

# Genesis: *In the Beginning*

*"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

**G**enesis comes by way of the Latin, from a transliteration of the Greek term meaning "origin," or "beginning." Genesis was given to the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Hebrew title comes from its first word in Hebrew, *Bereshith*, meaning "in the beginning." It describes the beginning of God's covenant relationship with His chosen people as well as the origins of all human history.

**AUTHOR:** The book does not name its author. However, the authorship is closely related to the authorship of the entire Pentateuch, which in the Hebrew is called the Torah. The Old Testament, New Testament, church and Jewish tradition ascribed the author of Genesis and the first five books of the Law to Moses. Jesus also viewed the author as Moses. Cf. Ex. 17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27; Lev. 1:1-2; 4:1-2; 6:8-9, 24-25; 7:22-23, 28-29; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 1:1; 31:9, 24; Josh. 1:7-8; 8:32, 34; 22:5; I Kings 2:3; II Kings 14:6; 21:8; II Chron. 34:14; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 8:18; 8:1; Dan. 9:11-13; Mal. 4:4; Matt. 8:4; 19:7-8; 8:4; Mk. 1:44; 7:10; 10:3-4; 12:26; Luke 5:14; 16:29-31; 20:37; 24:27, 44; John 5:45-47; 7:19, 23; Acts 3:22; 13:39; 15:21; 26:22; 28:23; Rom. 10:5, 19.

Moses was trained in the "wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22) and was capable of writing such a work. He probably could have written the book in several languages and in different scripts such as hieroglyphic, cuneiform, and old Hebrew. There are details that only an eyewitness could elaborate on (Ex. 15:27; Num. 2:1-31; 11:7-8). It would have been almost impossible for an editor living in Canaan many centuries later to obtain correctly the Egyptian names, geography and customs.

The author writes under the full inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21). He probably also has access to both oral and written traditions of early history. Someone else would have appended the death of Moses in Deut. 34.

The Babylonian account of the creation of the world is full of polytheistic mythology which is entirely different from the details concerning creation in Genesis. It is inferior to the Bible story and could not have been the source of Moses' account.

**DATE:** A good time for the composition of the book is during the wilderness exile of Israel, or during his years in Egypt (c. 1446-1406 B.C.). Cf. Judges 11:26; I Kings 6:1).

**THEME:** The book of Genesis is divided around the word "generations." Each section begins with the phrase, "These are the generations" (6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1; 37:2). The book has two major divisions: the history of the human race (1:1-11:19), and the history of the Hebrew race (12:1-50:26). It is the story of the beginnings. Most importantly, Genesis relates the beginning of the history of redemption with the announcement of a Redeemer (Gen. 3:15). Here are the beginnings of the people God chose through whom the Messiah and Savior would come.

**KEY WORD:** "generations" (*toledhoth*) is used to introduce each section of history.

**PURPOSE:** Moses relates how Israel was selected to be God's chosen people in spite of man's sin and depravity. God called Abraham to become the father of a righteous nation through whom He would bless all mankind. The author makes it clear that the Lord did not choose Abraham and his family because they were more righteous, more faithful, more pious or deserving in any way than any other ancient family. His election is an act of grace. Therefore the contents of the book are concerned only with events that bear directly upon the selective plan of God in His redemptive work.

**TIME COVERED:** Genesis covers from creation to about 1700 B.C.

**KEY VERSE:** Gen. 12:3c, "... And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

**STYLE:** Moses writes in a straight forward, strictly sober historical account of events. The writer uses no more figurative language than any other gifted historian. Archaeology has done much to restore confidence in the historicity of Genesis.

**GOD IN GENESIS:** God is seen revealing Himself in a covenant love relationship with His own chosen people. He reveals His character and nature to man whom He has created. The God of Abraham is the same God we have come to love and worship. He has not changed. In Genesis we see His power and wisdom, love and tender mercy, justice and holiness, sovereignty and salvation, faithfulness to His eternal purposes and grace extended to fallen man. E. Y. Mullins summarizes the Scriptures when he wrote:

God is the supreme personal Spirit; perfect in all his attributes; who is the source, support, and end of the universe; who guides it according to the wise, righteous, and loving purpose revealed in Jesus Christ; who indwells in all things by his Holy Spirit, seeking ever to transform them according to his own will and bring them to the goal of his kingdom."

**MAN IN GENESIS:** Man is seen as the crowning glory of the whole creation, the object of God's redeeming love, and constantly sought as the companion of the LORD God. He thinks, feels, wills, and alone of all creation was made in the image of God (Gen. 2:4-25). He is a spiritual, intelligent, moral, self-conscious and personal being who is held accountable to his creator. God gave man the power to choose either good or evil. He may be free to reject God's loving provision, but he does not have the power to escape God's sovereignty.

God's ways are beyond our powers of comprehension. Man's rebellion did not catch God off guard. The redeeming sacrifice of Christ on the Cross was no afterthought. Calvary was planned by the LORD God before the foundation of the universe was laid (I Pet. 1:18-21). His plan of redemption was worked out only by means of God's sacrifice of Himself on the Cross through His son, Jesus Christ. He planned the last detail our salvation "before the foundation of the world."

Gen. 12-50 gives the basic facts of the beginning of redemptive history. God freely chose one man and his descendants through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This covenant life is by faith in Him who calls. The book ends with the scene set for the next act in the drama of redemption, the deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

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