



# GENESIS

## ***“Introduction to the Book of Genesis”***

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*“Who is the literary genius of this artistic masterpiece, which, like a Bach fugue, counterpoints these patterns of structure with plot development? To answer that question, one must broaden the discussion to address the authorship and composition of the first five books of the Bible, for the book of Genesis opens up the Pentateuch, which all agree has been edited as a unity. Although a good case can be made that Moses authored the essential shape of Genesis and of the Pentateuch, he clearly did not author the extant text in our hands.”*

— Bruce Waltke

### **Who Wrote Genesis?**

*Well, Moses wrote it, obviously!*

- **While Genesis never names an author, other books in the Pentateuch tell us that Moses:**
  - received revelation from Yahweh
  - was a witness to God’s redemptive actions
  - wrote down historical events (Ex 17:14; Num 33:2)
  - wrote down laws (Ex 24:4; 34:27)
  - wrote down a song (Deut 31:22)
- **Other OT books support the traditional view that Moses wrote the Pentateuch.**
  - “the whole instruction... Moses commanded you.” Josh 1:6-7
  - “The Book of Moses” 2 Chron 25:4; Ezra 6:18; Neh 13:1
- **Jesus and the early church connected the Torah with Moses.**
  - Mt 19:7; 22:24; Mk 7:10; 12:26; Jn 1:17; 5:46; 7:23
- The view that Moses authored Genesis was the **unquestioned consensus** in churches and synagogues until just a few hundred years ago.

*“But there are still a few questions about Mosaic authorship...”*

- **Moses could not have recorded the story of his own death (Deut 34).**
- **Gen 11:28 says that Abraham came to the Promised Land from “Ur of the Chaldeans.”**
  - Ur no doubt existed as a city established long before Moses and Abraham.
  - However, the qualifier “of the Chaldeans” could not have been added before the first millennium B.C. (at least 500 years after Moses died), because the Chaldean tribe did not conquer and inhabit southern Mesopotamia before then.
  - Therefore, someone in the first millennium added “of the Chaldeans” to the text to help their readers understand which particular Ur their ancestors came from. There were other cities and villages named Ur by that point.
- **Genesis 14 records that Abraham successfully rescued Lot from four kings of the east.**
  - Gen 14:14 records that Abraham’s men caught up with Chedorlaomer’s army in Dan.
  - However, during the time of Abraham and later Moses, that city was actually named Laish. It wasn’t called Dan (after one of the Tribes of Israel) until the period of the Judges, well after the death of Moses (Judg 18:29).
  - Therefore, someone changed the name in the Genesis text so that later generations could understand exactly where these events took place.
- **Since all the events of Genesis took place before Moses’s birth, we must ask how he knew about them to write about them.**
  - It is possible that God revealed the contents of Genesis directly to Moses, and he simply wrote down what he heard or saw.
  - Moses relied on some sources that were passed down through the generations, whether verbally or in written form.
  - There are eleven toledot formulas — sentences that begin with “these are the generations,” “this is the family history,” and “this is the account” — and a personal name always follows these phrases.
    - *These eleven formulas structure the book into episodes: prologue (1:1-2:3), Adam (5:1), Noah (6:9), Noah’s sons (10:1), Shem (11:10), Terah (11:27), Isaac (25:19), Esau (36:1, 9), and Jacob (37:2).*
    - *See Gen 5:1 for some evidence that these sources/formulas were likely in written form by the time they came down to Moses.*

- Some raise the question of multiple authors of Genesis because of certain textual discrepancies.
  - In Gen 37:25-28, it first states that Joseph's brothers sold him to "Ishmaelites coming from Gilead," but then refers to them as "Midianite traders." Which group bought Joseph? Does the discrepancy indicate the possibility of multiple writers?
  - Do the two apparently different and separate accounts of creation (Gen 1:1-2:4; 2:4-25) likewise indicate multiple authors writing about the same events?

### *What about this "Documentary Hypothesis"?*

- In 1883, German scholar **Julius Wellhausen** published *The Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, in which he made four observations that led him to believe the Pentateuch is a compilation of **four distinct sources**. Wellhausen observed:
  - The use of different divine names, particularly *Yahweh* and *Elohim*.
  - The use of two or more different names to designate the same person, tribe, or place.
  - The appearance of "doublets," such as the wife-sister stories in Gen 12:10-20; 20; 26.
  - Different theologies, such as varying emphases on whether or not worship should be centralized.
- **The four sources Wellhausen identified (3 of which are explicitly found in Genesis) are:**
  1. **J (*Jahwist*):** The J source derives its name from the source that uses the name *Yahweh* most consistently.
  2. **E (*Elohist*):** The E source derives its name from its supposedly consistent use of the generic name for God, *Elohim*.
  3. **D (*Deuteronomist*):** The D source is identical with the book of Deuteronomy.
  4. **P (*Priestly*):** The P source's concerns include chronology, genealogy, ritual, worship, and law—areas easily associated with the priesthood.

*"The documentary hypothesis has been the most potent rival to the traditional view that Moses was the fountainhead of the Pentateuch. In contrast with the latter view, the documentary hypothesis takes the Pentateuch completely out of the hands of Moses, which raises questions for many about the veracity and authority of Genesis and the Pentateuch. After all, though the Pentateuch does not claim Mosaic authorship, it at least depicts Moses as the recipient of large parts of the revelatory content, particularly the law. Even though the authority of the text is grounded in Yahweh himself rather than in Moses, we can't help but have doubts if uncertainty is cast on the Torah's picture of Moses as recipient of the law at Mount Sinai."*

### *What are the problems with the documentary hypothesis?*

- The **methods used** to approach the Pentateuch are considered flawed by many scholars (increasingly so today).
- Variation in the use of divine names may be little more than a **stylistic practice**.
- Some scholars believe the “doublets” are actually **literary conventions known as “type scenes”**—commonly repeated narrative patterns intended to draw the reader’s attention to the connection between the two stories.
- Regarding the presence of two names for some places, people, or things, sometimes the referent can be **described with multiple names**. For example, Ishmaelites is a broad category of people that includes the Midianites!
- Some of the “distinctions” between the four sources only appear to be truly divergent if one has **already decided** that multiple sources must exist along such lines.

### *So, where do we land on the author of Genesis?*

- **Two popular views on the authorship of Genesis are clearly wrong** when the text is closely examined:
  - It is clear that Moses did not write all of the Pentateuch.
  - It is clear that the theory known as the documentary hypothesis is flawed.
- **Moses played a central role** in the production and literary composition of the Pentateuch, which includes the book of Genesis.
  - It is also clear that editing activity occurred after Moses, and most of Genesis exhibits signs of being assembled from previously existing sources.
  - In other words, Moses is the primary producer of Genesis, and we can also affirm the book’s composite nature.
- **Ultimately, the differences between what Moses wrote and what was later edited are of little consequence.**

*“...in the final analysis, the authority of the text is not located in Moses but in God himself. Moses’ words aren’t canonical; the finished product, the book as it was when the Old Testament canon came to a close, is.”*

— Tremper Longman, III

## What type of Book is Genesis?

*Genesis 1-11 seems like many other ancient creation narratives. Is it mythology?*

- **Myths are not necessarily the same thing as fairy tales, legends, or folklore.**

*“A myth is a traditional, sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form. A myth seeks to explain present realities by anchoring them in the prehistoric past and so to validate a culture’s contemporary institutions and values. In contrast to other forms of folklore, such as folktales and legends, myths are authoritative for the culture that embraces them.”*

— William Lane Craig

1. Myths are narratives, whether oral or literary.
  2. Myths are traditional stories handed down from generation to generation.
  3. Myths are sacred for the society that embraces them.
  4. Myths are objects of belief for members of the society that embraces them.
  5. Myths are set in a *primaeval* age or another realm.
  6. Myths are stories in which deities are essential characters.
  7. Myths seek to anchor present realities, such as the world, mankind, natural phenomena, cultural practices, and the prevailing cult in a primordial time.
  8. Myths often feature fantastic elements and are not troubled by logical contradictions or incoherence.
- What makes Genesis 1-11 distinct from other ancient mythologies is that its **genealogies seamlessly merge with the clearly historical narratives that begin in chapter 12.**
  - Therefore, it seems we have “**mytho-history**” on our hands. The early chapters of Genesis are thus **mythic in form** and **historically true** in their message.

*How does the structure or flow of Genesis help us understand its contents?*

- The prominent literary device in the book is this **genealogical catchphrase**: “*this is the document containing the family records of \_\_\_\_\_*” (Hb. *toledot* “the generations of”).
- If we follow **the *toledot* phrases** as providing the book’s infrastructure, they divide the book into twelve sections, the *toledot* formula introducing all but the first:
  1. **Creation: In the Beginning** (1:1–2:3)
  2. **Before the Patriarchs: The Need for a Covenant People**
    - a. *Toledot* of heavens and earth (2:4–4:26)
    - b. *Toledot* of Adam (5:1–6:8)
    - c. *Toledot* of Noah (6:9–9:29)
    - d. *Toledot* of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1–11:9)
    - e. *Toledot* of Shem (11:10–26)
  3. **The Patriarchs in Palestine: The Establishment of a Covenant People**
    - a. *Toledot* of Terah (11:27–25:11)
    - b. *Toledot* of Ishmael (25:12–18)
    - c. *Toledot* of Isaac (25:19–35:29)
    - d. *Toledot* of Esau (36:1–8)
    - e. *Toledot* of Esau (36:9–37:1)
  4. **The Patriarchs in Egypt: Incubation for the Covenant People** (*Toledot* of Jacob: 37:2–50:26)
- The *toledot* pattern utilizes genealogy to highlight Genesis’s **restrictive effect**: Within the flow of human history, from the universal to the particular, the genealogies indicate that God is separating out a righteous lineage by selection, choosing to bless the world of nations (compare Gen 5:1 and 10:1; 11:10).

*“Genesis represents the history of the establishment of the covenant. Chapters 1–11 establish the need for the covenant, and chapters 12–50 establish the formation of the covenant... the driving purpose of Genesis is not revelation of any of these people; Genesis intends to reveal God.”*

— John Walton