

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS

Author and Date

The book of Genesis is the first book of the Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy). It gives the foundation stories of God’s relation to the world, to the patriarchs, and to Israel. The name of Moses has been closely associated with the Pentateuch. He led Israel out of Egypt and was God’s faithful servant. His ministry has been variously dated from 1500 to 1300 B.C.

Audience

Genesis narrates for Israel the story of people who walked with the Lord (Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph) to encourage their descendants to break away from their resistant and recurring hardness of heart. The author intends the reader of the Pentateuch to connect the foundation stories (exile from Eden, human wickedness, and God’s unfolding promises of grace) with Israel’s new opportunity (of entering the land, despite Israel’s rebelliousness, and through God’s unfailing faithfulness to his promises). Genesis identifies the promises and path to life that must be understood and followed in order for the people of God to fulfill their calling as it is described and prescribed in Moses’ later books (e.g., Deut. 30:19–20) and, indeed, the rest of Scripture.

The Theological Message of Genesis

Genesis opens with the Bible’s greatest claim: there is only one God, and he made the heavens and the earth. This assertion sets Genesis apart from other ancient creation stories and from all polytheistic religions. All of life’s greatest questions and purposes begin and end in God. Who he is determines who we are and why everything in the universe exists.

God’s role as Creator and mighty King is seen in Genesis 1:1–2:3. He speaks his powerful word, and the world comes into existence. Since he is their Creator, all things are his servants (cf. Ps. 119:89–91). The order of creation shows that God provides for land, animals, and people before making them. And as he makes them he assesses them, repeatedly calling them “good.” When he completes his work he rests, thereby providing an example for his creatures to follow.

Genesis then highlights that human beings are created in the image of God. God makes men and women to be his regents, stewards of his creation (Gen. 1:26–31). Unlike the animals, they bear his image: they think, speak, relate, work, rule, and assess (2:4–25). Best of all, they can know him, walk with him, and share his work. Created sinless, they need only to keep his commands for their perfect life with him to continue.

But the first man (Adam) and woman (Eve) sin. They distrust God’s motives and words and break his commands (3:1–7). They fear his

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presence (3:8-13) and incur his punishment. Sin costs them everything dear to them. The ground, their children, and their walk with God all suffer (3:16-19). They pass on sin to their children like a genetic defect (4:1-26; Rom. 5:12-21). Soon they have so marred the world that God sweeps away all but Noah's family in a great flood (Gen. 6:5-7:24).

God promises redemption. The Creator creates a way people can be saved from sin and its deadly effects. Faced with a massive problem, he begins simply and organically, with people. He promises a Savior through Eve, the first sinner (3:15). He makes a covenant with the earth and with Noah's family, pledging that life will continue and binding Noah's family to God's service (8:20-9:7).

God makes a covenant with Abraham. God chooses Abraham, Noah's descendant, and his family to bless all the world's nations (12:1-9). He says to Abraham that in him, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (12:3; cf. Gal. 3:8), and promises to give him an eternal homeland (Gen. 12:1-2, 7; 13:14-17). God protects his family in Egypt, where he prepares them to bless the world (15:13-16; 37:1-50:26).

God saves by grace through faith. God saves Noah, Abraham, their spouses, and their descendants by his grace through their faith in him (8:20; 15:6; cf. Heb. 11:1-40). They do the good works he saved them to do (Gen. 18:18-19; cf. Eph. 2:9-10) so others will come to know God. God never surrenders his kingdom or his subjects to sin. He saves those who trust him.

Jesus Christ is a descendant of Adam and Eve, Noah, and Abraham (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). He keeps all of God's promises. He holds creation together (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3), defeats sin (Rom. 3:21-31) and death (1 Cor. 15:1-58), and blesses all nations (Matt. 28:16-20). He is the only Savior (Acts 4:12), and his people are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:16-20).

Outline

- I. The Creator Is Sovereign King of the Whole World (1:1-2:3)
- II. The Creation of the Garden of Eden and the First Human Family: Adam and Eve, Their Sin, Expulsion from Eden, and Life to the East of Eden (2:4-4:26)
- III. The Family of Adam: From Adam to Noah (5:1-6:8)
- IV. The Story of Noah: His Walk with God, the Flood, the Ark, and God's Covenant (6:9-9:29)
- V. The Family of Noah: The Nations and the Tower of Babel (10:1-11:9)
- VI. The Family of Shem: From Shem to Terah (11:10-26)
- VII. The Family of Terah: Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael and God's Covenant with Abraham to the Exclusion of Ishmael (11:27-25:11)
- VIII. The Family of Ishmael (25:12-18)
- IX. The Family of Isaac: God's Promises to Isaac and Jacob and the Exclusion of Esau (25:19-35:29)
- X. The Family of Esau (36:1-43)
- XI. The Family of Jacob: The Twelve Tribes (37:1-50:26)