

Genesis: The Book of Beginnings An Overview

TITLE: Nearly the entire Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, and Genesis is no exception. The original Hebrew title of Genesis is *bereshit*, which means “in beginning” (see 1:1a). This is an appropriate title, for the book of beginnings. But our English Bibles do not follow the Hebrew title; we follow the Greek title.

The Hebrew Old Testament was eventually translated into Greek (about 250 years before the time of Christ). The Greek translators then gave their own title, “Genesis” to the first book of their Old Testament text. The Greek word *geneseos* means “origin, source, generation, or beginning.” *Geneseos* is a translation of the Hebrew word *toledot* (“generations,” 2:4). This title is also quite appropriate because Genesis is indeed a history of origins, births, genealogies, and generations.

AUTHOR: Although Genesis does not directly name its author; Jesus and the writers of Scripture clearly believed that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, also called “the Law”; see Exod 17:14; Deut 31:24; 1 Kgs 2:3; Ezra 6:18; Neh 13:1; Dan 9:11-13; Mal 4:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:29; John 1:17; 5:44-47; 7:19, 23; Acts 26:22; Rom 10:5; 2 Cor 3:15, etc.). Luke reminds us that Moses was trained in the “wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22). In God’s sovereignty, Moses had been prepared to integrate and understand all the available records, manuscripts, and oral narratives with which he penned the Pentateuch. There was no more prepared or qualified man to take on this immense task of writing Israel’s history.

DATE/SETTING: Genesis spans more time than any other book in the Bible. In fact, it covers more than all 65 books of the Bible put together (approximately 2400 years). The total duration is from the time of creation (?) to the time when the Israelites arrived in Egypt and grew into a nation (about 1800 B.C.). The date of Genesis is sometime after the Exodus during the 15th century B.C.

The setting of Genesis divides neatly into three geographical areas: (1) The Fertile Crescent, 1-11; (2) Israel, 12-36; and (3) Egypt, 37-50. The setting of the first eleven chapters changes rapidly and it spans more than 2000 years and 1500 miles. The middle section of Genesis spans about 200 years and moves from the Fertile Crescent to the land of Canaan. The final setting in Genesis is found in Egypt where God transports the “seventy souls.”

AUDIENCE: Since the book announces that all peoples of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (12:3), it seems fair to conclude that all people can benefit from the Genesis account.

PURPOSE: To reveal how the sin of man is met by the intervention and redemption of God.

THEME: God’s choice of a nation through whom He would bless all nations.

KEY WORDS: beginning(s) and blessing(s).

KEY PHRASE: “...and in you all the nations of the earth be blessed” (six times).

KEY VERSES: Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Genesis 12:1-3: “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

KEY NOTE: Genesis is quoted from over 200 times in the New Testament. In fact chapters 1-11 is quoted more than 100 times in the New Testament. It's not just mentioned but you'll find it being quoted word for word over 165 in the New Testament.

KEY LESSON: God created us for blessings and chose us to be a blessing to the world.

CHRIST IN GENESIS: Genesis moves from general to specific in its Messianic prophecies: Christ is the Seed of woman (3:15), from the line of Seth (4:25), the son of Shem (9:27), the descendant of Abraham (12:3), of Isaac (21:12), of Jacob (25:23), and of the tribe of Judah (49:10).

Christ is also seen in people and events that serve as types (a “type” is a historical fact that illustrates a spiritual truth). Adam is “a type of Him who is to come” (Rom 5:14). Both entered the world through a special act of God as sinless men. Adam is the head of the old creation; Christ is the Head of the new creation. Abel's acceptable offering of a blood sacrifice points to Christ, and there is a parallel in his murder by Cain. Melchizedek (“righteous king”) is “made like the Son of God” (Heb 7:3). He is the King of Salem (“peace”) who brings forth bread and wine and is the priest of the Most High God. Joseph is also a type of Christ. Joseph and Christ are both objects of special love by their Fathers, both are hated by their brethren, both are rejected as rulers over their brethren, both are conspired against and sold for silver, both are condemned though innocent, and both are raised from humiliation to glory by the power of God.

STRUCTURE: The literary structure of Genesis is clear and is built around eleven separate units, each headed with the word “generations” in the phrase “These are the generations” or “The book of the generations”:

1. Introduction the Generations, 1:1-2:3
2. Heaven and Earth, 2:4-4:26
3. Adam, 5:1-6:8
4. Noah, 6:9-9:29
5. Sons of Noah, 10:1-11:9
6. Shem, 11:10-26
7. Terah, 11:27-25:11
8. Ishmael, 25:12-18
9. Isaac, 25:19-35:29
10. Esau, 36:1-37:1
11. Jacob, 37:2-50:26.

NUTSHELL OUTLINE:

1. The Origin of the Universe: Four Great Events (Genesis 1-11)
 1. Creation (Genesis 1-2)
 2. Fall (Genesis 3-5)
 3. Flood (Genesis 6-9)
 4. Confusion of Tongues (Genesis 10-11)

2. The Origin of the Hebrew Nation: Four Great Men (Genesis 12-50)
 - A. Abraham (Genesis 12-24)
 - B. Isaac (Genesis 25-26)
 - C. Jacob (Genesis 27-36)
 - D. Joseph (Genesis 37-50)

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