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The Book of Genesis from a Messianic Jewish Perspective

To my mother, Wilma Jean Mack, my beginning.
Through all the trials and tribulations of this life she has remained faithful.
From her Quaker roots, she taught me the way of "friendly persuasion."
Thee I love, more than the meadow so green and still,
More than the mulberries on the hill,
More than the buds of the May apple tree,
I love thee.

Genesis is the book of beginnings and probably the most important book ever written. It provides a dramatic account of the origins of mankind and his universe, the intrusion of sin into the world, the catastrophic effects of its curse on the race and the beginnings of **the LORD's** plan to bless the nations through **His** seed. Most of the books of the Bible draw on the contents of **Genesis** in one way or another. Apart from this, however, **Genesis'** subject matter, and the straightforward way in which it is written, has captivated the minds of people for ages. However, as with biblical truth in general, this book has been a stumbling block for many who have approached it with preconceived ideas or anti-supernatural biases. But for those who recognize it as the Word of **God**, whom they seek to serve, **Genesis** is a source of comfort and enlightenment.[1]

The Titles of Genesis

The Hebrew title of the book is called *bereisheet* and comes from the first word in the

Hebrew text that means *in the beginning.* It is a common occurrence that the names of the books in the Hebrew Bible are based on the first or second word. This is one example. This is the modern Hebrew name for the book. In ancient times, the original name for the book was *sepher maasch bereisheet,* which means *the book of creation,* or *the book of the act of creation.* It has since been shortened to simply *bereisheet.*

The Greek title of the book is called *geneseos* and emphasizes origin and source. It is the name given to the Greek translation of the TaNaKh. Before the birth of Jesus, for centuries, the number of Jews living away from Palestine had been increasing. They lived all over the Roman Empire. One of the consequences of this was that many had forgotten the language of their ancestors. For this reason, it was necessary to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into languages they understood, Aramaic in the east and Greek in the west. After Alexander the Great's conquests, Greek had become the common language of a great part of the Mediterranean. Egyptians, Jews, and even Romans used Greek to communicate with each other. Therefore, it was natural that when the Jews of Alexandria began losing their Hebrew they would translate the Scriptures to Greek. This translation is called the Septuagint, or the Seventy, because there were seventy Jewish scholars who translated it.[2]

The Author of Genesis

Both Scripture and tradition agree that Moses was the human author of **Genesis**. **ADONAI**, working through Moses, inspired him to write the first five books of the Bible. But interestingly enough, he is named as the author of **Genesis**. He sat down and wrote the books of **Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers**, and **Deuteronomy**. He was the human originator and source of these books. However, as far as **Genesis** is concerned he was a compiler and an editor, because he was not an eyewitness of the events of **Genesis** because he had not been born yet. He was an eyewitness to almost everything in **Exodus**, and all of **Leviticus, Numbers,** and **Deuteronomy**. Moshe made use of oral, as well as, written traditions and the inspiration of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**, to edit and compile **eleven family documents**.

Genesis has always been considered part of the Torah (the first five books of the TaNaKh), and Moses has always been considered the human author of the Torah **(Exodus 17:14; Leviticus 1:1-2; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 1:1; Joshua 1:7; First Kings 2:3; Second Kings 14:6; Ezra 6:18, Nehemiah 13:1; Daniel 9:11-13; Malachi 4:4; Matthew 8:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:29; John 7:19; Acts 26:22; Romans 10:19; First Corinthians 9:9; Second Corinthians 3:15).** Therefore, there is a long list from the TaNaKh and the B'rit Chadashah declaring that Moshe is the human author of the Torah, of which **Genesis** is a part.

The Motifs of Genesis

The entire book turns on the motifs of blessing and cursing. **The LORD** chose the nation through whom **He** would bless all nations. The promised blessing would give the nation of Israel the patriarchs and the land. But the cursing would alienate, deprive, and disinherit Israel from the patriarchs and the land. In the TaNaKh the verb *to curse* means *to impose a ban, a barrier, a paralysis on movement or other capabilities.* This power can only belong to **God**. The curse involves separation from the place of blessing or even from those who are blessed. This is seen in the first eleven chapters of **Genesis**. On the other hand the verb *to bless* means *to enrich.* Here, too, **ADONAI** is the source and, as used in **Genesis**, the promise of blessing primarily deals with the children of Abraham in the land of Canaan. The promised blessing included the patriarchs being blessed with children and the land being blessed with crops. The contrast between blessing and cursing reflects man's obedience by faith, or his disobedience by unbelief. **The LORD's** approval of faith or disapproval of unbelief leaves nothing to the imagination.

The Structure of Genesis

I. The Origin of the World and the Nation in General **(1:1** to **11:9)**

    A The Creation **(1:1** to **2:25)**

    B The Fall **(3:1** to **5:32)**

    C The Flood **(6:1** to **9:29)**

    D The Nations **(10:1** to **11:9)**

    The topic is the beginning of the human race.

    The style is historical.

    The geography focuses on the Fertile Crescent from Eden to Horan.

    The time line is two thousand years or more.

II. The Origin of One Nation, the Jewish Nation of Israel **(11:10** to **50:26)**

    A Abraham **(11:10** to **25:18)**

B Isaac **(25:19** to **26:35)**

C Jacob **(27:1** to **36:43)**

D Joseph **(37:1** to **50:26)**

The topic is the beginning of the Jewish people.

The style is biographical history.

The geography focuses on three places: Canaan, Horan and Egypt.

The time line is 193 years.

An initial section marks the structure of **Genesis (1:1** to **2:3)**, and then Moshe edited and compiled **eleven family documents**. The major structural word for **Genesis** is *toldot,* which means **the** written **account of**, or *this is what became of these men and their descendants.* The noun is often translated *generations, histories* or *descendants. Toldot* comes from the Hebrew word *yalad,* which means *to bear* or *to generate.* It makes a starting point from which to move from one genealogy, from one family document, to another. This structural word allows Moses to move the story line along.

But when a *toldot* begins, the story line that follows may not always be about the person mentioned. For example, when it says: **The written account of Isaac,** what follows is primarily about **Jacob,** *not* **Isaac.** In other words, what became of **Isaac** was **Jacob.** Or when it says: **The written account of Jacob,** what follows is primarily about **Joseph,** not **Jacob.** But it *does* tell us what became of **Jacob.** What became of **Jacob** was **Joseph.** So, each family document explains what became of a particular generation. The *toldot* also shows a narrowing of that generation to the chosen seed **(3:15)**, and contains within each section the dual motifs of blessing and cursing.

The Principles of Interpretation for Genesis

The writers of the B'rit Chadashah, and **Yeshua Himself**, accepted the book of **Genesis** as literal history, not figurative language. Some might feel that **Galatians 4:24**, which says: **These things may be taken figuratively** (referring to the story of Hagar and Sarah), warrants looking at **Genesis figuratively**. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Rabbi Sha'ul, who wrote **Galatians**, simply uses the spiritual principles by which **God** dealt with Abraham, his wives and sons, to illustrate eternal principles by which He deals with all

men. He does make a figurative *application,* but not a figurative *interpretation.* Abraham and Isaac, Sarah and Hagar, were real people to Paul, as the context clearly demonstrates. These events described in **Genesis** really happened to real people, and it is because of this very fact that Rabbi Sha'ul can make some spiritual applications in the New Covenant.

While not rejecting the historical facts of **Genesis**, other people overuse *types*. The characters and experiences of Abraham and others are taken as "types" of experiences in the life of **Messiah**, or the people of Isra'el, or the Church. They mean well, but they go far beyond what is actually written and practice speculation.

There is no question, however, that some portions of **Genesis** are treated as types in the B'rit Chadashah. The first Adam is taken as a contrasting type of the second Adam **(Romans 5:12-19; First Corinthians 15:21-22** and **45-47).** The Ark is pictured as a type of salvation in Christ **(First Peter 3:20-21).** Abraham and Isaac are discussed as a type of **the Father** offering up **His** one and only Son **(Hebrews 11:17-19).** Abraham is a type of salvation by faith unto righteousness **(Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23).** And sometimes, as is the case with **Joseph**, it is merely *very interesting* to see all parallels between **his** life and **the life of Christ**. But without confirmation from the New Covenant, **Joseph** cannot be identified as a type.

In addition, it must never be forgotten that types are to be considered only illustrations or applications, and not doctrinal interpretations (except when done so by the writers of the B'rit Chadashah). We must remember that whatever value the use of types may have, the application is based on the real live person in history. Therefore, in this devotional commentary, the emphasis will be placed primarily on the actual events that took place in history and the application of those events to our daily lives.

Genesis is the book of beginnings.

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