

Should the Book of Genesis be Taken Literally?

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With its six day account of the creation of the world, and its account of a global flood covering the mountains, through which the man Noah and his family were saved by building a gigantic ark, both skeptics and believers have wondered, should the book of Genesis be taken literally? This is a reasonable question based on the fact that the Bible uses a number of various forms of writing. There is symbolism, hyperbole, poetry, metaphors, parables, figurative language, and of course, there is writing that is intended to be taken literally. So, how should one approach the book of Genesis?

One very easy way to answer this question is by looking at the New Testament. The events of Genesis are referenced quite often by the New Testament writers, and even by Jesus during His earthly ministry. For example, take this reference to the Genesis account of creation by Jesus:

But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Mark 10:6-8

While some might question just how literally we should interpret the six days of creation, Jesus tells us man has been here since the *beginning* of creation. This certainly does away with the idea that the days of Genesis chapter one are merely poetic expressions of evolutionary processes occurring over billions of years. If we combine His words with the genealogy given in Luke's Gospel, which takes us all the back to Adam as the first man, we see that from Adam to Jesus there were around four-thousand years.

Jesus also speaks of Abel (Matt. 23:35), Noah and the flood (Matt. 24:37-39), Abraham (Luke 13:16), Lot (Luke 17:28-29), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15), Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 8:11). All of these represent events and people in Genesis that are mentioned by Jesus as being literal. These are powerful proof texts in understanding how we should interpret Genesis. More proof texts are found as one moves beyond the Gospels to the other inspired New Testament writings.

In Acts 7:1-18 Stephen covers events recorded in Genesis concerning Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. To those whom he was addressing, these were known to be actual people and events.

The familiar eleventh chapter of Hebrews covers a number of events recorded in Genesis, and does so as if they were literal history. These events include: creation, the death of Abel, Enoch, Noah and the flood, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, and Joseph (Heb. 11:1-22).

The apostle Peter makes mention of creation, Noah, the ark, the flood, Abraham, Sarah, Lot, and Sodom and Gomorrah (1 Peter 3:6, 20; 2 Peter 2:5-8; 3:4-6).

Many other references to the people and events of Genesis recorded in the New Testament could be cited. The point should be clear: These inspired writers saw these as literal history. When we study the book of Genesis, we should interpret and apply them in the same way.