

The Book of Genesis

OVERVIEW: The Hebrew title, following the ancient custom of naming books by their first word(s), is *bereshith*, “in the beginning.” The title in our English Bibles comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (known as the Septuagint). It means “origin.” The book of Genesis is the second longest book of the Bible (only Jeremiah is longer). Although it is likely not the oldest book of the Bible (Job may be the oldest book), it recounts the oldest events. It was written by Moses (see Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:24; John 5:46), likely during the desert wandering, with some later editing and updating after his death. Dating the book depends largely on one’s views on the dating of the Exodus (early view = 1446 B.C., late view = 1260 B.C.). These dates provide an approximation of when Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) were written. Of course, Moses is the human author, the Holy Spirit is the originator. The Pentateuch is also known as the “Torah,” or the “Law.” It relates to us the early history of Israel, how the people came about, how they received their land, and how they came to know their God. Below are some of the main characters in the drama of Genesis.

Yahweh: God of the universe, creator of all things (seen and unseen). He makes all things “good,” and yet those things denigrate into chaos due to the effects of sin. He will restore all things to a state of perfection, and thus a plan of redemption and salvation is introduced to us in Genesis 3:15. That plan begins with the calling of a people, separated out of the nations and tied by covenant to this God.

Abram/Abraham: A seemingly common man from the land of Mesopotamia who is called to be the patriarch of God’s people. The story of Israel begins with God’s covenant with Abram (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21).

Jacob/Israel: Jacob is Abraham’s grandson (the second son of Isaac). Via his conniving and deceitfulness, he acquires the blessings of the firstborn from his brother Esau and eventually becomes the father of twelve sons whose descendants will comprise the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Joseph: The eleventh son of Jacob, and his favorite. Joseph is hated by his older brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt. He eventually rises to second in command under Pharaoh. This powerful position allows him to save his family, and thus save the people of Israel and their future Messiah.

Major Divisions of Genesis: Genesis can be separated quickly into two main parts. Part One: chapters 1-11. Part Two: chapters 12-50. However, it is better to break it down further by looking at the “*toledoth*,” or “the generations” of Genesis, which fall into ten parts:

- Gen. 2:4-6 – Book of the generations of heaven and earth
- Gen. 2:7-6:8 – Book of the generations of Adam
- Gen. 6:9-9:29 – Book of the generations of Noah

- Gen. 10:1-11:9 – Book of the generations of the sons of Noah
- Gen. 11:10-26 – Book of the generations of the sons of Shem
- Gen. 11:27-25:11 – Book of the generations of Terah
- Gen. 25:12-18 – Book of the generations of Ishmael
- Gen. 25:19-35:29 – Book of the generations of Isaac
- Gen. 36:1-37:1 – Book of the generations of Esau
- Gen. 37:2-50:26 – Book of the generations of Jacob

Key Themes in Genesis:

- **Sovereignty:** God creates, he chooses, he calls, he provides, he equips, he blesses, he curses, he establishes, he directs — and no one and no thing can change or thwart any of it.
- **Covenant:** This theme moves the story of Genesis. A covenant is an agreement that takes two or more parties and makes them one. They are generally two-sided, with agreements by both parties (although God does establish one-sided covenants). In a covenant a strong, solemn agreement is reached which changes and establishes a relationship.
- **Family Lines/Genealogies:** The “*toledoth*” mentioned above. They tell us the original stories of God’s people (and Israel’s longtime enemies). They provide the major divisions of the book.
- **Blessing:** Genesis tells us the story of God’s providence and blessing in individual lives that lead to blessings for a collective people (Israel). Earth and sea creatures, the nations of the earth, Adam & Eve, the Sabbath Day, Noah & his sons, Abraham & Sarah, Ishmael, Isaac & Rebekah, Jacob, Laban, and Potiphar receive God’s blessings. The theme of blessing (and stolen blessing) permeates one of the main storylines of the book (the life of Jacob) and the book ends with the blessings of Jacob over the sons of Israel.
- **God’s authority, human rebellion, God’s judgment and preservation of life, God as Savior and the introduction to blood sacrifice:** All these themes find their origin in Genesis and are extrapolated out through the rest of the biblical narrative.

Recommended Resources: (Pastor Jym does not subscribe to all views expressed)

- *Creation and Blessing* by Allen P. Ross
- *God Dwells Among Us* by G.K. Beale and Mitchell Kim
- *Genesis in Space and Time* by Francis Schaeffer
- *Thru the Bible (Genesis)* by J. Vernon McGee
- *The Child’s Story Bible 3 Volumes* by Catherine Vos
- *The Genesis Question* by Hugh Ross
- *God of Creation and God of Covenant* (2 separate studies) by Jen Wilkin
- *In the Beginning We Misunderstood* by Johnny V. Miller & John Soden
- *Genesis* by Bruce Waltke
- *The Genesis Record* by Henry Morris
- *Evolution 2.0* by Perry Marshall
- *Genesis Unbound* by John Sailhamer