

## The Book Of Genesis – Introduction

What do Alice in Wonderland and Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz* both have in common? Well, besides the fact that Alice and Dorothy are storybook characters, they each received the same good advice- the best place to start is at the beginning.

Why is it important to start at the beginning? Well, have you ever begun to watch a movie that was already in progress? If so, then you know it can sometimes be difficult to understand what is taking place within the film if you didn't see it from the beginning. That's because the beginning of a book or movie is important for understanding everything that follows.

This "begin at the beginning" approach also holds true when reading the Biblical Scriptures. You see, the first book of the Bible is important for understanding the rest of the Scriptures that follow. This book also answers some important questions that every thinking person must eventually ask, including: *How did the world begin? How did we get here? Why are things the way they are?*

The first book of the Bible is known as "Genesis," a word that means "origin."<sup>(1)</sup> In the original language used to write the book of Genesis, the title is *Bereshith*, a word that literally means "the beginning." This is certainly an appropriate title because the book of Genesis offers some important information about the origins of such things as:

- The universe and everything within it.
- The variety of plant and animal life on this planet.
- The human race.
- Evil.
- The various language groups that exist.

Perhaps most importantly, the book of Genesis also tells us who or what God is by answering questions such as:

- What is God like?
- Is "God" some kind of force or consciousness?
- Are there many gods?
- Is God interested in what happens here on earth?
- Can we even know anything about God?

The book of Genesis may be the single most important book ever written and has probably had a greater influence on history than any other book ever produced. As a result, no other book is quoted more often or referenced more frequently within the Bible than the book of Genesis.

For example, there are at least one hundred and sixty-five passages in Genesis that are quoted or referenced in the New Testament. More than one hundred of those references are taken from the first eleven chapters of Genesis.<sup>(2)</sup>

The book of Genesis is also part of a larger body of work called the "Pentateuch," also known as the Law or Torah. The word Pentateuch is a word that means "five volumes" and consists of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers- the first five books of the Bible. Genesis is the part of this set that covers the period beginning with the creation of the world until about eighteen hundred years prior to Jesus' birth.

(1) *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* Copyright © 2006 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

(2) Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* pg. 21

While Moses is never actually mentioned in the book of Genesis, the Scriptures tell us that he served as the human author of the Pentateuch. However, there are many who are of the opinion that Moses did not compose the books of Genesis and the rest of the books of the Law. Instead, some believe a variety of writers authored these books at various points over time.

This view is known as the *Documentary Hypothesis* and it attempts to explain why the different writing styles and varying names for God are used throughout the first five books of the Bible. This hypothesis maintains that the book of Genesis and the other books of the Law are broken into four sections that were authored independently by various authors at different times.

This idea, although perhaps well-intentioned, contradicts the contents of these books. It also fails to correspond with Jesus' stated beliefs regarding these works.

Instead, these books tell us that God used Moses to compose the Pentateuch. For example, Exodus 24:4,7 tells us, ***"Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said... Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people."*** <sup>(1)</sup>

Exodus 34:27-28 also goes on to say, ***"the LORD said to Moses, 'Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.' Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments"*** (NIV). It's hard to get more specific than that.

Jesus also made some important statements about the authorship of Genesis and the other books of the Law. For instance, Jesus was once involved in a discussion with those who accused Him of breaking one of the Old Testament commandments. In responding to that accusation, Jesus said, ***"If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"*** (John 5:46-47, see also Luke 24:25-27).

Furthermore, the book of Genesis contains details and information regarding customs and geography that would have been difficult to fabricate at a later date. For example, Genesis 13:10 tells us that ***"Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar."*** This sounds much like a description that was taken from an eyewitness account. In addition, Acts 7:22 tells us that ***"Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action"*** so he certainly had the resources to be used of God to author these works.

(1) Except as indicated, all Scriptural references taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. All rights reserved.

Nevertheless, we should also acknowledge that there are questions regarding the authorship of Genesis. For instance, Moses was born approximately three centuries following the events recorded in the book of Genesis. If Moses really produced the book of Genesis, then where did he get his information?

After all, the very first verse of Genesis says, ***“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*** Moses certainly wasn’t around for *that*, so how did he know? Then there’s Deuteronomy 34:5-6 which says, ***“...Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as the LORD had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is.”*** It seems unlikely that Moses wrote about his death before it occurred, so how do we explain that?

We also have to account for the differences in style and word usage mentioned earlier. If the books of the Law were written by one person, then we would expect them to maintain the author’s particular writing style from beginning to end. However, the vocabulary and writing style of these works show distinct variations. So how can we account for these things?

Well, there are few ways that we can answer these questions. First, we can say that Moses received at least some of the information for the book of Genesis directly from God. To put it another way, Moses recorded this material as God imparted to him. We saw an example of this earlier in Exodus 24:4 where we read, ***“Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said...”*** If God said different things in different ways, then Moses wrote those things down in the way he received them.

Another possibility is that Moses employed some or all of the verbal histories that had been transmitted through the generations up until his time. He then organized those verbal histories into a written format under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In other words, God guided Moses in recording some or all of those narratives in a manner similar to the Gospel of Luke (see [Luke 1:1-4](#)).

One concern with this theory is the possibility that some of those histories might have been altered or corrupted as they were transmitted from one generation to the next. It is easy to imagine how such verbal information might be lost or distorted when passing from person to person and generation to generation. If such verbal histories were used by Moses in authoring the book of Genesis, then how do we know they were accurate?

To answer that question, we first should remember that earlier cultures placed a great emphasis on memorization. In earlier times, one had to rely on his or her memory since most people did not have easy access to writing tools or contemporary recording technology. Because of this, people had no alternative but to memorize valuable facts and information due to the limited storage methods that were available to them.

It is also important to remember that God was ultimately responsible for maintaining the accuracy of any verbal histories that Moses may have used in authoring the book of Genesis.

Finally, it is possible that Moses had access to various historical documents and built those documents into the book of Genesis as guided by the Holy Spirit. The structure of some portions of the book of Genesis seem to suggest this possibility.

You see, there are ten sections within the book of Genesis that are each divided by the same language: ***“This is the book of the genealogy of...”*** or ***“This is the book of the generations of...”*** You see this kind of phrasing used in the following passages:

- “The Book of the Generations of Adam” (5:1)
- “The Generations of Noah” (6:9)

- “The Generations of the Sons of Noah” (10:1)
- “The Generations of Shem” (11:10)
- “The Generations of Terah” (11:27)
- “The Generations of Ishmael” (25:12)
- “The Generations of Isaac” (25:19)
- “The Generations of Esau” (36:1)
- “The Generations of Esau ” (36: 9)
- “The Generations of Jacob” (37:2)

This may help to explain the stylistic differences and word choices that exist within the books of the Law. We'll consider this question at greater length in our look at Genesis chapter two.

The books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are certainly not light reading. These books take time to read and they certainly must have taken a long time to write. So where did Moses find the time to compose these works?

Well, the most likely answer would be during the time of Israel's exodus from the nation of Egypt. The history of Israel's departure from Egypt begins in Exodus chapter twelve. Those familiar with that narrative know that the nation of Israel had to spend forty years in the wilderness before they could enter the land of God's promise.

While that lengthy excursion was hardly ideal, it would have provided Moses with sufficient time to compose the books of the Law. The exception would be the latter portion of [Deuteronomy 34](#) which must have been added following his death.

So a basic summary of the book of Genesis would be as follows:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before the creation (Genesis 1:1-3).</li> <li>• The six days of creation (Genesis 1:3-26).</li> <li>• Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2).</li> <li>• Adam and Eve disobey God (Genesis 3:1-7).</li> <li>• Exile from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8-24).</li> <li>• Cain and Abel (Genesis 4).</li> <li>• Noah is born (Genesis 5).</li> <li>• Noah builds the Ark (Genesis 6).</li> <li>• The Great Flood (Genesis 7).</li> <li>• The earth is repopulated after the flood (Genesis 7-8).</li> <li>• Noah's son's disrespect (Genesis 9).</li> <li>• The genealogy of Noah's sons (Genesis 10).</li> <li>• The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abraham's test of faith (Genesis 22).</li> <li>• Sarah's death (Genesis 23).</li> <li>• Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24-26).</li> <li>• Rebekah and Jacob deceive Isaac (Genesis 27).</li> <li>• God appears to Jacob (Genesis 28).</li> <li>• Jacob's family (Genesis 29-31).</li> <li>• Jacob wrestles with God (Genesis 32).</li> <li>• Esau and Jacob reconcile (Genesis 33).</li> <li>• Jacob's son's carry out a revenge killing (Genesis 34).</li> <li>• God changes Jacob's name to Israel (Genesis 35).</li> <li>• Esau's genealogy (Genesis 36).</li> <li>• Joseph is sold out by his brothers (Genesis 37)</li> <li>• The incident with Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38).</li> </ul> |
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God speaks to Abram (Abraham) (Genesis 12-13).</li> <li>• Abraham rescues Lot (Genesis 14).</li> <li>• God renews His promise to Abraham (Genesis 15).</li> <li>• Ishmael is born (Genesis 16).</li> <li>• The sign of the covenant (Genesis 17).</li> <li>• Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19).</li> <li>• Abraham's deception of Abimelech (Genesis 20).</li> <li>• Isaac is born (Genesis 21).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39-41).</li> <li>• Joseph's brothers meet him in Egypt (Genesis 42-44).</li> <li>• Joseph announces himself to his brothers (Genesis 45)</li> <li>• Jacob and his family relocate to Egypt (Genesis 46)</li> <li>• The Hebrew population grows in Egypt (Genesis 47).</li> <li>• Jacob blesses Joseph's sons (Genesis 48).</li> <li>• Jacob tells the future to his sons (Genesis 49).</li> <li>• Joseph's final directions before his death (Genesis 50).</li> </ul>
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As mentioned earlier, every thinking person must eventually face some essential questions about life. Two of those inquiries are frequently ignored or disregarded: “*Why is there ‘something’ rather than nothing?*” and “*What does that answer mean to me?*” The course of our lives will largely be determined by how we confront those questions- and we can find their answers in the book of Genesis.

Now you may recall that this study opened with a mention of Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* and Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*. There is little doubt that many view the book of Genesis in the same way they view these storybook characters.

There's certainly no shortage of those who believe that the book of Genesis is nothing more than a collection of myths, fables, stories, legends, and fairy tales. The idea of a “God” who created the universe and humanity sounds ridiculous to some, just as the accounts of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Great Flood, and the other people and events contained within the book of Genesis do as well.

However, it's important to recognize that human beings may not have all the facts regarding events that occurred in the distant past. Our knowledge is often limited when it comes to the events of the past and to reject the book of Genesis on that basis is a serious misjudgment.

We should also remember that Jesus accepted the people and events in the book Genesis as people who actually lived and events that actually occurred. For example, Jesus accepted the reality of the following Biblical people and events as found within the book of Genesis...

- Adam and Eve ([Matthew 19:4](#)).
- Abraham ([John 8:56-58](#)).
- Noah and the Great Flood ([Luke 17:26-27](#)).
- Sodom and Gomorrah ([Luke 17:29](#)).

Jesus didn't consider these people and events to be myths, legends, or fairy tales. Instead, He accepted the truthfulness and accuracy of those accounts and used them in His teachings.

Finally, there is a legendary account concerning the well known scientist Albert Einstein that illustrates the need to take the ancient book of Genesis seriously. As the story goes, a group of Einstein's students confronted him with their belief that God did not exist. Einstein considered their position for a moment and then asked the group a question.

Einstein asked his students to estimate how much of the world's knowledge they possessed. The students discussed this question and decided that their group held 5% of all the knowledge that existed in the world. Einstein then replied, "*Is it possible that God exists in the other 95% you don't know?*"

The Biblical book of Genesis thus presents the record of God's existence and the origin of the human family for anyone who is willing to read it with an open mind.