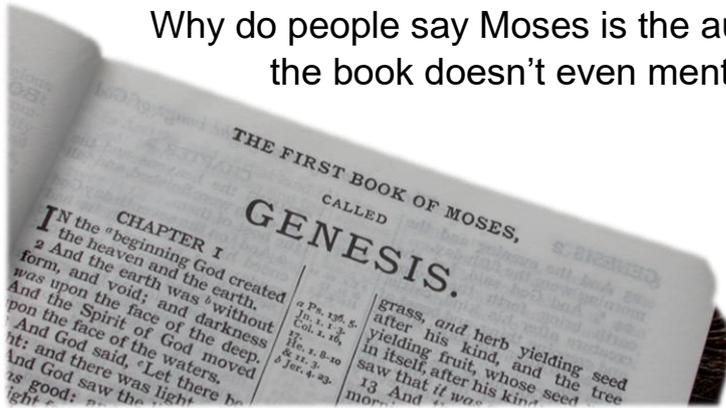


# How do we know Moses wrote Genesis?

## Question for Ask John Mackay website:

Why do people say Moses is the author of Genesis when the book doesn't even mention his name?



## Answer

The answer to this question is in three parts.

### Part 1: Evidence from the record of Babel – Bricks and Gentiles

#### Answer by John Mackay

Moses is certainly mentioned in four of the first five books in the Old Testament i.e. Exodus Leviticus Numbers and Deuteronomy. Since his death and burial are recorded in Deuteronomy 34:5, he obviously cannot have written the last 8 verses of that book. Nevertheless, it is true that throughout the rest of the Old and New Testaments, Moses is regarded as the author of the first five books beginning with Genesis.

Are there any clues in Genesis to back up such a claim? How do we do even begin?

One way is to search for words that hint at who the author was or wasn't e.g. if you were reading a book with the words Boggabilla, cunjevoi and Gympie Gympie in, it is highly likely the author is Australian as these terms are virtually unknown outside of Australia. And within Australia two of these words are really only known in the state of Queensland. So, let's look for some words that tell us about the book's author and see where they lead.

Genesis divides fairly easily into creation, fall, flood, Babel and the founding of separate nations including Israel to which Moses belonged. So let's start with the division of Noah's descendants at Babel (Genesis chapters 10 and 11). In these accounts we find distinguishing words such as 'gentile' (10:5), and Shinar (11:2), along with comparative phrases such 'they used brick instead of stone and slime for mortar' (11:3). But how does this help us?

Even if Genesis does not mention Moses by name, history as well as the rest of scripture inform us that the first five books were written for readership firstly by the people of Israel and it contains some key words such as 'gentile' which history records began as an

exclusively Israelite word. It is a '**them** and **us**' distinction. The word is pronounced 'Goy' in Hebrew, which became 'gentile' in the Latin Vulgate from the Latin *gens* meaning "a group or kind", and its use in Genesis 10:5 tells us the author was one of the '**us**' group and not one of '**them**'. The author was an Israelite!

Likewise, when the author describes the construction of the tower of Babel in chapter 11, it was recorded that it was built with "brick instead of stone". This type of comment is made only when an author finds such an oddity worth noting, or if those who are meant to read it need some explanation. So, what is odd or noteworthy about "brick instead of stone"?

When we search the book of Exodus as well as the New Testament, we discover that Moses was bought up in Egypt of 'hidden' Israelite background, but raised in a royal palace and trained in all the ways of the Egyptians for leadership under Pharaoh (Acts 7:22). As such he would have been familiar with how their large buildings were constructed. We also learn the reason for his mission is that the people of Israel were slaves who were used in the building industry and were well familiar with making sun-baked straw-filled mud/clay bricks which were used for 'common' buildings (Exodus 1:14, 5:7). But both Moses and the people knew that important buildings such as pyramids and temples were constructed of large blocks of limestone and sandstone, many of which still stand in today's Egypt. Now back to Genesis 11:3 where we note that the bricks in the Babel account were to be 'thoroughly baked' and not just filled with straw and left to harden in the sun. This is a process the Israelite slaves were not familiar with, so making an important Tower out of cooked brick was worthy of comment.

A little additional search of archaeological records also tells us that in ancient Egypt, the mortar they used to 'glue' bricks or stones together was usually a mixture of mud/clay and also cooked Gypsum. At 100°C (the temperature of boiling water) the semi hard rock called Gypsum (calcium sulphate) loses water and becomes a white powder which when remixed with water, sets semi-hard again. Today we know this powder as plaster of Paris. It was not until many centuries after Moses times the Romans perfected what we call cement mortar, made by cooking limestone (calcium carbonate) to around 800°C. Whilst Egyptians were familiar with bitumen, and are on record as later using it in mummification, (the word 'mummy' is from the Arab word *mum* meaning 'bitumen'), yet nobody in Egypt is recorded as using bitumen to glue building blocks together. Hence the use of bitumen is also an oddity worth recording for readers unused to such a practice, and can explain the need to include the phrase 'they used slime (bitumen/asphalt)' for mortar. Even today 'slime pits' are common in the region of Ancient Babylon, and you can still extract 'bitumen' from them.

So, now we know that whoever wrote Genesis could both read and write, was familiar with Egyptian building technology and the limitations of Israelite knowledge, and had access to ancient records of a time and location that existed before the founding of Egypt. This author was well educated, pro-Israelite, and an Israelite themselves.

So, is there any evidence that person was 'trained' in Egypt as the both the Old and New Testaments record of Moses? For more information see Part 2 below.

## Part 2: Evidence from the name Shinar

### Answer by John Mackay and John Osgood

In Genesis 11:1-2 we read; 'And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.' The next portion of this chapter informs us Shinar is the region where the Tower of Babel was built. (Genesis 11:1-5)

Today's archaeologists and ancient historians would regard the whole region as ancient Sumer which is known to many Bible readers as Babylonia.

The scriptures itself makes this link when the prophet Daniel identifies Shinar as Babylon (Daniel 1:1-2)

Why the different names for the same location? And what does it have to do with Moses as the author of Genesis?

The answer surprisingly provides a key evidence in support of Old and New Testament claims that Moses compiled Genesis, and had been brought up and well educated in Egypt.

The origin of some of these place names is helpful. Mesopotamian scholar Arno Poebel<sup>1</sup> suggested many years ago that the name Sumer is derived came from the name of Noah's son SHEM. Noah would have been alive when Babel was built and Shem also. Poebel's suggestion found later support from the greatest Sumerologist Samuel Noah Kramer<sup>2</sup>. Yet both met only stony silence from academic peers to their claim. More recently David Rohl<sup>3</sup> (Egyptologist) has added his voice in favour of this same thought.

The argument is to do with what happens to sounds when you transfer names from one language to another. Easy to follow in the present with Hebrew names like Yohann becoming Yan (Dutch), becoming Ian (Gaelic), as it crossed language barriers. But not so easy to follow name changes thousands of years ago. Linguists tell us that in Ancient Sumerian, the Semitics often changed the 'u/e' sound. Thus, Shem would have been pronounced Shum.

In addition, many present-day languages with words that end with an M sound, come via lips that can rarely manage to stay shut after the M sound is finished, so a small A sound and often an even smaller r sound escapes (try it - mum moves to mum-Ar). If you like technicalities, such an Ma sound is called an amissable consonant. The end result was that Shem became ShemAr until the e vowel sound slides towards u, and the word morphs again to Shumer whence like the proverbial English who drop their 'aitches', Shumer finally becomes Sumer – still meaning the land of Shem.

To show that such name changes are more norm than exception consider the UK capital London, which started as best we can find as the very BC Gaelic town Caer Ludein (after king Lud who was allegedly buried at Ludgate), then via the Roman's Londinium, ( 40BC) thence to Anglo Saxon Ludenwic, then a rebuilt defensive wall made it Lundenburh and finally to the more modern present day name of London by the time the Normans invaded - 1066 and all that.

We now have a fairly good idea as to how Shem also became Shinar thanks to people such as Howard Carter (who discovered Tutankhamen's tomb) who points out in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (JEA vol 1X p1- 4 1923), that the ancient Egyptian pronunciation of Sumer was 'Sinear'. In addition, we should note that the Septuagint Bible, a Greek

translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) done in Alexandria Egypt in the third century BC, makes the Shinar of Genesis 11 into the Greek word 'Senaar'. And what happened next is still with us in the way many languages deal with S, pronouncing it as 'Sh' e.g. the English sounding of Moses vs the Hebrew pronunciation Moshe, or in Czech where Milos is pronounced Milosh. It was then an obvious and easy step the to read Shinar from Senaar when the Bible text was translated into English.

By now it should also be obvious, the writer of Genesis actually recorded the then current Egyptian geographic name 'Sinear' (Shinar) for the area we now call Babylonia aka Sumer. This makes him a man familiar with the educated Egyptian language prior to 300BC. And in the days before the Internet or freely available translations of Egyptian Hieroglyphics, the simple uneducated Jew in the wilds of Palestine, who was not involved in the international politics would have had had no access to such educated Egyptian terminology from a country to the southwest of him, about an unknown region way to the east of him. So, as the New Testament writer and Greek physician Luke accurately records, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." (See Stephen's speech, Acts 7:22)

So not only does this word Shinar point to Moses, when we tie it to the use of excluding words such as 'gentile', and phrases such as 'brick instead of stone and slime for mortar' we have virtually eliminated anybody else as the source of the written version of Genesis.

#### References

1. Arno Poebel (American Journal of Semitic Languages-vol 58[1941], pp20-26)
2. Samuel Noah Kramer ('The Sumerians'-1963-Chicago-p298)
3. David Rohl ('Legend'-Century Publications-1998-pp 134-135)

#### Additional Scripture references to Shinar:

Gen 10:10 Shinar equated to the kingdom of Nimrod

Genesis 14:1 In Abraham's time, 'And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar'.

So, can the known writings of Moses help us any further? For more information see Part 3 below.

## Part 3: Evidence from Psalm 90

### Answer by John Mackay

There is more evidence concerning Moses's authorship of Genesis that we can consider! The Hebrew Scriptures have always included an introduction to Psalm 90 advising us that Moses is the author. The contents of this Psalm are most revealing. As the one thing we can conclude from Psalm 90 is that Moses had access to and direct knowledge of the contents of Genesis through Deuteronomy in the order we still have them. The Psalm begins with Creation and the Creator v1 and 2, (cross reference Genesis chapters 1 and 2). Then sin and judgement (Genesis chapter 3) are referred to when we are reminded that God's judgement is death and returning to dust (v3). Next the Psalm moves on to mention times spans of 1,000 years (v4), which less than coincidentally is similar to the vast life spans of people in Genesis chapters 1 to 6, of up to 969 years.

It then hinges around the term 'flood' (v5) and passes onto mankind's shorter lifespan post Noah's flood, and post Exodus, where unless the Lord strengthens your body or lengthens your days, you last a maximum of 70 - 80 years (v10). That by the way was the upper age limit that could be expected for the rebellious adults who had left Egypt and had been judged by God to wander 40 years until they died. Moses is a good example of the exception, in living to age 120 with a still strong body and good eyes (Deuteronomy 34:7). At which point God took his life on Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34: 5-6), just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

Note that all the literary clues in the Psalm tell us it was written after the Israelites left Egypt (Exodus chapter 14) and before Moses died at 120 years old (Deuteronomy chapter 34). Coincidentally the last time we saw a reference to man's days being 120 years was in Genesis 6:3, spoken to Noah, pre-flood.

All of which forms a good background for Moses to make the key point that whether our life span was 1,000 years pre flood, or as low as 70 or 80 years post Exodus, or even his own extraordinary 120 years, compared to the Eternal Creator our days are so few. Therefore every one of us needs to be careful with what we do with the time the Lord God gives us. And all of this only adds to the case that Moses was not only the recorded author of Psalm 90, but also the author of Genesis.

In addition, this Psalm has great use in defeating people who want to make the days of creation vast ages. See the questions:

DAYS: The New Testament says "a day is as a thousand years" to God. Why can't Genesis days be long times? Answer [here](#).

DAYS: Peter says a day is like a thousand years. How can you insist Genesis days are 24 hours? Answer [here](#).

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