

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark brown color, framing the central text.

**A Layman's  
Commentary on  
The Book of  
Genesis**

**T.O.D. Johnston**

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A Layman's Commentary on The Book of Genesis

Religious Non-fiction

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A Layman's Commentary on The Book of Genesis

1st Edition - 2017

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Published by Owen Johnston  
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Dedicated for knowledge, understanding, and inspiration as we seek to follow Our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ.

Preface

After reading many scholarly commentaries on different books of Scripture, it became my mental habit to sift through the minute discussions of individual words and/or phrases, and the quoting of various scholars of the past of many differing opinions, and center on the most logical and inspirational truths that remained. Thus I relied on the studied scholarship of those who had learned the original languages and had read all the previous scholars that had written to get the best possible understanding of Scripture that I, as a non-scholar, could. It seemed that most church members would not attempt to read scholarly works - but would benefit from their knowledge if presented in a plain and straightforward manner, the truths they had perceived. The following commentary is my attempt to do this. May God bless my efforts to the extent that they increase the understanding and faith of the reader.

T.O.D. Johnston  
2005

An Outline of Genesis

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Divine Sovereignty in Creation  
History and Redemption

---

I. Primeval History (chapters 1-11)

Four Big Events

1. The Creation
2. The Fall
3. The Flood
4. The Babel Crisis

II. Patriarchal History (chapters 12-50)

Four Great Men

1. Abraham
2. Isaac
3. Jacob
4. Joseph

## Genesis Study I

### Introduction to Genesis

Isaiah 55:8-11.

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 ¶ For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 2 Cor. 9.10

11 so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Two thoughts:

1. The greatness of God and His ways – above ours.
2. The purpose of His Word.

The Book of Beginnings – the foundation of all things. The only thing that makes the New Testament (as well as the rest of the Old Testament of any purpose the record in Genesis of man's creation and fall – his early history. Otherwise his need for salvation is questionable at least.

How we approach our future and our daily tasks is largely determined by our beliefs concerning the origin of all things.

Understand that God is a loving, righteous and just Being, and that He has a divine purpose in earth's history and the assurance that His will shall be finally consummated.

It is impossible for anyone to understand but a portion of the information held within the Biblical narrative in Genesis. Let us approach the Scripture as believers, trusting God for that which we cannot know or understand. He could have written a Holy Bible as long as several encyclopedias – obviously not only what the Lord considered most important has been included. We must remember that the Bible was not written as a history textbook, science textbook, or a theological treatise. It is God's revelation to us about Himself – His dealings with people, His love and concern for us – all which is consummated in His supreme Revelation in Jesus Christ. Scripture has the main purpose of leading us to our Redeemer, Mediator, Substitute, Savior and Lord.

A few words do need to be said about the Reliability and Authenticity and Accuracy of the Scriptures as a preface to this study.

There is very little doubt that what we have today as the Old Testament is not the 39 book of divinely inspired Writings of the First Century Jews. The Jewish historian Josephus and the New Testament writings hold numerous references to these writings and no others as the recognized Scriptures of the Jews.

Reliability of the Text – we have several documents of the Old Testament in Hebrew – the oldest and most accepted version by Jews and Christians is the Masoretic text in Hebrew, of around 500 B.C. It was compiled from comparing manuscripts which had come down to them – in the margins they wrote all variant readings accumulated up to that time – amounted to less than one per page. About 1,000 manuscripts of this version are in existence, with few variations.



The other main version is the Septuagint Version, or 70 scribes, dated about 280 B.C., in Greek, for the Jews of the Dispersion. This is the probable translation used by the First Century Christians.

Other versions include the Latin Vulgate by Jerome in about A.D. 400. The Syriac version in about A.D. 200. The Samaritan Pentateuch – independent of Jewish influence, from about 400 B.C.

"Although there are minor variations in all these versions, none are significant enough to change any doctrine or event recorded in the Old Testament. In almost all cases, the variations are trivial." Page 40.

The recent discovery of the Dead Seas Scrolls has confirmed the essential accuracy of our present Old Testament based on the Masoretic text. The Scribes are known to have taken extreme pains to insure accuracy in copying.

These points cannot be made to any near degree about any ancient writings other than the Old Testament.

#### Higher Criticism -

Since the early beginnings of mankind there have been those who chose not to believe God. Their lives and thoughts have taken many forms. Simply said, these people have limited their beliefs to what they know and understand and what they choose to accept or reject on a purely individual or subjective level.

The most recent school of such thought is called "Higher Criticism". They profess to be scientific, but deal with theories, unproven and unprovable. They have attacked the Bible, attempting to explain away miracles and fulfilled prophecies and denying the authorship of most of the books and dating them more recently than claimed in the books themselves. They approach the Bible as a natural book full of errors, contradictions and outright lies. Through the years, the assumptions of these men have carefully and systematically been refuted by conservative scholars.

As for the historical accuracy of the Bible – they have assumed it is false until proven true where a large amount of external supporting evidence was not already in existence.

For example, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century critics denied the accuracy of Biblical tribes of the Hittites, Horites, Edomites, etc. because secular history did not mention them. Since that time, archaeologists have produced evidence that could not be denied because of their existence.

Dr. Nelson Glueck – dean of Palestinian archaeologists, and president of Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Institute of Religion stated as follows:

"As a matter of fact, however, it may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries." (Page 48.)

In the realm of science a similar series of events has taken place. No continually accepted scientifically provable facts contradict the Biblical record where applicable. Indeed, the history and development of science and medicine in particular shows that the Books of Moses include laws which are only recently being understood in their medical implications.

It must be remembered that the whole question of Creation is completely outside the discipline of science – since no one was there to observe it – and the events are not recreatable in the laboratory. What often is put forward as fact by those in the fields of science are and must remain speculation. Each of us must individually approach the Genesis record according to our preconceived notions and understanding as to which theory or theories to place upon these scriptures. At the least let us be ready to realize and be ready to admit our ideas as theories – not incontrovertible fact.

At the most, let us approach this Word of God in an attitude of prayer, trusting, and openness to what the God of the Universe, the only true God, our Heavenly Father, might wish to impress upon us or reveal to us through His Spirit.

Finally as Christians we must listen to the testimony of Christ. It has been shown continually that the New Testament records are historically accurate - although that is beyond the of this course – and they represent Jesus Christ as the perfect, sinless, infallible Son of God – He claimed this for Himself as well as the Gospel writers claim for Him.

As we read and study the Gospels we see repeatedly that Jesus accepted the Old Testament as accurate and reliable and divinely inspired. All other New Testament writers did so too!

Although there are hundreds of allusions to the Old Testament in the New there are at least 320 direct quotations from the Books of Moses, the Prophetical writings and the Psalms.

Our Lord said - "the Scripture cannot be broken". (John 10:35.) Also see Luke 16:17.

Luke 24:44 - "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, where written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me."

It must be said that all preaching and/or teaching by Christ or all other apostles in the New Testament preached the Old Testament promises and experiences and laws as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

For a moment, let us look at what Jesus accepted as factual:

Moses as author of the Pentateuch (Luke 24:27; John 5:46,47)

Isaiah as author of both parts of the book of Isaiah (Matthew 13:14 and John 12:38

resp)

Daniel as author of Daniel (Matthew 24:15)

The historicity of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4,5; Mark 10:6-8)

(Jesus quotes Genesis 1:27b; 2:24)

Of Abel (Matthew 23:35)

Of Noah (Luke 17:26)

Of Abraham John 8:56-58

Of Lot (Luke 17:28)

The Historicity of the creation in the Genesis account (Mark 10:6) and the flood (Matthew 24:37-39)

Christ believed the Old Testament miracles – the supernatural destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:29)

Calamity of Lot's wife (Luke 17:32)

The miracle of the manna (John 6:32)

The healing of the serpents' bites (John 3:14)

Of Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:25-27)

The deliverance of Jonah from the whale (Matthew 12:39,40)

Dr. Henry Morris states:

"It is no light burden which modern liberal preachers and theologians assume, when they presume to know more about such matters than did the One Whom they profess as their Master. To Christ and the Apostles, the Old Testament was absolutely reliable, authentic, and verbally inspired of God, and that should settle the matter for all who claim to be Christian."  
(Page 49.)

Even though it is one of the most difficult things to do we must make the effort – to not pay any heed to social pressure that we should believe what others believe. It is not easy to stand for the Word of God against prevailing opinions of the academic and scientific

community. We must recognize the source of these beliefs and perceive that most people did not come to believe them because of their own private study, prayer and meditation upon the Word of God. It is a little surprising that the conformity among so many church members is so similar – a sort of follow the leader. True it must be an informed faith and firmly grounded in all facts available, with all possible use of our intelligence, common sense, reason and understanding – yet at the same time realizing our individual as well as collective shortcomings and limitations. Let us stand for God – and admit what we believe contrary to His Word for Truth from the standpoint – that God is true.

Let us listen most carefully to the sound advice of Paul in Romans chapter 3:1-4.

- 1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?
- 2 Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.
- 3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?
- 4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written,  
That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings,  
and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

Let us each search our minds and hearts to admit why we enter into this study. Can we admit that we bring with us many questions (some that may not be answered), many preconceived ideas that we have picked up from others and not tested? Can we admit that we have a desire to know about God, to have the right facts to quote, to be an authority on the subject?

As we search our motives, let us listen to the words of Solomon in Proverbs chapter 1:5,7 -

- 5 A wise man will hear, and will increase learning;  
and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:
- 7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge:  
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Let us not seek only knowledge about God – let us seek God – to know Him, Who He is – let us spend time with Him.

John 17:5

- 3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

As we seek to know God we have a promised reward.

Proverbs 2:6-9

- 6 For the LORD giveth wisdom:  
out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.
- 7 He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous:  
he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.
- 8 He keepeth the paths of judgment,  
and preserveth the way of his saints.
- 9 Then shalt thou understand righteousness,

and judgment, and equity;  
yea, every good path.

Let us not assume that brilliant men or women of today know more than Peter or Paul or John or Jesus Himself about God or His Word. Can we not trust God with that which we cannot understand or comprehend and trust God to reveal to us that which He decides we need to know and that He is with us as we seek Him in this time of fellowship, study, and prayer.

The word "genesis" means "origin" and provides the foundation of all that has come since. For example, we find:

1. Origin of the universe – special creation – the only book that does account for the ultimate origin of matter, space, and time.
2. Origin of order and complexity. Man has continually observed the decaying of all things. Only a Primeval Cause of programmed purposes could account for this.
3. Origin of the solar system - again special creation of the heavenly bodies.
4. Origin of the atmosphere and hydrosphere – both necessary for life – never developed on other planets.
5. Origin of life – no scientist has yet bridged the gap from non-living to living. Only the Genesis account makes sense.
6. Origin of man – the most highly organized and complex entity in the universe, so far as we know – the point of abstractly contemplating beauty, love, and worship.
7. Origin of marriage – ordained by the Creator – the remarkably universal and stable institution. Many corruptions have developed.
8. Origin of evil – the origin of physical and moral evils in the universe is explained in Genesis as a temporary intrusion into God's perfect world, allowed by Him as a concession to the principle of human freedom and responsibility, and also to manifest Himself as Redeemer as well as Creator.
9. Origin of language – of language in general and the various national languages in particular.
10. Origin of government – development of organized institutions, systems of laws and punishments.
11. Origin of culture – city-building, metal-working, music, agriculture, domesticating animals, writing, education, navigation, textiles, ceramics.
12. Origin of nations – all scholars today accept the essential unity of the human race. Only Genesis gives an adequate basis as to how distinct nations and races developed from one.

13. Origin of religion – the origin of all man's striving toward ultimate truth and meaning – and the origin of time, worship of the true God – only in Genesis.

14. Origin of the chosen people – the unique nation which gave the world the Bible and knowledge of God and through which Christianity came.

Let us now consider the question: Who wrote Genesis?

In common with all the other Scriptures, Genesis was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. II Peter 1:21 states -

21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

The tradition of both Jewish scribes and the Christian fathers accepted Moses as the Author, and also most conservative scholars. Genesis being the first book of the Law (Hebrew Torah) of Moses known as the Pentateuch (the others being Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Christ accepted this view, as we have seen in Luke 24:27,44.

It has been most reasonably suggested that Moses actually wrote the other books of the Pentateuch. He served mainly as compiler and editor of the material in Genesis, with the Holy Spirit guiding him, and the material came from written records that had been handed down father to son – from Adam, Noah, Shem, Jerah, and others – each writing individual accounts of what had occurred in his own lifetime, or something within his direct knowledge. Possibly these were on tablets of stone still recognized by the keyphrase - "These are the generations of..." The Hebrew word toledoth means essentially "origins". Thus we have 11 such divisions in Genesis. These were subscripts or closing signatures, most likely.

If this is correct, then Genesis can be divided into nine main subdivisions, as follows.

1. "The generations of the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1-2:4). No human name, for obviously no man was present to record the events. Most likely it was given by revelation by Adam, who then recorded it.

2. "The book of the generations of Adam (Genesis 2:4b-5:1). This was written by Adam and describes the Garden of Eden, the temptation and fall, and the experiences of Cain and Abel. The use of the word "book" makes it clear that these records were written, rather than oral tradition. Also, we must remember the beginning phase of the New Testament, in Matthew 1:1: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ".

3. "The generations of Noah" (Genesis 5:1b-6:9) – before the flood, Noah compiled the records of the antediluvian patriarchs. According to the genealogies in Genesis 5, Noah's father Lamech had lived contemporaneously with every one of these men, including Adam. Noah himself had then recorded the rapid degeneracy of the people of his day and God's determination to destroy them, while he was true to God.

4. "The generations of the sons of Noah" (Genesis 6:9b-10:1). Shem, Ham, and Japheth apparently took over the recording of the preparations for the Flood, describing the Flood itself, and the immediate post diluvian events – including Noah's prophecy about them, later his death.

5. "The generations of Shem" (Genesis 10:1b-11:10). He writes of the confusion of tongues at Babel and the scattering of peoples – (His brothers' families). He also recorded the names of Noah's descendants to about the time of scattering, in the so-called Table of Nations in Genesis 10. Apparently he lost track of Ham and Japheth after this.

6. "The generations of Terah" (Genesis 11:10b – 11:27). While brief, only the genealogies in the Semitic line, from Shem to Terah and his three sons, it is important because it gives the only possible basis for a chronology (proper ascertaining of years, in order) from the Flood to Abraham.

7. "The generations of Isaac" (Genesis 11:27b-25:19). In contrast, a long document. The detailed life of Abraham, from his call by God to his death. Also, events in Isaac's life until his father died.

Apparently, appended are the "generations of Ishmael" (Genesis 25:12), the record of his half-brother's sons, which he must have obtained from Ishmael when he returned home to help bury his father (Genesis 25:9). Ishmael's death is also mentioned (4-8 years after Abraham's burial).

8. "The generations of Jacob" (Genesis 25:19b-27:2) – the later events in his father Isaac's life – then his own history through his 20 year sojourn with Laban, his return to Canaan, recording the death of his wife Rachel and father Isaac.

Jacob appended two documents from his brother Esau (Genesis 36) after his brother joined him to bury their father (Genesis 35:29).

9. "The generations of the Sons of Jacob" (Genesis 37:2b-Exodus 1:1). Though not identical, a similar formula is used in Exodus 1:1 - "Now thee are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt..." In fact if the word generations replaced the word "names" the formula would be exactly repeated.

Whether orally transmitted or written down, these events in the lives of Joseph and his brothers would have originally been known only to them, obviously they came down to Moses and we notice a smooth transition from the last verses of Genesis to the first verses of Exodus.

Thus we are quite justified in assuming that we have actual eyewitness accounts of the events reported. Probably the original narratives were written on the tables of stone or clay, as was the practice of early times, handed down father to son, finally coming into the possession of Moses, who then compiled, edited and commented, provided smooth transitions with the result being the Book of Genesis that we have today.



One last point.

Genesis is important as not only the history of man's origin but also a prophecy of man's future. Genesis is Paradise lost. Revelation is Paradise regained.

Genesis begins with a perfect world. God's purpose will ultimately be consummated, even though sin intruded for a time.

Man in the first world was untested, though sinless, a probational world.

In the final world, man, though having sinned and failed, has experienced redemption and renewal. He shall have been made perfect and eternal, and therefore his world will be made perfect and unchanging = without probationary aspects – but equipped fully as man's eternal home, in the presence of God, his Creator and Savior.

There are many similarities between the Genesis world and the Revelation world – probation, then eternal: division of light and darkness (Genesis 1:4), to no night (Revelation 21:25), division of land and sea (Genesis 1:10), to no more sea (Revelation 21:1), rule of sun and moon (Genesis 1:16), to no need of sun or moon (Revelation (21:13), a prepared Garden (Genesis 2:8,9) to a prepared perfect city (Revelation 21:2), river flowing out of Eden (Genesis 2:10) to River flowing from God's throne (Revelation 22:1), Tree of life in the midst of the garden (Genesis 2:9) to Tree of life throughout the city (Revelation 22:2), God walking in the Garden (Genesis 3:8) to God dwelling with His people (Revelation 21:3)

The cursed of Genesis (3:17) will be renewed and the earth remade, eternal (Revelation 22:3).

We must understand Genesis to begin to grasp the eternal purposes of God.

Next study – The Creation of the World

Genesis 1:1-2

Read these verses several times, slowly and prayerfully, and let each word sink deeply within.

## Genesis Study II

### The Creation of the World

The First Book of Moses, Called Genesis. Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2

#### The Creation

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

#### Hebrews 11:3

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

The first verse of the Bible is the foundation verse of the whole Bible. It is the foundation of all foundations and therefore the most important verse in the Bible. Undoubtedly these were the first words ever written, and through the centuries the most widely read words ever written. Most people at one time in their lives start to read the Bible and therefore at least read these opening words, even if they got no farther.

If a person really believes Genesis 1:1, that God created all things, then he should have no difficulty in believing that God controls all things and can do all things.

This one verse refutes all of man's philosophies about the origin and purpose of the world.

1. It refutes atheism, because the universe was created by God.
2. It refutes pantheism, for God is transcendent (or supremely above) to that which He created.
3. It refutes polytheism, for one God created all things.
4. It refutes materialism, for matter had a beginning.
5. It refutes dualism, because God was alone when He created.
6. It refutes humanism, because God, not man, is the ultimate reality.
7. It refutes evolutionism, because God created all things.

All these are based upon the same disbelief in a personal, Creator God and are closely related to each other. There are many others also that can be named that are based on this system of atheistic evolutionary humanism.

The opening verse of God's book makes no attempt to prove that God exists. It takes this fact completely for granted and states that it matter of factly. It is obvious that only a fool could say "there is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

It must be said that only in the Bible, however, does this revelation appear. All other ancient religious books or systems as well as modern philosophies begin, not with God, but with matter already in existence or energy in some form.

In this primeval chaos, the forces of nature (or gods and goddesses personifying them) then begin to bring about cosmic changes that developed the world into its present form.

We may assume that this record of creation was written before any of these systems, and by God Himself – indeed when no one doubted the reality of God and the Creation. The others were developed later for the very purpose of replacing the true account, allowing men to live according to their own desires rather than be responsible to their Creator.



The first verse - "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

Let us most carefully and slowly consider each word in this statement, basic to all understanding.

1. "God" - the first use of the divine name is in Hebrew – Elohim – meaning mighty, omnipotence, majesty. It is used throughout the first chapter of Genesis. The "im" ending is plural – used here in the singular sense with a singular verb. A plural name with a singular meaning – uni-plural noun – suggesting the tri-unity of the Godhead. God is one, yet more than one.

2. "Created" - the Hebrew bara, used only of the work of God. Only God can create – that is, call into existence that which had no existence. He "callesth those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17).

"...The worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Hebrews 11:3).

An important distinction must be made at this point about the difference between "create" and "make" or "form". Men can "make" or "form" things but man cannot "create".

God can also make (Hebrew asah) and form (yatsar) – better and faster than men. To make or form consists of organizing materials already existence into more complicated things. Creating, uniquely a work of God, consists of speaking into existence something which had no previous existence, except in the mind and power of God.

In science there is a law of cause and effect. For the observable effects that each of us can testify to in our universe there must be an adequate cause.

Although we cannot comprehend fully these basic concepts of God as alone, infinite and eternal, and omnipotent, only such a personal, loving, intelligent God could be the adequate Cause to produce the effects that we see in the complex, orderly, intelligible universe with creatures that think, love and seek to worship something greater than themselves.

3. "Heaven" - Hebrew – shamayim – plural noun – translated either "heaven" or "heavens", depending on the context, and use with singular plural verb. (Not to be confused with stars which were made on the 4th day and are called the "host" of heaven.)

It seems the essential meaning corresponds to our modern term space. It can refer to space in general or a particular space.

In Genesis it refers to the component of space in the basic space-mass-time universe.

4. "Earth" - Hebrew erets – used as a general term – refers to the component of matter. No planets, stars, or other bodies were brought into being until the fourth day. The earth itself originally had no form to it (Genesis 1:2) so this verse must speak essentially of the bringing into existence of the basic elements of matter, to be organized into the planet earth and later into other material bodies. Erets can also be a particular portion of earth.

5. "In the beginning" - the beginning of time. The universe is observed to be a continuum of space, matter, and time. Matter (which includes energy) must function in space and time. Each one, to be grasped at all, must include the other two.

A technical paraphrase of Genesis 1:1 could be as follows:

"The transcendent, omnipotent Godhead called into existence the space-mass-time universe."

As noted earlier, Elohim suggests that God is one yet more than one. It does not specify that God is a trinity – the fact of a tri-universe created by Him does strongly suggest this possibility. A continuum means that the universe is all space, all time, all matter – a tri-unity – not part space, part time, part matter.

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