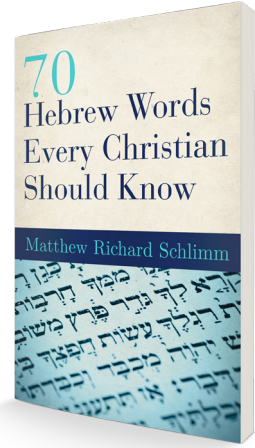


This is one example of a Hebrew word and its explanation from *70 Hebrew Words Every Christian Should Know* by Matthew Richard Schlimm.

The 70 Hebrew words presented in this book appear more than thirty thousand times in the Bible. They show up in nearly fifteen thousand verses. More than 60 percent of the verses in the Old Testament contain at least one of the seventy words included in this book. Learning these words help readers experience scripture in new and broader ways.



**Find out more and read the introduction at:  
[AbingdonPress.com/70HebrewWords](http://AbingdonPress.com/70HebrewWords).**

## Adam and Eve

English readers hear something of how Hebrew sounds when they encounter names.<sup>34</sup> Our English Bibles talk about a couple named Adam and Eve who live in the garden of Eden. They are the parents of Cain and Abel. Each of these names comes close to the sound of the Hebrew:

	English	Hebrew	Hebrew Transliteration
1. (see above)	Adam	אָדָם	<i>adam</i>
11.	Eve	חַוְוָה	<i>khavvav</i>
12.	Eden	עֵדֶן	<i>eden</i>
13.	Cain	קַיִן	<i>qayin</i>
14.	Abel	הָבֶל	<i>hevel</i>

As the Hebrew Transliteration column shows, vowels might change, and the letter “h” doesn’t always transfer across languages. Nevertheless, connections surface between how the Hebrew and English are pronounced.

While it's nice to hear the Hebrew approximated, each Hebrew name in these chapters is loaded with meaning that does not translate into English:

- The Hebrew for Adam means “Humanity.”
- The Hebrew for Eve means “Life.”
- The Hebrew for Eden means “Delight.”
- The Hebrew for Cain means “Spear.”
- The Hebrew for Abel means “Fleeting Breath,” like what we see on cold mornings. It's there one second and gone the next.

Translators could have gone with meanings instead of sounds when translating these Hebrew words. In fact, an ancient Greek translation of the Bible does just that with Eve in Genesis 3:20, calling her “Zoe”—which matches the Hebrew meaning of “life” but is far removed from the Hebrew sounds.

Our English Bibles could be summarized as follows:

*Adam and Eve initially live in the garden of Eden. After God kicks them out, Cain kills his brother Abel.*

However, if we focus on the meaning rather than the sound of these names, Genesis 2–4 looks a bit different. The Hebrew could be summarized like this:

*Humanity and Life initially live in the garden of Delight. After God kicks them out, Spear kills his brother Fleeting Breath.*

The English translation sounds like an account of ancestors the farthest removed from us. The Hebrew sounds more like an account of human nature: what we're like. The names' meanings suggest we may have less a historical account and

### *Losing Hebrew Meaning*

more a parable about God, humanity, our world, and the loss of innocence. (See **Symbolic and Literal**.)

#### **Symbolic and Literal**

“My point, once again, is *not* that those ancient people told literal stories and we are now smart enough to take them symbolically, but that they told them symbolically and we are now dumb enough to take them literally.”<sup>35</sup>

—John Dominic Crossan & Richard G. Watts

Names alone don't determine whether a story is symbolic or historical. However, Genesis 2–4 has other clues that it's more symbolic in nature. There's a talking snake—with no explanation of why the snake can do more than hiss (3:1). The directions to the garden in Genesis 2:10-14 describe the world as a whole, rather than a single location. No one has ever found angelic beings guarding the entrance to the forbidden garden (3:24). The Hebrew text has poetic qualities, and Hebrew poetry is filled with symbolism. These factors, combined with highly meaningful names, suggest that the story as a whole should be seen as symbolic.<sup>36</sup>

Sometimes when I tell my students what these names in Genesis mean, they become angry that no one told them that earlier. Throughout their lives, they've felt an enormous tension between science and faith. They've felt like they needed to choose between Darwin on the one hand and Adam and Eve on the other. But when we see what the Hebrew names actually mean, then Genesis 2–4 appears less about science or history and more a symbolic story that helps us understand who we are, who God is, and why the world works the way it does. The words behind "Adam" and "Eve" are invitations to see ourselves in these characters.

When translators kept the Hebrew sounds for "Adam," "Eve," and their children's names, they also surrendered the rich meanings of these names that allow us to see what the opening of Genesis is really all about.

## Other Names

Most names in the Bible have been rendered according to their sounds, rather than their meaning. Sometimes, the meanings of these names have relatively little significance to the text itself. For example, an important prophet during the time of David is called "Nathan." His name means simply "he gives." (A related biblical name is "Jonathan," meaning "the LORD gives.") Knowing the meaning of Nathan's name doesn't add a new layer of meaning to the stories involving him.<sup>37</sup>

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We hope you enjoyed this sample.

***70 Words Every Christian Should Know***

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