



Genesis: A Living Conversation (PBS Series)

Bill Moyers , Betty Sue Flowers (Editor) , Judith Davidson Moyers (Editor) , Elizabeth Meryman-Brunner

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People need stories to make sense of the world--to hold their lives together, and to fasten on to those values that last. The greatest stories are found in the Bible, enduring through the centuries. In "Genesis, " acclaimed television journalist Bill Moyers brings together some of the world's liveliest minds for spirited round-table discussions of the ageless stories from the Bible's first, towering book. Creation, temptation, murder, exile, and family strife--these emerge from every page of Genesis and speak to us today. "Genesis" invites readers into a lively and accessible discussion of the manifold meanings of these stories, and engages us in a fascinating exploration of the relationship between interpreter and text. Among the scores of writers, theologians, artists, and thinkers in the series are Mary Gordon, Phyllis Tribble, John Barth, Faye Kellerman, Samuel Proctor, Aviva Zornberg, Walter Brueggemann, Robert Alter, Oscar Hijuelos, Charles Johnson, Stephen Mitchell, Leon Kass, Elaine Pagels, Bharati Mukherjee, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Elizabeth Swados, Renita Weems--all in a dazzling, multi-layered chorus of voices.

With the same interplay of text, photographs, and art that made "The Power of Myth" and "Healing and the Mind" so dynamic and unforgettable, "Genesis" has the capacity to enrich people's lives intellectually and spiritually.

Genesis: A Living Conversation (PBS Series) Details

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From Reader Review Genesis: A Living Conversation (PBS Series) for online ebook

John Martindale says

I enjoyed these interfaith dialogs on stories found in Genesis, it was interesting to hear how people from non-evangelical backgrounds interpret and react to the ancient stories.

Igrann32257 says

A conversation among a diverse group of people from the arts, science, religion, and other areas.

This book was enlightening on two levels. The first was the stated subject matter, the Book of Genesis. The second level is that it shows what can be accomplished by a group of people of all walks and beliefs, when they agree to discuss without judgment.

Lisa says

I thought this would be more engrossing than it was. I thought I would come away with more profound insights than I did. In all fairness I may have been too distracted by trying to keep track of who was saying what to focus on the 'conversation' as a whole.

Jeff Wise says

This book is a companion to the PBS series Moyers made back in 1999 I believe. I've not seen the PBS series and the book is essentially a transcription of the conversations and seems to stand alone nicely though I'd definitely be interested in watching the series to get a better feel for how the dialogue flowed.

The book takes the stories of Genesis and engages a group of folks from Christianity, Judaism and Islam to discuss the themes and meanings within those stories. It was a fascinating read from start to finish.

John Ferreira says

I had this book on my shelf for years. Inspired by a Steve Berry book that I just read which takes place in the Vatican, I decided to finally read this one. Interesting perspectives. Food for thought. Went out and bought a Bible to read some time in the future.

Jay says

It took liberal journalist Bill Moyers five years to raise the funds to produce this book, which is a collection of edited transcripts of scholars and artists sitting around a table, discussing various episodes from the Bible's book of Genesis. I've attended church most of my life but never heard these topics delved into to the depth in which they are discussed in this book. The participants raise many issues or point out details that had never occurred to me, making this a fascinating analysis of a number of topics relevant to modern people and our current morals. Some of my favorite quotes or observations are:

"...When God create[d] the Sabbath, it's not a place, it's a structure, 'a cathedral in time.'"

"Of all the creatures, only man was not created by the word of God, but rather by the hands of God."

"The human being is the shadow that God casts in the world. One of the primary functions of shadows is to say something about the reality of what is casting a shadow. Once you have a shadow, then you know that the object that's casting the shadow is substantial, is real."

"To keep a balance in our lives, everyone should have two pieces of paper. On one piece of paper is written, 'I am but dust and ashes.' When you need to be reminded of that, you can take it out and read it. But on the other piece of paper, for your low moments, is the reminder '*Bishvili Nivra haslam*'--'For my sake, the universe was created.'"

These and many of my other favorite passages in the book come from the rabbinic interpretations of Genesis that have been formulated and refined over the centuries. Others come from Islamic scholars who present alternate views of Biblical events from the Koran, such as traditions about Esau and Ishmael that are missing from the Hebrew texts.

Unfortunately, many of the participants in the discussions seem to not have read the text very carefully, or display a woeful lack of understanding of accepted theological principles. The chapter on Cain and Abel, for example, is badly marred by a number of the panelists who accuse God of capriciously accepting Abel's sacrifice and rejecting Cain's, leading to the latter's murder of the former. They seem ignorant of the well-known principle that only blood can atone for sin, and therefore Abel's animal sacrifice met the criterion and Cain's offering of vegetables did not. He failed to obey the rules and that's why God rejected his offering, not because He didn't like him. Therefore many of the conclusions the panelists draw from this episode are plain wrong, such as the assumption that Cain came up with the idea of offering sacrifices to God rather than God commanding it. It's unfortunate that neither Moyers nor the other panelists ever try to correct such absurdities.

Perhaps the worst chapter is the last, focusing on Joseph and his exile and exaltation in Egypt. Two of the panelists are rabid feminists (one is an ex-nun) who clearly hate men and every manifestation of anything male, and they steadfastly refuse to see anything but misogyny in the story, despite the urging of their co-conversationalists to move beyond their rigid orthodoxy and see the bigger, or at least a different, picture. One of them says "It's a terribly patriarchal story and has no resonance with those of us who are not males." It takes real effort to keep your head buried in your own narrow ideology and not find some lesson you can take to heart. This same harridan goes on to insult the other panelists by saying "It's clear from this conversation that very few people here are at the level of seeing the misogyny in the story." How pompous and condescending! How insulting to the accomplished scholars across the table. It was all I could do to finish reading that chapter.

Sadly, every chapter includes comments by at least one participant who wants to blame God for the bad things happening to the people in the story, or who wants to ascribe human failings to God. The result is that, at the end of each chapter, God is diminished and faith is eroded. when you finally close the book, you can't help but feel that the whole exercise of holding these panels, and transcribing them, was intended to do just that, despite the occasional useful nuggets and insights that the book presents. This idea is reinforced by the final comment in the penultimate chapter on Jacob, by Moyers himself, that "worship, on public television, may be unconstitutional." A sadly predictable (and willful) misinterpretation of the First Amendment by a liberal journalist who has done much to help erase the presence of God from public life in America.

The says

For over 36 years I have facilitated 3-4 weekly groups that come together to do what Moyers and his companions did for the book of Genesis. Our discussions go deep and wide. The hunger to probe the readings that we will hear on the coming weekend worship service remains strong. I never imagined that what was to be a six week experience for Lent back in 1980 would generate this exploration. I think more people would appreciate such gatherings. Take a look at this book and see if you might be one of them.

Tony Taylor says

In all honesty, when I first tuned into Genesis the PBS series, I wasn't really in the mood to hear a cabal of hyper-intellectual critics enlighten me with their interpretations of an already widely familiar religious text. Within seconds of watching, however, I was completely engrossed in a conversation unlike any I'd experienced before--lively, intelligent, generous, illuminating, exciting. If you didn't catch the series, or even if you did and you still want more, pick up this book. It expands in places where the program had to be cut and is just as riveting. The commentary and the "already familiar text" prove as multidimensional and visceral as life itself.

Rick Barnes says

A great discussion that attempts to unravels the mysteries, absurdities and contradictions of the first book of the Bible. Definitely worth the read whether you believe these stories to be the word of God, historical writings by witnesses, parables by who knows whom, or pure nonsense... just because. But then, I like just about anything that involves Bill Moyers, with the obvious exception of The Viet Nam War...I'm sorry...Conflict!

Janet Eshenroder says

When you get together leaders in the field of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religion, literary professors, artists and writers, the discussions on stories of Genesis bring up fascinating ideas and concepts. I especially liked the respect for different understands, the encouragement of seeing a story from many different

viewpoints.

Maitri says

Super interesting and worth forming into a book club and re-reading

Mckinley says

While the segments cover interesting topics, I didn't find the conversations particularly insightful or even all that interesting. It wasn't clear why the panel members were picked or who they even are. Too many times I found myself shaking my head at things being said. A bunch of people sitting around voicing their opinions without the reader having any reason to have any confidence in what they were saying. It reminded me of a poorly run Western Civilization 101: Bible as Literature college course. Disappointing.

Christopher Kanas says

A few Muslims, Jews, and Christians (among other faith backgrounds) walk into a theological discussion and talk about some of the most well know Biblical stories man has wrestled over for centuries.....and everyone is cordial and gets along.

Great book. I picked it up on a whim at a used book store since I've always been a fan of Bill Moyers. Wasn't sure what to expect but what I found was some great insights by some very smart people. Even as a Christian I have always appreciated a lot of Jewish perspective, and there is some very profound discussion and points made by both Jewish and Islamic apologists. Ranging from the creation of the world through the story of Joseph, all the major themes in Genesis are brought forth and I found discovery in many areas that I felt I already knew. Not all opinions in a group like this I agreed with, but nonetheless, you do get a greater understanding of how the different Abrahamic faiths interpret these stories.

Certainly for fans of Biblical studies, world religions, religion and philosophy.

Adele says

"Justice is simultaneously absolutely essential and impossible, and [this] moment at which the child, however narcissistically motivated, cries out, 'It's not fair' is a very important human moment. And yet, as Hamlet says, if we were all treated after our deserts, who would escape whipping? None of us really wants a world where justice is triumphant over mercy. So I think the great and most beautiful mysterious moment is when God says, 'Okay, it's about mercy now.' It's not about behavior anymore, it's about something else, and that something else is not in the text. It is very mysterious. It is only mercy beyond understanding that stops bloodshed."

- author Mary Gordon on the story of Cain and Abel

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I started flipping through this book--a collection of transcribed conversations between a variety of thinkers/authors/cultural critics on the Book of Genesis--during a long road trip yesterday. It's a companion piece to a well-known 1996 PBS series that I have yet to see, yet worth reading for its own merit, I think. The chapter on Cain and Abel is the highlight so far, and happens to come at a time when my mind is swarming with thoughts of God's mercy and justice in specific relation to acts of violence. (How can you read a quote like that above and not want to wrangle such a topic, whether through the vicarious 'conversation' of a book like this or through real-life dialogues with friends/family members/church colleagues?) Also, I am now setting out to read more of Mary Gordon's work, fiction and non-fiction, as I have read but a few of her anthologized short stories.

Yaaresse says

Standard "I read this, but damned if I can remember exactly when or why or enough about it to make detail comments" disclaimer:

My rating is based solely on my memory of how much or little I enjoyed the book at that time. In some cases, "at that time" might mean before most Goodreads users were born. Then again, it could mean a couple years ago and that I have a lousy memory.

Your mileage may vary. Heck, given how all our tastes change over the years and the fickle nature of memory, my own mileage might vary if I re-read it today.
