

## Genesis a different approach (Introduction)

By

Former Pastor Dr. Joel Minto \*

© 2019 Joel Minto (Used With Permission)

If there is one book of the Bible that almost every Christian on the planet has read, it is Genesis. It was also one of the core studies for me when I was pursuing my Doctorate in Biblical studies. In fact several teachers I have had over the years have all said the same thing; all we ever need to know about God and His relationship to man and His creation are contained in the first few chapters of Genesis. In some ways that makes a lot of sense since the opening chapters of the Bible has caused controversy and turmoil in the Christian community for years. We look at Genesis with a western/ Greek worldview which tries to make the book a scientific treatise on how the world began. We attach 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking to a book that was written for a culture and people that do not share the same world view as we do. As a result we have imposed on the written pages our set of values conditions and theology that was never intended in the first place. I too was drawn into this illusion formed by our thinkers and philosophers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and subscribed to many of the theology they drew out of these verses to match their own world view. I would like us to step back and look at these beginning chapters of the book of Genesis with a fresh set of eyes, with the eyes of the original hearers if you will and make sense of what God is telling us in that world view. In order to do that we have to examine three questions:

1. To whom was this written?
2. When was it written?
3. Why was it written?

The first two questions are rather easy to answer because it pervades almost everything written about Christian literature (tongue in cheek since it is a Hebrew document). It was written to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai after being held captive and slaves for 400 years in Egypt. That answers the first two questions rather easily and are not disputed by most of our scholars today.

The third question is where we really need to focus... why? 400 years of slavery under Egyptian rule and Egyptian thinking permeated the world view of the Hebrews of that time. The only creation story they would have had at that time was Egyptian based.

According to the website [ancient.eu/ Egyptian\\_Mythology](http://ancient.eu/Egyptian_Mythology), a portion of the world view of the early Egyptians was:

**“To the Egyptians, the journey began with the creation of the world and the universe out of darkness and swirling chaos. Once there was nothing but endless dark water without form or purpose. Existing within this void was Heka (god of magic) who awaited the moment of creation. Out of this watery silence (`Nu’) rose the primordial hill, known as the Ben-Ben, upon which stood the great god Atum (or, in some versions of the myth, Ptah). Atum looked upon the nothingness and recognized his aloneness and so, through the agency of magic, he mated with his own shadow to give birth to two children, Shu (god of air, whom Atum spat out) and Tefnut (goddess of moisture, whom Atum vomited out). Shu gave to the early world the principles of life while Tefnut contributed the principles of order.**

## Genesis a different approach (Introduction)

By

Former Pastor Dr. Joel Minto \*

© 2019 Joel Minto (Used With Permission)

**Leaving their father on the Ben-Ben, they set out to establish the world. In time, Atum became concerned because his children were gone so long and so removed his eye and sent it in search of them. While his eye was gone, Atum sat alone on the hill in the midst of chaos and contemplated eternity. Shu and Tefnut returned with the eye of Atum (later associated with the Udjat eye, the Eye of Ra, or the All-Seeing Eye) and their father, grateful for their safe return, shed tears of joy. These tears, dropping onto the dark, fertile earth of the Ben-Ben, gave birth to men and women.”**

Why is this important? If you have been taught a mythology that permeated lives for 400 years a Jehovah based creation story had to replace the one they were most familiar with and I dare say probably accepted. I say that because when left to themselves as Moses ascended Mt Sinai and they thought they were abandoned despite the miracles and parting of the Red Sea for salvation they resort back to the ingrained 400 year old worldview and create a golden image, just like they would have done if they were still in Egypt.

Skip Moen in one of his daily commentaries at the website skipmoen.com summed up what I am trying to say better than I could.

**“How incredibly difficult it is for us to read these ancient texts from the perspective of the original audience. We constantly import theories and constructions that were developed thousands of years later, in a different culture and a different epistemology. When we encounter a commentator who does push us back to the original setting, we find his words strange, even repulsive, because they do not agree with what we have come to believe. Unfortunately, very few of us actually know why we believe what we believe about the text. We have inherited our beliefs without examining their roots.**

**The opening lines of Genesis are a perfect place to begin re-thinking. Of course, we know that the original audience was the children of Israel removed from Egyptian slavery. But perhaps we forget that 400 years of Egyptian thinking was a part of the worldview of these ex-slaves. If you think that isn't the case, just review the event of the golden calf (bull). It comes straight out of Egypt. But when we read these first few lines, we immediately divert to nineteenth-century arguments about creation versus evolution. We begin by imagining that Genesis 1 is a semi-scientific account, a chronology of God's creative acts. We assume that these words fall under our definitions of event-history.”**

And then in another article titled creation 2010:

**“In my mind, the biggest issue of creation theory is not the scientific evidence. It is the lack of exegetical awareness. No one who first heard the Torah recounting of God's creative activity would have worried about “Big Bang” implications or the age of the earth or the fossil record or any of the other scientific issues. Why? Because the Genesis account is an apologetic against other ancient cosmogonies. It is not a book about astrophysics. The purpose of the biblical record is to guide us to a communal and personal relationship with the Creator, not to tell us how God created. Contemporary debates about creation tend to ignore this, and as a consequence, attempt to force-fit the biblical text**

## **Genesis a different approach (Introduction)**

By

Former Pastor Dr. Joel Minto \*

© 2019 Joel Minto (Used With Permission)

**into an empirical scientific worldview. This is just another example of the shift to a Greek understanding of the world, in the largest possible scale.**

**Does the truth of Scripture rest on an argument about creationism? Does the legacy of the prophets, the history of Israel, the life of Yeshua, the resurrection and the witness of the apostles depend on an argument about the age of the Grand Canyon? The problem here once again pushes us toward a definition of truth. If we are Greek in our thinking, we will want the “one right answer,” the one that fits the requirement of correct calculation. In other words, we will define the playing field according to mathematics, the fundamental language of science. But that ignores entirely the Hebrew idea of personal, faithful reliability, where the playing field is not about numerical accuracy but rather about relationship trustworthiness. As long as believers accept the Greek rules of the game, the debates will continue. The real argument is not about the “facts.” It is about the epistemological assumptions that determine what we call the facts.**

**“In the beginning, God created” is a declaration of relationship. The sovereign, unique, royal, unopposed God acted in such a way that everything else came into being. This declaration establishes the relationship between God and all creation. He is supreme. He is not part of the creation. He is the only agent responsible for its being. And He loves what He made.”**

So as we begin our exploration of the first few chapters of Genesis, let’s approach the way the Hebrews would have approached it and not bring our Greek based theological worldview as baggage.