

Pentateuch: **GENESIS**

INTRODUCTION

The book of Genesis, traditionally attributed to Moses, is the first of the five books known as the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). These foundational texts were likely written between 1440-1400 BC during Moses' leadership of Israel out of Egypt¹. Genesis sets the stage for the entire biblical narrative, introducing the origins of humanity, sin, and God's covenant relationship with His chosen people, Israel.

In Genesis, we encounter some of the most defining moments in Scripture: the creation of the world, the fall of humanity in the garden, the flood in Noah's time, the Tower of Babel, the calling of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac, the rivalry of Jacob and Esau, and the remarkable journey of Joseph. Through these stories, God's power and faithfulness, as well as His relentless pursuit of a broken and rebellious people, is revealed.

One of the major themes of Genesis is "beginnings." Genesis highlights the beginning of the world, sin, the promise of redemption through Christ (*yes, that's in Genesis*), and God's covenant with Abraham. This covenant, outlined in Genesis 12, 15, and 17, was defined by three key words: land, seed, and blessing. God promised Abraham a specific land, descendants as numerous as the stars, and that through him, all nations of the earth would be blessed.

Significantly, Genesis also teaches about salvation. In Genesis 15:6, it was written that Abraham "believed the Lord, and it was credited to him as righteousness." This verse underscored a timeless truth: salvation has always been by faith, not by works. Just as Abraham was saved by trusting in God's promises, so were all who placed their faith in God in the Old Testament.

It's also important that we understand who Jacob is. About ¾ through the book, Jacob, a descendant of Abraham, is renamed "Israel." Throughout the rest of Scripture, we'll read about the nation of Israel, and this nation came from this family. The nation of Israel was composed of 12 tribes, and each tribe's namesake was a son of Jacob/Israel.

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

When reading a children's book, you can typically expect it to start with the phrase, "Once upon a time," and then continue to unfold into a beautiful, charming story of a prince and princess living happily ever after. And although as you read, you may find trouble, problems, and confusion, you can read with confidence because you know how the story ends. The story will end with the phrase, "and they all lived happily ever after."

The book of Genesis is our "Once upon a time" in the Bible, as we begin to read God's story. The Bible is one big true story, full of smaller stories, that point to God and his rescue plan for humanity through Jesus. Genesis is where we learn about some of the key characters! The narrator clues us into the heart of the God we worship, as we get the best spoiler alert ever: for those who are faithfully loving and following this God, there will be a happily ever after: a hero is coming (Genesis 3:15)!

BOOK ORGANIZATION

GENESIS: Beginnings

4 Events (Chapters 1-11):

1. Creation (1-2)
2. Fall (3-5)
3. Flood (6-9)
4. Tower of Babel (10-11)

4 People (Chapters 12-50):

1. Abraham (12-24)
2. Isaac (25-26)
3. Jacob (27-36)
4. Joseph (37-50)

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Genesis.html>

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

The story of the Bible is the story of God's people in God's place under God's rule, and the book of Genesis introduces this concept. **Jesus's redemptive work is foreshadowed for the first time in Genesis 3:15 as he is the serpent crusher. This moment in Scripture is a catalyst for the rest of the Bible, because as we keep reading, we should be looking for more clues as to who this person is.**

As we continue throughout Genesis, more clues are given and one of them is in Genesis 14. In Genesis 14 we read of the priest-king, Melchizedek. Later, in the book of Hebrews, we learn that Jesus was a priest after the order of Melchizedek. But what does this mean for believers? Jesus is the greater Melchizedek means that He is our even better priest-king! He doesn't just make a sacrifice as our King; rather, he is the sacrifice himself.

Lastly, we read about the family line Jesus is coming from in Genesis 49:10. He comes from the lineage of Judah, Joseph's son. Genesis 49:10 says, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah..." The "scepter" that we are talking about, is a sign of kingship, and it won't depart from Judah. This means that a king will come who will rule forever. But who is the king that will reign forever? Jesus, of course!

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN STUDYING THE BOOK OF GENESIS

OBSERVATION

- When you ask what's repeated, the two key words to look for in the book of Genesis are "covenant" and "blessing."

INTERPRETATION

- Literary context: Remember the book of genesis is categorized as narrative. Pay attention to where you are in the story line.
 - As you study and seek to interpret, ask, "Which Covenant are we currently under?" Or "What covenants has God made with his people so far?" (E.g. Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic)
- Narrative context: The original author is Moses, and the intended audience is the nation of Israel. At the time this book was written, the people of Israel had fled their captivity in Egypt and were attempting to become their nation, led by God himself. The book of Genesis is intended to tell the beginning of humanity and the origins of the family tree of the nation of Israel. Who are they? Where did they come from? And how did this covenant relationship with God start? The original audience would then see their situations as permeated with God's purpose and would learn to embrace their lives as a gift from God, to be lived as he directs.²
 - Sometimes we try to answer questions the Bible is not intending to answer (i.e. The Bible is not a science textbook). As you study, make sure you're keeping the narrative and historical context in mind.
- Cultural context: What customs, practices, actions, and attitudes were common then?
 - Is this passage more prescriptive or descriptive?
 - This group of people didn't have the law, how do you think that interfered with the way they lived their lives?
 - Consult a good study Bible if you encounter a practice that is unfamiliar to you.

APPLICATION

- How can I read considering Christ? What was true then, what is true now, what is always true?
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to repent from?
- Is there a promise to cling to?
- Are these commands to follow, or descriptions of what has happened in the past?
- Is there an example to follow? Or one to avoid?
- What do I learn about the character of God?
- How might the Spirit have me live differently (depending on him) in response to what I read today?

² Crossway. (2008). *ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

- Who is one of the characters in the book that you would want to emulate? Who is someone you wouldn't?

PRAYER

- Pray for further dependence on God like the Patriarchs did.
- Pray to trust God making good what the enemy meant for evil (Genesis 50:20)
- Pray for the humility to submit to the will of God (Genesis 12:4)

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF GENESIS?

"And the evening and the morning were one day. Why does Scripture say 'one day' not 'the first day'? It is because Scripture wishes to establish a relationship with eternity" – Basil of Caesarea³, 370 AD

"In matters that are so obscure and far beyond our vision, we find in Holy Scripture passages which can be interpreted in very different ways without prejudice to the faith we have received. In such cases, we should not rush in headlong and so firmly take our stand on one side that, if further progress in the search for truth justly undermines this position, we too fall with it." – Augustine of Hippo⁴, 401 AD

"The days of creation were ordinary days in length. We must understand that these days were actual days, contrary to the opinion of the holy fathers. Whenever Moses writes, 'And it was evening and morning,' that signifies a day." – Martin Luther⁵, 1535

"Man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols." – John Calvin⁶, 1554

"If we possess the Bible without Genesis, we would have a 'house of cards' without the foundation of mortar. We cannot ensure the continuing fruit of our spiritual heritage if we do not give place to its roots." – Kenneth A. Matthews⁷, 1996



³ Basil of Caesarea. (1963). *Hexaemeron* (S. A. C. Way, Trans.). In *Saint Basil: Exegetic Homilies* (Vol. 46, pp. [specific page]). Catholic University of America Press. (Original work written ca. 370 AD).

⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, vol. 1 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 42 (Book 1, Chapter 18).

⁵ Luther, M. (1958). *Lectures on Genesis* (J. Pelikan, Ed., & G. V. Schick, Trans.). In *Luther's Works* (Vol. 1, pp. [specific page]). Concordia Publishing House. (Original work published 1535).

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), 11:4.

⁷ Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).