

Genesis

Scripture: Genesis

Code: MSB01

Title

The English title, Genesis, comes from the Greek translation (Septuagint, LXX)¹ meaning “origins”; whereas, the Hebrew title is derived from the Bible’s very first word, translated “in the beginning.” Genesis serves to introduce the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the OT) and the entire Bible. The influence of Genesis in Scripture is demonstrated by its being quoted over 35 times in the NT and hundreds of allusions appearing in both Testaments. The story line of salvation which begins in Gen. 3 is not completed until Rev. 21, 22 where the eternal kingdom of redeemed believers is gloriously pictured.

Author and Date

While 1) the author does not identify himself in Genesis and 2) Genesis ends almost 3 centuries before Moses was born, both the OT (Ex. 17:14; Num. 33:2; Josh. 8:31; 1 Kin. 2:3; 2 Kin. 14:6; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Dan. 9:11, 13; Mal. 4:4) and the NT (Matt. 8:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:29; 24:27, 44; John 5:46; 7:22; Acts 15:1; Rom. 10:19; 1 Cor. 9:9; 2 Cor. 3:15) ascribe this composition to Moses, who is the fitting author in light of his educational background (cf. Acts 7:22). No compelling reasons have been forthcoming to challenge Mosaic authorship. Genesis was written after the Exodus (ca. 1445 B.C.), but before Moses’ death (ca. 1405 B.C.). For a brief biographical sketch of Moses read Ex. 1–6.

Background and Setting

The initial setting for Genesis is eternity past. God then, by willful act and divine Word, spoke all creation into existence, furnished it, and finally breathed life into a lump of dirt which He fashioned in His image to become Adam. God made mankind the crowning point of His creation, i.e., His companions who would enjoy fellowship with Him and bring glory to His name. The historical background for the early events in Genesis is clearly Mesopotamian. While it is difficult to pinpoint precisely the historical moment for which this book was written, Israel first heard Genesis sometime prior to crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land (ca. 1405 B.C.). Genesis has 3 distinct, sequential geographical settings: 1) Mesopotamia (chaps. 1–11); 2) the Promised Land (chaps. 12–36); and 3) Egypt (chaps. 37–50). The time frames of these 3 segments are: 1) Creation to ca. 2090 B.C.; 2) 2090–1897 B.C.; and 3) 1897–1804 B.C. Genesis covers more time than the

remaining books of the Bible combined.

Historical and Theological Themes

In this book of beginnings, God revealed Himself and a worldview to Israel which contrasted, at times sharply, with the worldview of Israel's neighbors. The author made no attempt to defend the existence of God or to present a systematic discussion of His person and works. Rather, Israel's God distinguished Himself clearly from the alleged gods of her neighbors. Theological foundations are revealed which include God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, man, sin, redemption, covenant, promise, Satan and angels, kingdom, revelation, Israel, judgment, and blessing.

Genesis 1–11 (primeval history) reveals the origins of the universe, i.e., the beginnings of time and space and many of the firsts in human experience, such as marriage, family, the Fall, sin, redemption, judgment, and nations. Genesis 12–50 (patriarchal history) explained to Israel how they came into existence as a family whose ancestry could be traced to Eber (hence the "Hebrews"; Gen. 10:24, 25) and even more remotely to Shem, the son of Noah (hence the "Semites"; Gen. 10:21). God's people came to understand not only their ancestry and family history, but also the origins of their institutions, customs, languages, and different cultures, especially basic human experiences such as sin and death.

Because they were preparing to enter Canaan and dispossess the Canaanite inhabitants of their homes and properties, God revealed their enemies' background. In addition, they needed to understand the actual basis of the war they were about to declare in light of the immorality of killing, consistent with the other 4 books that Moses was writing (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Ultimately, the Jewish nation would understand a selected portion of preceding world history and the inaugural background of Israel as a basis by which they would live in their new beginnings under Joshua's leadership in the land which had previously been promised to their original patriarchal forefather, Abraham.

Genesis 12:1–3 established a primary focus on God's promises to Abraham. This narrowed their view from the entire world of peoples in Gen. 1–11 to one small nation, Israel, through whom God would progressively accomplish His redemptive plan. This underscored Israel's mission to be "a light to the Gentiles" (Is. 42:6). God promised land, descendants (seed), and blessing. This 3-fold promise became, in turn, the basis of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:1–20). The rest of Scripture bears out the fulfillment of these promises.

On a larger scale, Gen. 1–11 set forth a singular message about the character and works of God. In the sequence of accounts which make up these chapters of Scripture, a pattern emerges which reveals God's abundant grace as He responded to the willful disobedience of mankind. Without exception, in each account God increased the manifestation of His grace. But also without exception,

man responded in greater sinful rebellion. In biblical words, the more sin abounded the more did God's grace abound (cf. Rom. 5:20).

One final theme of both theological and historical significance sets Genesis apart from other books of Scripture, in that the first book of Scripture corresponds closely with the final book. In the book of Revelation, the paradise which was lost in Genesis will be regained. The apostle John clearly presented the events recorded in his book as future resolutions to the problems which began as a result of the curse in Gen. 3. His focus is upon the effects of the Fall in the undoing of creation and the manner in which God rids His creation of the curse effect. In John's own words, "And there shall be no more curse" (Rev. 22:3). Not surprisingly, in the final chapter of God's Word, believers will find themselves back in the Garden of Eden, the eternal paradise of God, eating from the tree of life (Rev. 22:1–14). At that time, they will partake, wearing robes washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 22:14).

Interpretive Challenges

Grasping the individual messages of Genesis which make up the larger plan and purpose of the book presents no small challenge since both the individual accounts and the book's overall message offer important lessons to faith and works. Genesis presents creation by divine fiat, *ex nihilo*, i.e., "out of nothing." Three traumatic events of epic proportions, namely the Fall, the universal Flood, and the Dispersion of nations are presented as historical backdrop in order to understand world history. From Abraham on, the pattern is to focus on God's redemption and blessing. The customs of Genesis often differ considerably from those of our modern day. They must be explained against their ancient Near Eastern background. Each custom must be treated according to the immediate context of the passage before any attempt is made to explain it based on customs recorded in extrabiblical sources or even elsewhere in Scripture.

1. LXX Septuagint—an ancient translation of the Old Testament into Greek.

Outline

Genesis by content is comprised of two basic sections: 1) Primitive history (Gen. 1–11) and 2) Patriarchal history (Gen. 12–50). Primitive history records 4 major events: 1) Creation (Gen. 1, 2); 2) the Fall (Gen. 3–5); 3) the Flood (Gen. 6–9); and 4) the Dispersion (Gen. 10, 11). Patriarchal history spotlights 4 great men: 1) Abraham (Gen. 12:1–25:8); 2) Isaac (Gen. 21:1–35:29); 3) Jacob (Gen. 25:21–50:14); and 4) Joseph (Gen. 30:22–50:26).

The literary structure of Genesis is built on the frequently recurring phrase "the history/genealogy of" and is the basis for the following outline:

I. The Creation of Heaven and Earth (1:1–2:3)

II. The Generations of the Heavens and the Earth (2:4–4:26)

A. Adam and Eve in Eden (2:4–25)

B. The Fall and Its Outcomes (chap. 3)

C. Murder of a Brother (4:1–24)

D. Hope in the Descendants of Seth (4:25, 26)

III. The Generations of Adam (5:1–6:8)

A. Genealogy—Seth to Noah (chap. 5)

B. Rampant Sin Prior to the Flood (6:1–8)

IV. The Generations of Noah (6:9–9:29)

A. Preparation for the Flood (6:9–7:9)

B. The Flood and Deliverance (7:10–8:19)

C. God's Noahic Covenant (8:20–9:17)

D. The History of Noah's Descendants (9:18–29)

V. The Generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1–11:9)

A. The Nations (chap. 10)

B. Dispersion of the Nations (11:1–9)

VI. The Generations of Shem: Genealogy of Shem to Terah (11:10–26)

VII. The Generations of Terah (11:27–25:11)

A. Genealogy (11:27–32)

B. The Abrahamic Covenant: His Land and People (12:1–22:19)

1. Journey to the Promised Land (12:1–9)
2. Redemption from Egypt (12:10–20)
3. Division of the land (chap. 13)
4. Victory over the kings (chap. 14)
5. The covenant ratified (chap. 15)
6. Rejection of Hagar and Ishmael (chap. 16)
7. The covenant confirmed (chap. 17)
8. Birth of Isaac foretold (18:1–15)
9. Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16–19:38)
10. Philistine encounter (chap. 20)
11. Isaac's birth (chap. 21)
12. Abraham's act of faith with Isaac (22:1–19)

C. Abraham's Promised Seed (22:20–25:11)

1. Rebekah's background (22:20–24)
2. Death of Sarah (chap. 23)
3. Isaac's marriage to Rebekah (chap. 24)
4. Isaac the only heir (25:1–6)
5. Death of Abraham (25:7–11)

VIII. The Generations of Ishmael (25:12–18)

IX. The Generations of Isaac (25:19–35:29)

A. Competition Between Esau and Jacob (25:19–34)

B. Covenant Blessings to Isaac (chap. 26)

C. Jacob's Deception for the Blessing (27:1–40)

D. Blessing on Jacob in a Foreign Land (27:41–32:32)

1. Jacob sent to Laban (27:41–28:9)

2. Angel at Bethel (28:10–22)

3. Disagreements with Laban (29:1–30)

4. Promised seed (29:31–30:24)

5. Departure from Aram (30:25–31:55)

6. Angels at Mahanaim and Peniel (chap. 32)

E. Esau's Reunion and Reconciliation with Jacob (33:1–17)

F. Events and Deaths from Shechem to Mamre (33:18–35:29)

X. The Generations of Esau (36:1–37:1)

XI. The Generations of Jacob (37:2–50:26)

A. Joseph's Dreams (37:2–11)

B. Family Tragedy (37:12–38:30)

C. Vice Regency over Egypt (chaps. 39–41)

D. Reunion with Family (chaps. 42–45)

E. Transition to Exodus (chaps. 46–50)

1. Journey to Egypt (46:1–27)

2. Occupation in Goshen (46:28–47:31)

3. Blessings on the twelve tribes (48:1–49:28)
4. Death and burial of Jacob in Canaan (49:29–50:14)
5. Death of Joseph in Egypt (50:15–26)

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).