A picture containing text

Description automatically generated**The Genesis of Genesis**

Who wrote Genesis? Like all of the sacred canon, the book of Genesis was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

“**20** knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. **21** For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2Pe 1:20-21 ESV)

So, although a human wrote it, it was God Himself who worked through that human author to write it. He did so with an endgame in mind:

“**16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2Ti 3:16-17 ESV)

But you are probably wanting to know, **who was the “holy man”** who wrote as he was **“carried along by the Holy Spirit?”** Great question and worthy of a few minutes of discussion.

Traditionally Genesis, like the rest of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) have been ascribed to Moses. The other four books of the Pentateuch relate to Moses’ life and his role in bringing Israel to the borders of Canaan, and parts of these books are expressly said to have been written by Moses ([Num. 33:2](https://www.esv.org/Numbers+33%3A2/); [Deut. 31:24](https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+31%3A24/)). Genesis is clearly an introduction to the books that follow, so it is natural to suppose that if Moses was responsible for their composition, he must also have been the author of Genesis.

But it is more than “natural” to believe this. This seems to be what Christ believed based on what he said to the two travelers on the road to Emmaus:

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Lu 24:27 ESV)

“Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."” (Lu 24:44 ESV)

So, if Moses wrote Genesis, and we have every reason to believe he did. Where did he get the information? There are three major theories, I will save the one I believe to be true until the end and provide a little evidence.

The Three Main Theories:

1. Moses received it through direct revelation from God. Forty days on Mt Sinai the first time. Then after breaking the initial set of ten commandments 40 more days on Mt Sinai with God, plus all of the time in the Tent of Meeting. Of course, there is plenty of time for this much direct revelation, but I do not think so.
2. He received it passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition. Of course, with people living so long this is indeed possible. (See The Geneologies of Genesis), but this is a great deal of material to be held all through oral tradition and so I do not believe this is how it happened. Although there would have been stories being told by parents to their children and grandchildren (etc).
3. Moses took actual written records that had been written, collected, and passed down. With the Holy Spirit of God guiding the production of the final product. This is what I believe, for a few reasons:
   1. It is the most logical. If I were venturing a guess, this is what I would guess.
   2. We see this quite a bit in the Old Testament where a writer is using various documents to produce the final product that we are reading. Remember back to our study in I Kings, two quick examples:

“Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon?” (1Ki 11:41 ESV)

“Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.” (1Ki 14:19 ESV)

There are many more, but this makes the point.

* 1. It seems, contained within Genesis we have a hint that this is what happened. It is likely that the English phase ***“these are the generations of...”*** or ***“this is the genealogy of...”*** are the indicators. The word translated generations or genealogy is the Hebrew word **תולדה** (toledoth). The first use is Genesis 2:4.

It means the history of, or the record of the history of. It seems to follow the history that it is talking about (although some would argue it leads). To me it seems like it is “this was the history of x”. It seems to represent a subscript or a closing statement.

When looked at this way, it tells us what event or people are being talked about and likely points to who compiled the writing.

If we approach it that way, we find **10 clear divisions**:

“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.” (Ge 2:4 ESV) (Covering 1:1-2:4) These details had to conveyed from God to Adam or Moses.

“This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.” (Ge 5:1 ESV) (Covering 2:4b-5:1) The sections is about Adam and all that happened in the temptation, the fall, Cain and Abel.

“These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.” (Ge 6:9 ESV) (Covering 5:1b-6:9) This is the story of the pre-flood patriarchs as recorded by Moses.

“These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.” (Ge 10:1 ESV) (Covering 6:9b-10:1) It seems that Shem Ham and Japheth took responsibility for recording the preparation for the flood and the global catastrophe itself.

“These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood.” (Ge 11:10 ESV) (Covering 10:1b-11:10) After Noah’s death and the dispersion at Babel it seems that the three sons of Noah were separated. It appears Shem attempted to track the descendants of his brothers.

“Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot.” (Ge 11:27 ESV) (Covering 11:10b-11:27) This is a very small document that contains the line from Shem to Terah and his three sons.

“These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son: Abraham fathered Isaac,” (Ge 25:19 ESV) (Covering 11:27b-25:19) Here we have a very long section, laying out the details of Abraham’s life, Isaac’s life and contains a section on Ishmael.

“These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s servant, bore to Abraham.” (Ge 25:12 ESV) Here we have what appears to be a small portion about Ishmael’s lineage.

“These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father’s wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.” (Ge 37:2 ESV) (Covering 25:19b-37:2) Jacob’s record is also very long, providing events that happened later in Isaac’s life as well as the death of his wife and his father. Jacob seems to add the section on his brother Esau as well as some Edomite kings.

“These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household:” (Ex 1:1 ESV) (Covering 37:2b-Ex 1:1) Although the formula shifts slightly this section covers the events of the life of Joseph are recorded here.

If this is correct, not only do we see these ten sections, but we have an indicator of who compiled each section material that Moses relied upon. The one section that may not point to the person who complied it is the section about Ismael, it was likely compiled by Isaac.

Keep in mind, we do not have (for example) what Joseph possibly wrote that he passed on. Rather, we have what Moses wrote (as he was carried along by the Holy Spirit) regardless of how he came to learn the details.