

The Book of Genesis

Scripture View

OVERVIEW:

The word *Genesis* means “beginning”. Not only is this the beginning of the Bible, but the beginning of all time and creation.

Genesis is commonly divided into two parts: The Primeval History (Chpts 1-11) and the Patriarchal History (Chpts 12-50).

A Closer Look at the Primeval History (1-11):

Chapters 1 & 2:4ff cover the accounts of creation. Notice that the two stories have some marked differences:

1. Chpt 1 shows creation in the following order - plants; sea creatures and birds; land animals; man and woman (together). Chpt 2's order is man; plants; land animals and birds; woman.

2. The literary style of each chapter suggest that the stories are of two different authors. Those in favor of the two-author theory point to the use of *Elohim* (God) in Chpt 1 and *YHWH Elohim* (God of Israel) in Chpt 2. Also, the written Hebrew is more grammatically correct in Chpt 2 which may also point to a second author.

In any case, both chapters point to the creation of the world by one who is greater than humanity. In essence, this is the higher TRUTH that should be kept in mind when reading the creation accounts, the whole book of Genesis, and - for that matter - the entire Bible.

Chapters 3-4 reveal the Fall of Humanity with the first sin of Adam and Eve and the ultimate sting of sin - death (in this case by the hand of Cain).

Chapter 5 reveals the first genealogy of the Bible, from Adam to Noah. Genealogies were common practice in the oral transmission of stories. It is a way to show that many years have passed before the next story is told. Notice the length of the lives of

each person from Adam to Noah? Many years of have passed which gives time for humanity to mess things up. This, of course, sets the stage for the Noah event.

Chapters 6-9 center on Noah, the Ark and the Flood, the Covenant, and sins of Noah's sons. This promise of a new beginning shows the mercy of God. The covenant with Noah is the first of many in the Bible. Abraham, Moses, and David will also enjoy a covenant with God. The covenant will be made complete with Jesus, the fulness of God revealed.

Chapters 10 through 11:26 give us more genealogies and prepare us for the call of Abraham and a new covenant. The genealogies are separated by the story of the Tower of Babel (11:1-9) which describes the continued presumption of humanity that life can be enjoyed without God.

From Abraham the Patriarch to Joseph (12-50):

The call of Abraham (Abram) actually begins with the call of Terah, his father, (11:27) from the land of Ur of the Chaldeans to Canaan. Upon reaching Haran, Terah dies and Abram takes up the call to continue toward Canaan.

In Chapters 13-14, Abram and Lot part because of their many possessions. Presumably, Abram and Lot are wealthy due to an earlier period where Pharaoh in Egypt is deceived and grants Abram flocks, slaves, camels, asses, etc (see 12:10-20). Abram settled in the land of Canaan and Lot took the Jordan Plain.

After their separation, a battle ensues and Lot is captured. Abram finds allies to do battle against the Northern kings and retrieve Lot and all of his possessions. After the battle, Abram is greeted by the mysterious Melchizedek - priest & king of Salem. Abram receives a blessing and, in turn, gives a tenth of his possessions to Melchizedek.

Chapters 15-17 show us the covenantal relationship that God has with Abraham and his descendants. Abram's faith is tested in that he does not have children through Sarai, his wife, but through Hagar her maidservant. God then offers a further covenant



with Abram with a ritual of circumcision, the giving of new names (Abraham and Sarah), and a promise that Sarah will have a son.

Chapters 18-19 tell of the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah upon the visit of three visitors (Angels or God?), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the incestuous births of Lot's sons, Moab and Ammon (ancestors to the Moabites and Ammonites).

Chapters 21-22 are a blessing and a test for Abraham. He receives Isaac (as God promised) through Sarah and later must sacrifice Isaac, his only son, to God. The Lord spares Abraham this ordeal at the last minute and rewards Abraham for his faith with descendants as numerous as the stars and sands of the seashore.

Chapters 23-25:17 cover the deaths of Sarah and Abraham and the arranged marriage of Isaac to Rebekah. The birth of Jacob and Esau to Isaac close Chapter 25 and we see the rivalry between the two sons as Jacob grips the heel of Esau on arriving from the womb. This is a prelude to Esau's selling of his birthright.

Chapter 27 continues the rivalry between Esau and Jacob. Through the intervention of Rebekah, Jacob is able to steal a blessing intended for Esau. Though this is a deceptive act, we are reminded that Esau had previously sold his blessing as a youth. Esau is ready to kill Jacob but, with Isaac's blessing, Jacob is sent to be with his uncle, Laban.

Chapter 28 reveals the dream of Jacob in Bethel on his way to Laban. The dream is a blessing of God to assure Jacob that he is chosen to receive the inheritance of Isaac, the son of Abraham and that Jacob would return to Canaan, the Promised Land. Jacob promises a tenth of his possessions to the Lord.

Chapter 29-31 cover Jacob's exile and his hardships under his uncle's guardianship. Laban deceives Jacob into consummating a marriage with his daughter Leah rather than Rachel, Jacob's true love. After some bargaining, Jacob receives Rachel as his wife as well. The two wives are envious of each other and require of Jacob various sons. At first, God shows affection for Leah because she is not loved by Jacob and so renders Rachel infertile. Leah gives Jacob four sons - Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah (the first of Jacob's twelve sons). Rachel gave her maid-servant to Jacob so (through her) Rachel would be a mother to Jacob's sons - Dan and Naphtali. Leah suddenly becomes barren and gives Jacob her maid-servant who conceives and offers two sons - Gad and Asher. Leah becomes fertile again and gives Jacob two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun, along with a daughter, Dinah. Finally, God makes Rachel fruitful, and she gives to Jacob her son, Joseph. Later, Rachel will die giving birth to Jacob's twelfth son, Benjamin (35:16-19).

In Chapter 31, Jacob flees the hardness of Laban. When Laban catches up to Jacob, they agree to make a pact and go separate ways.

Chapter 32-33 gives us the unusual story of Jacob and his wrestle with man (angel/God). As Jacob held on to the heel of Esau at birth to grab his blessing, Jacob refuses to let go of the divine until he could receive the Lord's blessing. The Lord does bless him with a new name, ISRAEL (meaning, you have contended with the divine). Later, after encountering his brother Esau and making peace, Jacob finds himself in the Land of Canaan as God had promised (28:15) and erects an altar to the God of Israel.

Chapters 34-36 shows us the journey of Israel back to Isaac his father at Hebron. The journey includes the rape of Jacob's daughter, Dinah, by Shekhem while in his territory. Dinah's brothers get revenge which forces Israel to flee. They leave any idols or images collected from their journey and go to Bethel where Jacob first had his dream. There, Israel's name is confirmed and with a blessing that he will be a father of many nations. As his family leaves Bethel, Rachel gives birth to Benjamin and dies in the process. She is buried in Bethlehem. After reaching Hebron with his twelve sons, Isaac dies and is buried by Esau and Jacob.

Chapters 37-41 tells of the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph is favored by Israel and his brothers are jealous. They devise a plan to sell him into slavery in Egypt. As a slave in Egypt, Joseph is falsely accused of attempted rape and is thrown into prison. While in prison he is blessed with interpreting dreams and is soon brought to Pharaoh. After interpreting his dreams and offering good advice, Pharaoh rewards him as his royal advisor.

Chapter 41-46 tells of the famine in the land which leads Joseph's brothers to Egypt for food relief. Joseph recognizes them and, after a series of trials and tests, reveals himself to his brothers. His brothers are overwhelmed at the presence of Joseph and how God had spared his life and given him authority in Egypt. At Joseph's request, his brothers bring Jacob to him and - at long last - father and son are reunited.

The final chapters (47-50) of Genesis give us the death of Jacob in Egypt and his burial in the Promised Land. Joseph also dies but is buried in Egypt, setting up for us the necessary literary bridge to the Book of Exodus.

