

The Authority of Scripture: Can We Trust the Book of Genesis? Questioning the Documentary Hypothesis

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I. Uniqueness of Genesis

The Book of Genesis, and arguably Genesis 1 – 11 in particular, has been the most impactful piece of writing in existence. The rest of the Bible is firmly oriented to it, and alludes to that section more than any other. Much of the literature of the Western world alludes to it in some way as well. Yet what kind of book is this? Is it a documentary? Or is it something that was – like movies today – ‘inspired by true events’? Something loosely related to things that happened, but quite different from the actual facts? That would be somewhat problematic, wouldn’t it? So can we trust the book of Genesis? One of the ways we can explore that is to wrestle with the question, ‘Who wrote this material?’ Is there anything we can know about that?

II. Historical Views of Authorship

Jewish and Christian Tradition

With no exceptions until maybe the year 1753, Jewish and Christian tradition throughout most of history held that the human author of this material was Moses. In fact, various rabbis have believed that the Torah came before creation itself, and was the blueprint of creation. Thus, the Torah was pre-existent as God Himself was, and then was entrusted in written and oral form to Moses, who wrote the Torah and then communicated the oral law to his chief disciple Joshua. All the biblical writers and finally Jesus himself viewed Moses as the human author of this material, with God being the divine author (e.g. Matthew 19:1 – 12).

The Documentary Hypothesis

But a few hundred years ago, starting in 1753, literary scholars began to comment on what they thought were inconsistencies or problems in the text of this literature. The problems raised were: a reference to Moses’ death in Dt.34 – could Moses have written that?; a reference to Moses’ humility in Num.12:3 (‘Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth’ – would Moses have written that?); most of the narrative is 3rd person about Moses; a reference of ‘and to this day’ something or other is still here – doesn’t that seem like it came after Moses?; different names for God, for example in Genesis 1 and 2; literary changes, like diction and style; duplicate or parallel stories (when you have 2 stories, they may be two different documents with two traditions, e.g. Genesis 1 and 2; 40 days or 150 days of flooding; Abraham in Egypt, Isaac in Gerar). Historical conflicts in Israel must have given rise to different political/religious motives

A man named J. Astruc began to isolate what he thought were the different source documents used by Moses to form Genesis. Within the next fifty years, scholars identified four distinct sources. Eventually, a scholar named Julius Wellhausen removed Moses entirely from consideration, and instead, put forward four different camps or schools of thought or political movements within Israel’s early history. This is called the Documentary Hypothesis. It’s a pretty specific and standard explanation now offered in college classrooms. In the secular academy, Mosaic authorship has been largely rejected. The Documentary Hypothesis has been largely accepted. Here is a description of Wellhausen’s four camps:

J	E	D	P
Jehovah Judah (David) Southern Kingdom 10 th – 9 th BCE	Elohim Ephraim Northern Kingdom 9 th – 8 th BCE	Deuteronomist 2 Kings.22:8 King Josiah 7 th BCE	Priestly text Full Levitical priesthood threatened by Aaronite special priests 6 th BCE?

So this is an issue. Does this affect our sense of authority of the text? Yes! It’s not like we have the 4 Gospels, which have one source (Jesus) and the same agenda (to proclaim Jesus) merely speaking to different audiences, and

are trying to harmonize them. In this theory, we have different patchworks with entirely different agendas. The Old Testament is the result of a political compromise by factions within Israel.

There are four main questions we can raise to the Documentary Hypothesis. First, there's no hard or historical evidence for it. We've never discovered any sub-documents. We don't have diverted strains or different manuscripts. We don't have any evidence of a Mr. J or Ms. J. There is no physical evidence. To draw a parallel: If you have a letter that you think is actually a composite from Jimmy and from Scott, there may be some things you can do to confirm that. Can you tell who wrote what portions? If you actually have letters from Scott and Jimmy, then yes. But if you don't, then it's a lot harder to do that. If you're not even sure Scott and Jimmy exist, then it's *really* tough. This doesn't disprove it, but it's pretty devastating. *Because that means that the Documentary Hypothesis rises and falls on the literary arguments alone.* Therefore I will engage this idea strictly on the literary level.

Second, there is the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Samaritans were the result of Jewish and Assyrian commingling after Assyria took over the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the ten tribes of the north that were not Judah and Benjamin in the south. The Northern Kingdom broke away from the Southern Kingdom and the Davidic line of kings after Solomon's death, at around 931 BC. So if the E school, which stands for the Northern Kingdom, already had a fully integrated Pentateuch, and not just an E document, how do you explain that? The higher critical scholars ignored it. Said Rev. Canon Garratt in 1904, 'I can find no reference to it in Wellhausen's *Die composition des Hexateuch*, nor in his *Prolegomina*. In his criticism in both these books, on 2 Kings xvii, a chapter in which it could not be forgotten, it is not even mentioned. Nor do I find any allusion to the subject in Driver's *Introduction*. Chancellor Lias says in *Principles of Biblical Criticism*: "This independent edition of the books of Moses is most characteristically ignored by the new Criticism." It is evidently not a welcome subject with modern critics. Bishop Herbert Ryle (now Bishop of Winchester) in his *Canon of the Old Testament*, is an honourable example of breaking through what I can only call a conspiracy of silence among the critics. He published a second edition of his book in 1895, and added to chapter iv an appendix on the Samaritan Pentateuch, and speaks of the importance of the subject as apparent to every thoughtful student, which makes the silence of the best known men of the modern critical school the more remarkable. "Important, however," he says, "as the subject is, it will be felt to belong more properly to the province either of an enquiry into the history of the Hebrew text, or of an investigation into the history of the Hebrew characters. But in recent years the evidence of the Samaritan Pentateuch has been loudly proclaimed to be the rock upon which the modern criticism of the Pentateuch must inevitably make shipwreck. Under these circumstances an apology is hardly needed for briefly touching upon the subject."¹ The Samaritan Pentateuch has literary features that fatally damage the Documentary Hypothesis. So does another manuscript family, the Masoretic text. For example, 'The words Jehovah and Elohim are so frequently reversed in the Masoretic and Samaritan texts as to make any Elohist and Jehovistic theory impossible.'² If the underlying manuscripts are happy to jumble the E and J names for God, then the whole project is rather shot.

Third, a damaging literary point: most of the literary analysis was done in ignorance of the actual properties of ancient literature at the time, and the literary analysis done primarily by Jewish rabbis and scholars. In fact, most of the foundational research on the Documentary Hypothesis comes from Germany, and it had undertones of German anti-Semitism from that period.

And fourth, none of the literary criteria work in any consistent way. We'll see this as we take specific examples.

¹ Rev. Canon Garratt, "On the Samaritan Text of the Pentateuch," *Journal of the Transactions* (London: Harrison & Sons, 1904), p.3; <http://shomron0.tripod.com/articles/garrattpentateuch.pdf>; the Wikipedia article on 'Documentary Hypothesis' still has no reference to 'Samaritan Pentateuch'!

² Ibid, p.5

III. Literary Analysis of Genesis

Genesis 1 – 4

Genesis	J	P
1:1, 'In the beginning God...'; 2:4a, 'This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created'		1:1-2:4a
2:4b In the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven...	2:4b-4:26	

There are four main issues in Genesis 1 – 2 that seem to support the Documentary Hypothesis: (1) different names for God; (2) different descriptions of creation of male and female; (3) different orderings of the creation of humans and animals; and (4) different orderings of the creation of humans and plants.

(Issue 1) Names of God in Genesis 1 and 2. 'Elohim' emphasizes God's power in Genesis 1, whereas 'YHWH Elohim' emphasizes God's relationality in Genesis 2 – 4. He is not only transcendent, outside all creation and acting upon it. He is within it as Lord, relating to it. So the names of God are thematically related to the content they're in. What's more, in the Bible, God takes delight in nicknaming Himself, or taking new titles. Hagar gives God a nickname in Genesis 16. So even if there are two different names, it doesn't mean that much. By comparison, Paul in Philippians 1:8 – 11 calls Jesus: Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, and Jesus our Lord. Is there any doubt that Paul is talking about one person? No.

But what's even stranger is that the Documentary Hypothesis says that Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 is a J section. But you'll notice above that in Genesis 3, the serpent calls God by the P name. He uses 'Elohim,' the more distant name of God, supposedly used by the P source. Eve then uses the same name for God, the Elohim name. And, closer examination reveals that Satan's ploy was to get Eve to think of God as distant, so there is an internal logic to the story as to why 'Elohim' is used in a supposedly J section. Right after that, in 3:8, the story goes back to the YHWH Elohim name of God. Now you can't imagine that the temptation of Eve story in 3:1-7 comes from a different source because it's so central to the overall story. It even is structurally similar to the sin of Cain story (4:1-15) because of the elements of jealousy, transgression, God's questions, and human response. So the temptation of Eve story belongs there. And differences in the name of God are done strategically for literary reasons that cohere.

How do we deal with the other apparent contradictions in Genesis 1 and 2? (Issue 2) Regarding the creation of male and female: Genesis 1 is clearly a summary statement. Genesis 2 provides the detail. No contradiction. (Issue 3) Regarding who came first, humanity or animals: In Genesis 2, the word translated 'formed' should probably be translated 'had formed.' In other words, 'The LORD God had formed all the animals...' This is because Hebrew only has two past tenses: an action that was completed in the past, and an action that is still continuing in the present. Hebrew as a language doesn't have the past perfect tense. So it can't differentiate between 'the LORD God formed' and 'the LORD God had formed.'

(Issue 4) Regarding plants, Genesis 2:5 is already explaining why the pre-Fall world is different from the post-Fall world. We see this explained further because God supernaturally cared for the ground. In v.6, not rain, but a mist would rise from the earth and water the surface of the ground. Sounds like a tropical climate! What's more, out of Eden flowed a supernatural river. Rivers converge in the natural world; they don't divide. So this is a supernatural river, reflecting how God provides for all His creation. We find that 'no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground.' Rain and cultivation of the ground are things that happen after the Fall. The term 'plant of the field' is key; it implies farming. After the Fall, in Genesis 3:18, God says to Adam, 'Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field.' Before the fall, we have fruit at our fingertips, abundance without farming, irrigation without digging. The need to farm 'fields' came about after the fall. So there is no contradiction between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 in terms of the order in which things were created.

So these stories are not duplicate stories. They are not two creation accounts. Genesis 1 is a creation account, where God creates. Genesis 2 – 4 is a *genealogy*, where the world develops out of an original marriage between

heaven and earth. Why then do we have these two sections? Genesis 2 develops the same themes begun in Genesis 1.

- In Genesis 1, God is the one who fills the creation with order and life. In Genesis 2, humanity is called to take the special order and special life of the garden and spread it throughout the creation. In both cases, the motif of filling is present. In Genesis 1, God fills the creation and blesses humanity to fill it, too. In Genesis 2, God calls humanity to fill the creation with the garden.
- In Genesis 1, God demonstrates His authority by speaking. In Genesis 2, Adam demonstrates his authority by speaking, naming the animals.
- Genesis 1 explains why the land is a gift from God to humanity. Humans were created on day 6 to rule the land created on day 3. Genesis 2 expands on just how much of a blessing the land was. But Genesis 2 – 4 also explains why the land was cursed with thorns and thistles, and then with human blood, and why humans instead live in cities instead of gardens. This would be important to Israel, because Israel was God’s new humanity living in a garden land looking out at a Gentile world that built cities.

Genesis 5 – 9

Scholars following the Documentary Hypothesis arrange this section in the following way:

Genesis	J	P
5:28, ‘And Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and became the father of a son.’		5:1-28
5:29, ‘Now he called his name Noah, saying, ‘This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed.’	5:29	
5:30, ‘Then Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years after he became the father of Noah, and he had other sons and daughters.’		5:30-32
6:1, ‘Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them...’	6:1-8	
6:9, ‘These are the records of the generations of Noah.’		6:9-22
7:5, ‘And Noah did according to all that the Lord had commanded him.’	7:1-5	
7:6, ‘Now Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water came upon the earth.’		7:6
7:7, ‘Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him entered the ark because of the water of the flood.’	7:7-10	
7:11, ‘In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened.’		7:11
7:12, ‘And the rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights.’	7:12	
7:16a, ‘And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him. . .’		7:13-16a
7:16b, ‘. . . and the Lord closed it behind him.’	7:16b	
7:17a, ‘Then the flood came upon the earth for forty days’		7:17a
7:17b, ‘and the water increased and lifted up the ark, so that it rose above the earth.’	7:17b	
7:18, ‘And the water prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the surface of the water. ¹⁹ And the water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered. ²⁰ The water prevailed fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered. ²¹ And all flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind’		7:18-21
7:22-23, ‘of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died. Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth;	7:22-23	

and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark.’		
7:24, ‘And the water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days.’		7:24

P seems to be interested in numbers: 7 days of creation, how many years Adam and sons lived, how old Noah was, how many days the floodwaters were on the earth, etc. J seems to be interested in the name of God as ‘the Lord.’ It’s difficult to say exactly what else distinguishes J, but there you go.

Here are some problems: (1) You’ll also notice that for whatever reason, 7:12 mentions forty days and forty nights and yet that is not Priestly, the school that is concerned about numbers and records everywhere else. It’s given to J. That’s strange. (2) You’ll also notice that you very strange weird verse splicing. Noah’s name is explained in 5:29, and that’s the only verse in the whole genealogy that is said to be J. All the other material surrounding it is assigned to P.

But (3), contrast that with this diagram of Genesis 5 – 9. The entire Noah story is in the form of an inverted parallel, or chiasm.³ It is a Hebrew literary form found all over the Bible, where the first point matches the last point, the second point matches the second to last point, and so on, until you reach the center. And how do you know the story has cohesion? Look at the literary design of the story. How do you know the author’s intention? What is the point? Look at the center.

- a. The genealogy of Adam to Noah, emphasizing corruption of humanity except Noah (5:1 – 6:8)
- b. Noah is righteous (6:9)
- c. Shem, Ham, and Japheth (6:10)
- d. God will bring an end to all flesh; God tells Noah to build ark for the flood (6:11-17)
- e. Covenant with Noah (6:18-20)
- f. Food in the ark (6:21)
- g. Command to enter the ark (7:1-3)
- h. 7 days waiting for flood (7:4-5)
- i. 7 days waiting for flood (7:6-10)
- j. Entry to ark (7:11-15)
- k. Yahweh shuts Noah in (7:16)
- l. 40 days flood (7:17a)
- m. Waters increase (7:17b-18)
- n. Mountains covered (7:19-20)
- o. 150 days waters prevail (7:21-24)
- p. God remembers Noah (8:1)
- o’. 150 days waters abate (8:3)
- n’. Mountains tops visible (8:4-5)
- m’. Waters abate (8:5)
- l’. 40 days (end of) (8:6a)
- k’. Noah opens window of ark (8:6b)
- j’. Raven and dove leave ark (8:7-9)
- i’. 7 days waiting for waters to subside (8:10-11)
- h’. 7 days waiting for waters to subside (8:12-13)
- g’. Command to leave the ark, family leaves ark (8:14-22)
- f’. Food outside the ark (9:1-4)
- e’. Covenant with all flesh (9:5-10)
- d’. God will not flood all flesh again; God makes rainbow (9:11-17)
- c’. Shem, Ham, and Japheth (9:18)
- b’. Noah repopulates the whole earth (9:19)
- a’. The sons of Noah, emphasizing corruption of Noah and his family (9:20 – 29)

The Documentary Hypothesis requires you to have an editor who is remarkably sloppy. He or she does things that no editor ever does. They split sentences in half, insert verses. They take 4 ‘contradictory’ documents and toss them in without reconciling them and these different supposed agendas. Even though if you look carefully at the grammar and the literary features, there is incredible unity.

³ modified by Mako Nagasawa from Gordon J. Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” *VT* 28 (1978): 338. See also Bernhard W. Anderson, “From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1 – 11,” *JBL* 97 (1978): 23-29.

Analogy: William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*

Let's apply this type of reasoning to a famous work of literature from the 20th century.⁴ One of the great American writers of this century is William Faulkner. Let's look at his famous novel, *The Sound and the Fury* using this lens, specifically the chapter entitled 'June 2, 1910.' The first two pages begin with a reasonably easy to follow narrative, like most of the book up to that point. This is the 'Common' or 'C' source. Then, rather abruptly several pages later and published in italics, the narrative flows like this: 'Thinking it would be nice for them down in New London if the weather held up like this. Why shouldn't it? The month of brides, the voice that breathed *She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent. Roses. Roses. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of. Roses. Not virgins like dogwoods, milkweed.*' Let's say that the italicized portions of the story are from the 'Reflective,' or 'R' source. Still further on in the chapter, we find an entirely different style, without punctuation and with very odd paragraph breaks, yet with the italicized 'R' reflections peppered in there. That can be called the 'Amalgamated,' or 'A' source, since it includes the Reflective source material with the fourth and final source, the 'Punctuationless' or 'P' source. If we follow the advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis, we wind up with our elegant theory of authorship for Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. What do we have? C, R, A, P. Who wrote it? Who knows! Maybe Faulkner wrote some of it himself? But we can be 'sure' that some random employees at Faulkner's publishing company got a hold of the manuscript, tweaked it according to their own agendas, and sent it to the presses. The only problem with this idea is that not a single person alive in America today since Faulkner wrote the book in 1936, literary critic or not, would even dream of asserting that William Faulkner did not write *The Sound and the Fury*. Yet this is exactly what is going on with the Documentary Hypothesis.

IV. An Alternative View of Authorship: The Toledot Theory

So what view should we have about the human author or authors of Genesis? Some good work has been done recently by Jewish and Christian scholars in the Old Testament, and particularly in Genesis. I don't have room here to comment on the archaeological and historical aspects of Genesis 1 – 11, but I do have time to give a literary assessment. There is reason to think that Moses brought together earlier documents written by Joseph, Jacob, and Abraham and preserved by their descendants. These earlier documents are called 'toledot' by scholars. 'Toledot' is the Hebrew word for 'generations.' There are 10 such toledot sections in Genesis, not counting Genesis 1 which seems to be a prologue.

The 'Toledot' Theory / Genealogical Structure of Genesis

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2:4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created

5:1 This is the book of the generations of Adam

6:9 These are the records of the generations of Noah.

10:1 Now these are the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth

11:10 These are the records of the generations of Shem.

11:27 Now these are the records of the generations of Terah.

25:12 Now these are the records of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son

25:19 Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son

36:1 Now these are the records of the generations of Esau (that is, Edom).

37:2 These are the records of the generations of Jacob.

Moses probably received the original stories from the patriarchs. He compiled this information, probably with finishing touches added by Joshua. That explains Moses' death and statement of his meekness.⁵ I think this is an excellent theory, honoring of both Jewish and Christian tradition, and lending itself to a reasonable explanation for why there is so much literary unity to Genesis as a book.

⁴ This exercise was originally done in 1993 by Dorman Followwill, then college pastor at Peninsula Bible Church and a mentor of Mako.

⁵ This is the view of scholars like P.J. Wiseman in a booklet called *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis* (published by Thomas Nelson Publishers), Kikawada and Quinn in their book *Before Abraham Was*, Duane Garrett in *Rethinking Genesis*, as well as Paul Borgman in *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* and the more extensive work of John Sailhamer in *The Pentateuch as Narrative*. Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, and Yehuda Amit, and J.P. Fokkelman also corroborate. Any of their books are great starting points.

Furthermore, in Scripture, a thematic pattern develops around the number 10 concerning God's activities.

	Genesis 1:1 – 2:3	Genesis 5:1 – 6:8	Genesis 11:10 – 30	Genesis 2:4 – 50:26	Exodus 7 – 11	Exodus 19 – 20	Matthew 8 – 9
Ten acts leading up to a new work of God	Ten declarations of Creation; God forms all life	Ten generations from Adam to Noah, new creation	Ten generations from Shem to Abram, new humanity	Ten genealogies of Israel; God forms the nation Israel	Ten plagues; God uncreates Egypt to free Israel	Ten commands; God makes the Mosaic covenant	Ten word miracles; Jesus forms new covenant movement

Is that a coincidence? Or does it reflect a God who works in patterns, both in history and in literature? The powerful thing about this pattern is that it unites the whole book of Genesis. Not only that, it straddles the hypothetical lines drawn up in the Documentary Hypothesis.

V. Three Reasons to Trust the Book of Genesis

In closing, let me offer three reasons to trust the Book of Genesis.

Reason 1: The Ideas in Genesis Attest to a Non-Human Source

For one, Genesis says that God's ideal for marriage is monogamous, heterosexual, binding, mutually loving and vulnerable. This is surprising in that Genesis does not support polygamy as an ideal. One would suspect that Genesis should support polygamy, since polygamy emphasizes male power and dominance. In fact, if Genesis were merely written by men, you would expect that they would sanction polygamy as an ideal; shouldn't we be reading about Adam and Eve, and Eva, and Evelyn, and so on? But polygamy is critiqued in Genesis 4 and monogamy is held up as God's ideal. Why? Where does monogamy come from? It has no real social scientific explanation because it limits male power and dominance; yet it is an ideal stamped on the human psyche from the beginning. Why else would it be here in Genesis? For more examples like this, see my paper *Does the Bible Have Evidence of Supernatural Design?* (<http://nagasawafamily.org/article-does-bible-have-evidence-of-gods-design.pdf>)

Second, look at a high level view of Genesis 1 – 11 to see how revolutionary it was, and still is. Scholars Kikawada and Quinn compare Genesis to the other Near Eastern creation myths that Genesis supposedly borrowed from. It does appear that Genesis is aware of the other myths, but that it doesn't borrow from them at all. It argues with them.

Genesis 1 - 11

Stasinus' Cypria (European)	Atrahasis (Babylonian/Akkadian)	Zoroastrian Avesta (Old Iranian)	Genesis 1-11 (Hebrew)
Problem: Overpopulation, wickedness, earth burdened	Creation (1.1-351): the work of the gods and the creation of humans	Creation: Ahura Mazda tells Yima (human) to be king over creation	Creation (1:1-2:3): God creates the world and humans and blesses them
First Threat: Zeus sends the Theban War; many destroyed	First Threat (1.352-415): Humans numerically increase; plague from the gods to limit overcrowding; Enki's help	First Threat: Overpopulation; Yima asks the earth goddess Armaiti to expand herself	First Threat (2:4-4:25): Genealogy of heavens and earth; the Fall; God promises victory to the seed of the woman; Cain kills Abel and settles in a city; God preserves Seth
Second Threat: Zeus plans to destroy all by thunderbolts; Momos dissuades Zeus	Second Threat (II.i.1-II.v.21) Humanity's numerical increase; drought from the gods; Enki's help	Second Threat: Overpopulation; Yima asks the earth goddess Armaiti to expand herself	Second Threat (5:1-9:29): Genealogy of Adam to Noah; human corruption and bloodshed; God cleanses the land through the flood; God preserves Noah and family

Third Threat: Momos suggests that Thebis marry a mortal to create Achilles and that Zeus father Helen of Troy; war results between the Greeks and the barbarians	Third Threat (II.v.22-III.vi.4): Humanity's numerical increase, Atrahasis Flood, salvation in boat	Third Threat: Overpopulation; Yima asks the earth goddess Armaiti to expand herself	Third Threat (10:1-11:9): Genealogy of Shem, Ham, Japheth; Tower of Babel and dispersion
Resolution: Many destroyed by Trojan War, earth lightened of her burdened	Resolution (III.vi.5-viii.18): Numerical increase; compromise between Enlil and Enki; humans cursed with natural barrenness, high infant mortality rate, cult prostitution (to separate sex and procreation)	Resolution: Ahura Mazda sends a deadly winter with heavy snowfall to punish overcrowding; Yima told to build a three storied enclosure to survive; humanity destroyed outside while a boy and girl born in enclosure every 40 years	Resolution (11:10-26): Genealogy of Shem; introduction of Abram (In 11:27ff., God calls Abram out of Ur to begin Israel.)

The other creation stories come from urban settings and argue for population control. Human beings get too numerous, so there are things that happen that eliminate human life. Whose interest does it serve to promote that kind of social ethic? The rich and powerful, who want to regulate the masses. We have that attitude today. That's why we ask immigrant families, 'Why do you have so many kids?' That's why we abort so many babies. That's why we choose not to feed the world's poor even though we do have enough food. The rich and powerful always use 'human civilization' as a reason to destroy human life.

Genesis 1 – 11 is aware of the other surrounding creation stories, and *argues* with them. Genesis 1 – 11 seems to follow a five fold structure that undergirds other ancient literature. But Genesis reverses the themes. Human life is always good. God says, 'Be fruitful and multiply.' In Genesis 1 – 11, the flood happens not because of human overcrowding, but because of human sin and violence. And when human beings cluster together in cities, God disperses them. Human civilization elevates itself at the expense of human life. Genesis 1 – 11 elevates human life at the expense of human civilization. Kikawada and Quinn argue, "This command, so long familiar to us, is in its cultural context utterly startling, as unexpected as the monotheism."⁶ Frymer-Kensky says that this command to be fertile is "an explicit and probably conscious rejection of the idea that the cause of the flood was overpopulation and that overpopulation is a serious problem."⁷ Kikawada and Quinn conclude: "Genesis 1-11 then constitutes a rejection of Babel and Babylon – of civilization itself, if its continuance requires human existence to be treated as a contingent [or secondary] good. For Genesis the existence of a new human was always good."⁸

What else is different about Genesis? Third, there is only one God. How do you go from polytheism to monotheism? Especially in the ancient world? This is revolutionary. Why would anyone do that? Fourth, the character of this God is so different. For one thing, He is holy. By contrast, look at the Greek gods. They are whimsical, kind of like human beings in their moods and tempers. Isn't it easier to have gods who are like us? Why invent a God who is so serious about dealing with evil?

⁶ Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn. *Before Abraham Was*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p.38.

⁷ Tikva Frymer-Kensky. "The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for Understanding Genesis 1-9," *Biblical Archaeologist* 40 (1977):152. See also B.S. Yegerlehner, *Be Fruitful and Multiply* (Diss., Boston University, 1975) and David Daube's *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982).

⁸ Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn. *Before Abraham Was*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p.51

To the prevailing myths and attitudes of its time, Genesis strongly says 'NO.' It is profoundly distinct from them on the ethical level, as well as the spiritual level. *Why would any mere people group produce this type of foundational literature? What incentives would they have to do that? None that I can think of.*

Reason 2: The Unity of the Story of God

Reason number two is the unity of Scripture. Look at the repetition of the pattern, ten acts of God when God does a new thing. Look at the flow of Genesis 1 – 11: creation, fall, sinful civilization, then new creation, a second fall, a second sinful civilization. Look at how God says to Abram that he and his descendents will be a blessing to all the families of the earth, and how that comes true at the end of Genesis when Abram's great-grandson Joseph helps the known world survive a 7 year famine – he is a blessing to all the families of the earth indeed. Look at the consistent use of the motif of water: God brings forth life out of water. After the Flood, God brings forth new creation out of water. Then He rescues Israel from Egypt and brings forth a new humanity through the water of the Red Sea. Then Jesus is baptized in water, and he baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, which is symbolized by being immersed in water, symbolic of dying and rising as a new creation. The unity of the story suggests that there is a divine Author who is above the human authors who knows that He will be victorious in the end.

Reason 3: Jesus' View of Genesis

Finally, reason number three is Jesus' own view of Genesis, which develops that last remark. In order to find the author of Genesis and determine whether it is trustworthy, we can look at what Jesus said in Matthew 19:3 – 6: And some Pharisees came to him, testing him, and saying, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?' And he answered and said, 'Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?' Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'

As usual, Jesus makes a striking connection for us. Jesus quotes both Genesis chapter one ('male and female' from 1:27) and chapter two ('For this cause...' from 2:24), and inextricably links them with God Himself. He identifies God, the one who made humanity, as the one who spoke the words of Genesis 2. Jesus asserted that the Creator, the one who said, 'For this cause' is the real Author of Genesis. Even a critical Bible dictionary is forced to agree: 'Both Christ and his Apostles or writers of the New Testament held the current Jewish notions respecting the Divine authority and revelation of the Old Testament.' (Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible)

So we can look beyond the original writers of the 'toledot' source documents. We can look beyond Moses and Joshua. We can certainly look beyond anyone named J, E, D, or P, to the ultimate author of this material. God Himself, communicating by His Spirit through a human instrument, conceived of this material. The thoughts, the order, the literary genius, and the absolute truth contained in Genesis is God's alone. GOD HIMSELF IS THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS. As Jesus himself placed his trust in this material, I think we can also do so with confidence.

Question and Answer Time with Mako

Q: Is it possible that Israel developed the ethical stance in Genesis 1 – 11 because they were slaves in Egypt?

A: It's possible, yes. But here's the problem with saying that the ethics of Genesis 1 – 11 was just a natural outgrowth of being oppressed in the past: Oppressed people often become oppressive when they have power, unless something unusual happens. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire talks about this in his book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when he says that the only model for an oppressed people is the model of their oppressors. So for example, the modern State of Israel persecutes Palestinians, and this is somewhat predictable because the Diaspora Jews were persecuted in Europe and Russia on an ethnic basis. In many oppressed communities, men oppress women. So it is much more common that an oppressed people turns around and oppresses someone else. After all, they have been in a mode of ethnic self-preservation and then have to build a civilization. They usually do not develop an ethics and attitude that are inclusive. That's why I think God intervened in Israel's beginnings to write Genesis 1 – 11.

Q: Some people say that the Bible was written after Israel came back from Babylon at around 500 BC.

A: Of course since Genesis 11 has a critique of Babel or Babylon, that would be a possible conclusion. But I think that's really unlikely. The Babylonian Captivity created all kinds of sociological and theological questions that required new answers.

(1) First, the later books of the Old Testament depend literarily on the Torah, so the Torah must have been written first. The book of Samuel especially depends literarily on Genesis, and Jewish literary scholar Robert Alter argues that it could have only gone in that direction; Genesis was not created after Samuel. You can tell something about how widespread knowledge of the Torah already was, in order for the other later books to be written. Also, the Psalms seem organized into five 'books' as a pattern after the five books of Moses. And so on. We think that Genesis and the Torah as a whole must have been much earlier, therefore, than everything else.

(2) Second, the literary structures in the Torah and important details both point to an older date. The book of Deuteronomy is patterned after a Hittite covenant between a king and his people that fit the time that Deuteronomy says it was written, around 1300 BC. Why would someone go out of his way to use that literary form if it was 800 years out of date? And Genesis 1 – 11 is in the form of the ancient creation myths, which seem more significant in the ancient, older dates. I don't know if those were as relevant 1000 years later. So the Torah seems to be arguing with very old literature, not literature that was relevant at 500BC.

(3) Third, after the Babylonian Captivity, how was Israel supposed to divide up land? In the Torah, Moses says to divide up land from father to son by families, keeping family records. That fits the moment when Israel was entering the promised land under Joshua. But it doesn't fit the return from Babylon: All family records were already lost; there was no way to rejuvenate that tradition. Why set yourself up for social and legal frustration?

(4) Fourth, the Babylonian Captivity centralized political hope in the House of David and the Davidic King. In the Torah, Moses predicts a king, but is not that specific. Moses also gives tribal leaders a lot of power. And there's room for prophetic figures to spring up and lead the people, which is what happened in Judges. Why doesn't Moses just come right out and say something more affirming about the Davidic king? Why have that kind of political ambiguity?

(5) Fifth, the Babylonian Captivity created the need for a new Temple, a permanent place of worship, because that is what existed right before Babylon took over. But Moses gives instructions for a movable tent-like thing called the Tabernacle. In fact, the whole Pentateuch is a chiasm that critiques the Tabernacle and by extension, the Temple, not affirms it.