

What happened to the dinosaurs? How did all the animals fit in the ark?

There may be many questions like these bubbling around in your head which you'd love to have answers to. But if we read Genesis with the idea that we will be able to find out the answers to all our questions we will end up missing what Genesis is really about!

"I like the one about Adam and Eve eating the juicy apple"

We will also miss the point of Genesis if we think that it is just a story book for children. It's true that the stories that we find in Genesis are some of the most interesting and easy to read parts of the Bible. But Genesis is much more than a story book.

How then should we read Genesis?

The starting point must be to ask the question "Who wrote the book, and why did they write it?"

Moses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote Genesis to Deuteronomy to teach and remind the generation of God's people that were about to enter the Promised Land some key truths. The Promised Land was God's place – it was the place that he had chosen for his people to live, and it was important that they knew how he wanted them to. This is what is found in these first five books of the Bible.

Three important things that God's people needed to know were who God is, who they were and what God's purpose for them was. These questions we find answered in Genesis...

Who God is?

The Israelites had been living as slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years and would have heard all sorts of stories about their gods and the Egyptian history of the world. They would have met other nations during the time they spent wandering between Egypt and the Promised Land, and the ideas these people had about god may have crept into their thinking. They also knew about their God, the God who chose Abraham and had rescued them from slavery and brought to the edge of the Promised Land. Moses needed to make sure that entering God's place they knew who God was. That the God who had made a promise to Abraham; was the same God who created the world – the only God.

Who they were?

The Israelites needed to know about themselves. They needed to know how they ended up as slaves in Egypt outside God's place and presence. Maybe they had heard rumours about a time when God lived with his people in a perfect relationship in a mysterious place called the Garden of Eden. They needed to know what Adam and Eve did to change this. They needed to know why their parent's generation was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Ultimately, they needed to know that they were sinners.

What was God's purpose for them?

And finally they needed to know what God's purpose for them was. They needed to know how to live in God's place as his people under his rule and blessing. They needed to know that God's purpose was for them to share in His rest – to enjoy life in relationship with Him.

Beginning with Genesis Moses wrote down these words to teach God's people who were about to enter God's place, the Promised Land about these three things so that they knew how to live under his rule and enjoy his blessing, so that when he was gone they would have a lasting reminder of God's Word to them.

Moses carefully selected material beginning with the creation of the world in Genesis 1 and ending with the Israelites in Egypt in Genesis 50 and orders it into ten sections which each begin with the "these are the generations of..." In these ten sections we find stories and family histories which teach us about the beginning of the world, the beginning of the human race and the beginning of the nation of Israel arranged to teach the Israelites about God, themselves and God's purposes for them.

The question of how God's people should live in God's place still applies today. That's the theme of the whole Bible. What we read in Genesis 1-2 about Adam and Eve (God's people) living in the Garden of Eden (God's place) under his rule and blessing is life as it was designed to be lived. What we read in Revelation 21-22 is about this ideal way of living being restored. And in between these chapters we have the details of what went wrong and how it is to be put right. Genesis is part of the Bible, God's instructions for us about how we are to live on earth, and our obedience to God's Word demonstrates God's rule in our life. God's people do experience His blessing in this life, but ultimately the blessing is spending eternity in God's intimate presence in a new creation where all the messed up things of this world are gone.