV translation “rib” is ancient, reasonable and contextually defensible. The Hebrew word *tsela* has a wider Biblical range that includes a side or structural side-part. Genesis does not disclose enough anatomy to determine the exact size of what God took. “Part of Adam’s side” is therefore helpful explanatory language, but it should not be used to condemn “rib” or to announce a hidden account of a divided, double-bodied Adam.

The familiar picture is simple. God caused Adam to sleep, removed one rib, closed the flesh, made Eve from the rib and brought her to Adam. That picture may be substantially correct. The question is whether the modern English word “rib” carries every possibility allowed by the Hebrew text.

Genesis 2 uses the Hebrew noun *tsela*. In its other Old Testament occurrences, the word commonly names a side, a lateral part or a structural component associated with a side. It can describe the side of a hill, the sides of the ark and tabernacle, chambers along a building, boards or door leaves. Genesis 2:21–22 is the word’s clear human anatomical setting, which is why “rib” remains a legitimate translation. Yet the broader range prevents us from insisting that the word can mean only one bare rib with no connected flesh or surrounding tissue.

This commentary expands the Biblical reasoning behind the sermon. It examines the narrative, the Hebrew vocabulary, Adam’s “bone and flesh” statement, later Jewish interpretations, the four-legged question, human rib counts and what Jesus and Paul make central. The goal is not to replace a familiar certainty with a stranger certainty. It is to receive what Scripture says, consider what it permits and stop where revelation stops.

1. Begin with the Familiar Word

The Picture We Carry

Many readers have heard Genesis 2 preached since childhood. Adam lies beneath a tree or upon the ground. God removes one curved bone from his chest. Eve is formed nearby and Adam awakens with one fewer rib. Paintings, children’s lessons and sermons have made this picture feel almost as familiar as the written verses.

The picture is not unreasonable. The KJV says that the LORD God “took one of his ribs” and “made he a woman.” The difficulty begins only when details supplied by imagination become indistinguishable from details supplied by Scripture. Genesis does not show the dimensions of what was taken, the condition of Adam’s chest afterward or the steps by which God fashioned the woman.

A Question Is Not an Accusation

Asking whether “rib” fully conveys the Hebrew is not an accusation against the KJV. Translation always requires a word in one language to represent a word from another language. Sometimes the available English word communicates the immediate meaning well while leaving part of the source word’s wider range less visible.

The approved question refers to what Moses intended readers to understand. That wording does not place Moses above God. Christians receive Genesis as inspired Scripture. God is the divine Author and Moses is the human writer through whom the words were given. Asking about the writer’s intended meaning is one way of asking what God communicated through the text.

READING PRINCIPLE A familiar picture may be correct without being complete. Read the verse first. Distinguish the words Scripture supplies from the details imagination supplies.

2. Read Genesis 2 Before Debating Anatomy

The Need God Identified

Genesis 2:18 begins with God’s judgment: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” The first need named in the passage is relational, not anatomical. Adam has meaningful work and fellowship with God, yet no corresponding human companion.

The animals are brought to Adam and named, but “for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.” They may be near him and useful to him, but none shares his humanity. The narrative creates an expectation that God will provide someone who corresponds to Adam in a way no animal can.

Sleep, Taking and Closure

God causes a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. Adam does not assist, advise or observe. God acts. Genesis then says that God took one of Adam’s tsela forms and “closed up the flesh instead thereof.” The closure of the flesh makes flesh part of the scene, but the verse does not say how much flesh was taken with the selected part.

God then brings the woman to Adam. The movement is personal and covenantal. God does not merely display a completed biological object. He presents a person to the man whose need He identified.

Recognition and Covenant

Adam responds, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.” He recognizes shared humanity and unique origin. She is not another creature selected from among the animals. She is Woman, taken from Man.

The narrative then moves immediately to marriage: leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh. The text's own destination is not a surgical reconstruction. It is the God-established unity of husband and wife.

3. The Biblical Range of Tsela

More Than One English Gloss

The Hebrew noun *tsela* is numbered H6763 in Strong's system. The Westminster Leningrad Codex records forty-one occurrences in thirty-two verses. Brown-Driver-Briggs organizes its range under "rib, side." Genesis 2 contains the clear anatomical uses. Elsewhere the word repeatedly refers to sides and side-related structures.

Second Samuel 16:13 uses *tsela* for the side or slope of a hill. Exodus uses it for the sides of the ark and the tabernacle. Other passages use it for chambers situated along a building, boards, planks or leaves of a door. These objects are not ribs, but they share the idea of a lateral part or structural side.

Context Still Governs

A dictionary range is not a list of interchangeable meanings. The fact that *tsela* can name the side of the ark does not mean Adam was shaped like a building. The context is human and anatomical, so an anatomical English word is appropriate.

At the same time, the non-anatomical uses show why "side" belongs to the word's ordinary Biblical range. They prevent us from defining the noun more narrowly than the language itself does. The selected part may have been one rib. It may have included flesh or connected tissue. The noun could permit a more substantial side portion, but the grammar does not measure it.

LEXICAL PRINCIPLE A word's range tells us what may be possible. Context tells us which meaning fits. Neither a dictionary nor an imaginative reconstruction can replace the sentence in which the word appears.

4. Is the KJV Wrong?

An Ancient Interpretation

The translation "rib" did not begin with modern English Bibles. The Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, uses *pleura* in Genesis 2. The word can refer to a side or a rib area. The Latin Vulgate uses *costa*, a word associated with rib, side and flank. English translators inherited an interpretation with deep roots.

Brown-Driver-Briggs also lists “rib of man” for Genesis 2:21–22. The anatomical context gives the KJV genuine lexical support. It is therefore inaccurate to say that the translators ignored the Hebrew or that “rib” is an obvious mistranslation.

Accurate Does Not Always Mean Exhaustive

An English translation can be defensible without displaying every shade of the source word. “Rib” gives the reader a concrete anatomical part from Adam’s side. “Side” displays the broader lexical range but may sound vague. “Part of Adam’s side” works well as explanation because it preserves both the anatomical setting and the wider range without pretending to identify an exact measurement.

The responsible answer is not, “The KJV got it wrong.” It is, “The KJV gives a legitimate contextual translation, while the Hebrew allows us to consider a somewhat broader picture.” That conclusion honors both translation history and the limits of the evidence.

TRANSLATION JUDGMENT Keep “rib” in the KJV reading. Use “part of Adam’s side” when explaining the Hebrew range. Do not turn an explanatory phrase into a replacement Bible translation.

5. What Did God Take?

One Selected Part

Genesis 2:21 says God took “one” from Adam’s *tsela* forms. The grammar presents a selected part associated with Adam’s sides or side-parts. It does not state that God removed one entire half of Adam. It also does not specify that the selected material was a dry, isolated bone.

A literal rib remains possible and may be exactly what the verse describes. A rib with surrounding flesh or tissue is also possible. A larger side portion cannot be ruled out solely from the noun’s range. The approved language must remain proportional to the evidence: one selected part from Adam’s side, with its exact size undisclosed.

What “Closed Up the Flesh” Tells Us

The KJV says God “closed up the flesh instead thereof.” This confirms a bodily opening and divine closure. It does not tell us whether the flesh was merely opened to reach the rib or whether some flesh accompanied the removed material. Both readings remain compatible with the verse.

God could form Adam from dust and could build Eve from whatever portion He chose. The miracle does not depend upon supplying enough biological material by ordinary natural processes. The passage emphasizes God’s deliberate action rather than the quantity of raw material.

TEXTUAL LIMIT Scripture identifies the source as Adam's own humanity. It does not provide dimensions, a medical procedure or an anatomical blueprint. Certainty about those missing details would come from us, not from the verse.

6. “Bone of My Bones, and Flesh of My Flesh”

Literal Origin and Kinship

Adam's declaration naturally raises the question that helped shape this study. If only bone was taken, how can he say “flesh of my flesh”? One possible answer is that flesh or related tissue accompanied the rib. Genesis does not forbid that possibility.

There is also a second answer within Scripture. Bone-and-flesh language became a recognizable expression of kinship. Laban tells Jacob, “Surely thou art my bone and my flesh” in Genesis 29:14. Abimelech says, “I am your bone and your flesh” in Judges 9:2. The tribes tell David, “Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh” in 2 Samuel 5:1. David uses similar words of his brethren in 2 Samuel 19:12.

None of those speakers claims to have been physically constructed from the listener's skeletal tissue. The expression identifies shared family, shared people and close human belonging.

Two Compatible Levels

In Genesis 2 the words have unusual force because Eve actually came from Adam's body. The statement can therefore function at two compatible levels. She shares his physical humanity through God's creative act, and she is his nearest kin. The idiom explains how “flesh of my flesh” can be true even if the removed part is described as a rib. It does not eliminate the possibility that flesh was physically included.

KINSHIP CLUE “Bone and flesh” answers more than an anatomical question. It declares that the woman is fully human, truly related to the man and unlike every animal that passed before Adam.

7. God “Built” the Woman

The Verb Banah

Genesis 2:22 uses the Hebrew verb *banah*, ordinarily translated “to build.” The KJV renders the action idiomatically: “And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman.” The Hebrew wording presents intentional divine craftsmanship.

Banah is used for building houses, cities, altars and sacred structures. That range gives the sentence dignity and purpose. Eve is not an accidental byproduct or an afterthought. God fashions her according to His wisdom and brings her to Adam.

What the Verb Does Not Reveal

The verb does not provide an architectural diagram of Eve's body. It cannot prove that God divided a double-bodied Adam into two equal halves. Nor does it reveal how a rib, tissue or larger side portion became a complete woman. "Built" tells us who acted and something of the purposeful character of His work. It does not make the hidden process observable.

The passage treats the creation of the woman as a miracle. Biblical reasoning should acknowledge the miracle without decorating it with invented mechanics.

8. Ancient Jewish Interpretations

Two Faces, a Side or an Appendage

Later Jewish teachers also asked what *tsela* meant in Genesis 2. Genesis Rabbah 8:1 preserves an interpretation in which the first human was double-faced or two-sided and God divided the being into man and woman. The discussion appeals to the language of "side" elsewhere in Scripture.

Berakhot 61a records competing explanations. One view speaks of two faces. Another treats the selected part as a tail or appendage, and the discussion also relates the word to a rib. The variety matters. Ancient Jewish interpreters did not speak with one voice about Adam's anatomy.

Reception History Is Not Revelation

These texts are valuable because they show that questions about "rib" and "side" are not modern inventions. They also help explain why a sensational contemporary article can sound as though it has uncovered an ancient secret.

The rabbinic discussions were composed and preserved after Genesis. They record interpretation, debate and creative reflection. They do not add a divinely inspired appendix to Genesis. A modern teacher should not select the most dramatic ancient proposal, ignore the competing proposals and announce it as the recovered Hebrew meaning.

HISTORICAL CAUTION An ancient interpretation may be historically interesting without being Biblically controlling. Age does not turn commentary into Scripture.

9. Could Adam Have Been Four-Legged?

An Honest Question Deserves a Direct Answer

If someone imagines a larger side removed from Adam, another question may arise: Was Adam originally shaped like a double creature, perhaps with four legs or another unfamiliar anatomy? Scripture provides no support for that picture.

Genesis 1 presents humanity as male and female in God's image. Genesis 2 presents Adam as a man distinct from the animals. He works, speaks, receives a command, names the creatures and recognizes the woman when God brings her. Nothing in the account describes two faces, two backs, four legs or two conscious persons contained within one body.

Imaginability Is Not Evidence

God could create in ways beyond our experience. That truth does not make every imaginable reconstruction equally plausible. A possibility becomes useful in Biblical study only when the text, language or reliable background gives us a reason to consider it.

The later two-faced interpretation is evidence that an interpreter imagined such a being. It is not evidence that Adam actually possessed that anatomy. The responsible answer is therefore clear: Scripture does not support a four-legged Adam, and this study has no reason to teach one.

10. Adam's Ribs and Modern Anatomy

How Many Ribs?

Modern men and women ordinarily have twelve pairs of ribs, for a total of twenty-four. Anatomical variations occur, but the usual count is equal. The popular idea that every man has one fewer rib than every woman is false.

Genesis never states Adam's original number. If God removed one whole rib and neither replaced nor regenerated it, Adam afterward would have had one fewer than he had before. That could mean twenty-four became twenty-three, twenty-five became twenty-four or another variation. The text does not allow us to choose.

Acquired Loss Is Not Inherited

A bodily loss acquired during a parent's lifetime is not ordinarily inherited by the children. A father who loses a finger does not thereby produce children missing that finger. Even if Adam lived after Genesis 2 with one fewer rib, the equal rib count of ordinary men and women today does not tell us his post-event anatomy.

Could a Rib Regenerate?

Medical literature documents notable regenerative capacity in mammalian rib tissue under particular conditions, especially when surrounding tissue important to bone growth remains. That makes regeneration a genuine biological possibility rather than pure fantasy.

It does not prove that Adam's rib regenerated. Genesis says God closed the flesh. It does not report later bone growth. Medical evidence may answer whether regeneration is possible in principle, but only Scripture could tell us whether it occurred in this event, and Scripture is silent.

EVIDENCE RULE Modern anatomy can correct the myth that men normally have fewer ribs. It cannot reveal Adam's original count, the amount God took or what happened afterward.

11. What Jesus and Paul Emphasize

Jesus Returns to Creation and Covenant

When Jesus cites Genesis in Matthew 19:4–6, He does not explain the dimensions of the *tsela*. He says that the Creator “made them male and female” and quotes the leaving, cleaving and one-flesh language. His conclusion is covenantal: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Jesus treats the creation account as true and authoritative. His emphasis is that God created, God established the union and God joins husband and wife. The anatomy serves the origin of the relationship, but it is not the destination of His teaching.

Paul Sees Marriage and Christ

Ephesians 5 also quotes the one-flesh statement. Paul tells a husband to love his wife as his own body and connects marital love to Christ's love for the church. He then calls the union a great mystery concerning Christ and the church.

The canonical movement helps govern this study. Genesis tells us that Eve came from Adam's humanity. Jesus centers the marriage covenant. Paul centers self-giving love and the mystery of Christ and His church. A commentary that ends only with a Hebrew noun has stopped before Scripture reaches its own pastoral and Gospel horizon.

12. Why the Question Matters

Read Familiar Passages Slowly

The study teaches readers to revisit familiar verses without treating the Bible with suspicion. A lifelong mental picture can be examined without being mocked. A respected translation can be honored while its underlying language is explored.

That habit matters far beyond Genesis 2. Responsible study asks what the text establishes, what comparison with Scripture adds and where a conclusion depends upon inference. It resists both unexamined tradition and the excitement of a supposed hidden truth.

Preserve Human Dignity

Adam's recognition is not dehumanizing. The woman is not an inferior fragment or an expendable piece of the man. She shares his bone and flesh. Both man and woman bear God's image. Any application of the passage should preserve equal human dignity, covenant responsibility and accountability before God.

The one-flesh covenant also does not mean that an unmarried person is incomplete as a human being. Jesus was the perfect man and was unmarried. Worth and spiritual completeness are found in God, not in marital status.

Let the Passage Point to Christ

The woman's creation displays God's provision for a need Adam could not answer himself. The larger Biblical story reveals a deeper need humanity cannot answer. Sin separates us from God, and no imaginative theory, linguistic knowledge or moral effort can reconcile us to Him.

Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again. Salvation is received through faith in Him. Those who belong to Christ are joined to Him and called to covenant faithfulness, truth and love.

PASTORAL CENTER The heart of Genesis 2 is not what Adam lost. It is whom God gave him. The heart of the Gospel is not what we can discover for ourselves. It is the Savior God has given us.

Conclusion: A Careful Answer and a Clearer Picture

When our English Bibles say that God made Eve from Adam's rib, does "rib" fully convey what Moses intended us to understand? The most faithful answer requires both confidence and restraint.

"Rib" is an ancient, legitimate and contextually appropriate translation. Genesis 2 is a human anatomical setting, and the traditional rendering should not be denounced. The Hebrew word *tsela* nevertheless has a

broadest Biblical range centered upon a side or structural side-part. “Part of Adam’s side” is therefore responsible explanatory language.

The passage does not disclose whether God took one bare rib, a rib with flesh or tissue or a more substantial side portion. Adam’s declaration is both literal origin language and recognizable kinship language. Later double-faced interpretations document reception history rather than inspired fact. Scripture gives no support to a four-legged Adam. Modern anatomy tells us that men and women ordinarily have the same number of ribs, but it cannot recover Adam’s original or later count.

Genesis is restrained about the anatomy but unmistakably clear about the relationship. God saw the need, acted while Adam slept, built the woman from Adam’s own humanity and brought her to him. Adam recognized her as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. Their origin grounds the one-flesh covenant that Jesus affirms and Paul connects to Christ and the church.

The study therefore ends where the sermon ends. A rib may be part of the answer. A side may help us see more of the picture. But the heart of the passage is not what Adam lost. It is whom God gave him.

THE ENDURING COUNSEL Honor the KJV. Examine the Hebrew. Reject sensational certainty. Receive what Genesis reveals about shared humanity, covenant love and the God who provides.

Selected Sources

Primary Scripture

Genesis 1:26–28; 2:18–25; 5:1–2; 29:14; Exodus 25:12–14; 26:20; 27:7; Judges 9:2; 2 Samuel 5:1; 16:13; 19:12; Matthew 19:4–6; Ephesians 5:28–33. KJV quotations and primary public reading.

Hebrew and Ancient Translation Resources

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Ancient Jewish Sources

Genesis Rabbah 8:1 and Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 61a. These sources preserve competing later interpretations involving two faces, a side, a tail or appendage and a rib. They document interpretation rather than establish the anatomy of Adam.

Biblical and Exegetical Resources

Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part I: From Adam to Noah*. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*.

Medical Resources

Osama A. Safarini and colleagues, “Anatomy, Thorax, Ribs,” *StatPearls*. Marissa K. Srouf and colleagues, “Natural Large-Scale Regeneration of Rib Cartilage in a Mouse Model,” *Journal of Bone and Mineral Research* 30, no. 2 (2015): 297–308. Stephanie T. Kuwahara and colleagues, “Sox9+ Messenger Cells Orchestrate Large-Scale Skeletal Regeneration in the Mammalian Rib,” *eLife* 8 (2019): e40715. These sources address ordinary rib anatomy and regenerative capacity. They do not establish what happened to Adam.

Popular Claim Reviewed

“The Shocking Truth About Eve’s Origin Hidden in the Hebrew Text,” *NewsToday123*, June 24, 2026. The article usefully raised the range of tsele and the existence of later Jewish discussion. Its claims that “rib” is wrong and that Genesis reveals a divided double-bodied Adam were not accepted.