

Genesis Overview

Introduction

When I was a baby Christian, I asked one of the guys in my men's group how I should read my Bible. He said, start by reading the gospel of John, then read it all the way through from start to finish. That was very helpful advice. A comprehensive familiarity with Genesis is key to understanding the remainder of God's Word – not only because Genesis details the early history of God's chosen people Israel, but also because the stories of creation, the fall of man, and the great flood that we find in Genesis provide the framework for the overarching theme of God's Word – the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A short time after I became a Christ follower, [Ken Ham](#) of [Answers in Genesis](#) spoke one evening at our church. He proposed that unless we believe the creation stories and the story of the fall of man in Genesis 1-3, our belief in the very Gospel of Jesus is called into question. At the time, I was very skeptical of this idea. Prior to that time I believed in [Theistic Evolution](#) – the idea that the universe was indeed created by God through the event called the “Big Bang” but that since then our world has evolved under the laws of nature God put into place from the beginning. I did not believe that God takes an active role in the unfolding of His creation. I did not believe in a literal Adam and Eve who were the ancestors of all mankind.

But as I matured in my Christian life, I came to realize that if the story of the fall of man we find in Genesis 3 isn't true or is merely symbolic, then the very cross of Christ would be unnecessary and ineffective to rescue fallen mankind out of death in our sins. Because I **did** believe in the birth, sinless life as a man, sacrificial death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, ascent back to glory, and promised return of Jesus – God the Son, it logically followed that I **had** to believe the stories of the creation and the fall of man found in Genesis 1-3. Otherwise, I would have to decide for myself, what portions of the Biblical account are truly God's Word, and which parts are not. I realized that my poor mortal mind is incapable of making such a distinction.

Therefore, before we undertake our detailed study of Genesis, we need to agree that our approach will be to interpret the text literally unless the context clearly indicates otherwise, and that the entirety of the canon of scripture handed down to us is indeed God's own Word – given by Him to enable us to know Him and most importantly the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, God's intent in giving us His Word is to enable us not only to come to a saving faith in Jesus' Gospel, but also to effectively serve our fellow creatures by sharing the Gospel with them. Writing to his protégé Timothy, the apostle Paul summarized this concept correctly and succinctly.

16All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

So, agreeing on this fundamental principle, let's start our study with an overview of the major topics and themes of Genesis. The book can be broken into five major sections:

1. From the Creation and fall of man until the global flood in the time of Noah.
2. From the flood until the birth of Abram (later called Abraham).
3. The lives of Abraham and his sons Isaac and Ishmael.
4. The continued life of Isaac, and the lives of his twin sons Esau and Jacob (later called Israel) including the birth of Jacob's sons who became the progenitors of the tribes of Israel.
5. The life of Jacob's son Joseph, his rise from slavery to power in Egypt, and the start of the Israelites' sojourn and later captivity in Egypt.

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Genesis Lesson Plan

	Genesis	Subject	Cross Reference/Quote
Creation to Flood	1 2:1-3 2:4-25	Creation God Rests on the Seventh Day Creation of Man and Woman (detail)	
	3	The Fall of Man and Curse of Sin	Romans 5:12-21
	4:1-16 4:17-24 4:25-5:32	Murder of Abel by Cain Cain's Descendants Adam's Descendants Through Seth to Noah	Luke 11:51, Hebrews 11:4 & 12:24 1 Chronicles 1:1-4, Luke 3:36-38
Flood to Abam	6:1-8 6:9-8:19 8:20-9:29	Corruption of the Earth (the Nephilim) The Great Flood Covenant with Noah (rainbow)	Hebrews 11:7 1 Peter 3:20 Luke 17:26-27
	10 11:1-19 11:10-32	Descendants of Noah (table of nations) Tower of Babel Descendants of Shem to Abram	1 Chronicles 1:5-27 1 Chronicles 1:17-27, Luke 3:34-36
Abraham, Isaac, & Ishmael	12:1-9 12:10-20	Call of Abram from Ur to Canaan Abram & Saria in Egypt (lie to Pharaoh)	Acts 7:2-5
	13:1-18 14:1-16 14:17-24	Abram's Return from Egypt Abram Rescues Lot Abram Blessed by Melchizedek	Hebrews 7:1-2
	15:1-21 16:1-16	Covenant with Abram (promise of Isaac) Birth of Ishmael (Abram & Hagar)	Hebrews 11:8-10
	17:1-14 17-15-18:19	Abram Renamed Abraham (circumcision) God Reiterates Promise of Isaac	Exodus 12:43-13:2
	18:20-19:29	Destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah	Hebrews 13:2, Matthew 11:23-24, Luke 17:28-32
	19:30-38 20:1-18 21:1-7 21:8-21	Lot's Incest with His Daughters Abraham Lies to Abimelech About Sarah Birth of Isaac God Rescues Hagar & Ishmael	Hebrews 11:11 Galatians 4:21-30
	21:22-34 22:1-24	Abraham's Covenant with the Philistines God Calls Abraham to Sacrifice Isaac	Hebrews 11:17-19
	23:1-20 24:1-67 25:1-11 25:12-18	Sarah's Death Isaac Marries Rebekah Abraham's Death and Sons by Keturah Genealogy of Ishmael	1 Chronicles 1:32-33 1 Chronicles 1:29-31

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Isaac, Jacob, & Esau	25:19-28 25:29-34 26:1-33	Birth of Esau & Jacob Esau Sells His Birthright to Jacob Isaac Lives with the Philistines	Hebrews 12:16
	26:34-27:41 27:42-28:5 28:6-9	Jacob Deceives Isaac to Get Esau's Blessing Jacob Flees from Esau to Paddan-aram Esau Marries Ishmael's Daughter	Hebrews 12:17
	28:10-22 29:1-30	Jacob Dreams of Ladder to Heaven Jacob Serves Laban for Leah and Rachel	
	29:31-30:24 30:25-43	Jacob's Children Born in Padan-aram Jacob's Prosperity in Padan-aram	
	31:1-55 32:1-21 32:22-32 33:1-20	Jacob Leaves Padan-aram for Canaan Jacob Prepares to in Fear Meet Esau Jacob Wrestles with God Jacob Meets Esau Then Returns to Canaan	
	34:1-31 35:1-15 35:16-20	Rape of Dinah & Revenge of Her Brothers God Blesses Jacob & Renames Him Israel Birth of Benjamin & Death of Rachel	
	35:21-29 36:1-43	Death of Isaac Genealogy of Esau	1 Chronicles 1 35-42
Joseph	37:1-11 37:12-36	Joseph's Dreams Joseph Sold into Slavery in Egypt	
	38:1-30	Harlotry of Tamar with Judah	
	39:1-23 40:1-23	Joseph Imprisoned by Potiphar Joseph Interprets Prisoners' Dreams	
	41:1-36 41:37-57	Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams Pharaoh Makes Joseph 2 nd Over Egypt	
	42:1-38 43:1-34	Joseph's Brothers' First Trip to Egypt Joseph's Brothers Bring Benjamin to Egypt	
	44:1-34 45:1-28	Joseph Tests His Brothers Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers	
	46:1-47:12 47:13-27	Jacob & Israelites Come to Settle in Egypt Joseph Administers Egypt During Famine	
	47:28-31 48:1-22 49:1-27	Joseph Promises Not to Bury Jacob in Egypt Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons Jacob Blesses His Sons	Hebrews 11:21

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Joseph	49:28-50:14 50:15-21 50:22-26	Jacob's Death and Burial in Canaan Joseph Reassures His Brothers Joseph's Death	Hebrews 11:22

As you can see, I have broken the fifty chapters of Genesis into 29 sessions. This means that our study of Genesis will take about 8 months assuming Becky Bereans won't meet some weeks. Given my track record of deep-dive Bible studies, this plan may seem a bit aggressive. Note that some of these sessions will cover three chapters of the book while others will cover only one chapter. If we were to take just one chapter per session, our study would take almost a year to complete even assuming we meet every week. On the other hand, we don't want to just skim through important passages like the fall of mankind. Indeed, we could easily spend an entire session just on Genesis 1:1. I think that splitting the 50 chapters into roughly two-chapter lessons is a good compromise between glossing over important details and getting lost in minutiae.

No matter how we approach our study, we need to remember that God gave us this Word so that we could apply it to our lives and use our knowledge of His Word to reach others with the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We'll just have to see how it goes and adapt our pace and approach as needed.

When Was Genesis Written and by Whom?

Tradition holds that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible – also known as the *Pentateuch* and in Hebrew as the Torah (תּוֹרָה *Tōrā*). Indeed, God's Law set forth in the Torah is commonly called the Law of Moses. This tradition began to be questioned in the latter half of the 19th century as was the tradition that the Apostle Paul was the author of the letter to the Hebrews. Admittedly it does seem odd that Moses would have written in Numbers 12:3 that “*...the man Moses was very meek, more than all the people who were on the face of the earth,*” if Moses did indeed write Numbers and he *was* truly meek. But I digress...

Since we believe (as Paul himself wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16) that the *true* author of the entire Bible is God's Spirit working through human minds and hands, the identity of the human scribes God used to give us His Word is unimportant. However, if Moses was the human author of Genesis, then we have a minimum age for the book. Since Moses died just before the Israelites conquered the land of promise following their exodus from Egypt and their 40-year wilderness wandering, Genesis must have been written no later than about 1450 BC. However, if Moses was not the author, Genesis could have been written much later. Some scholars have proposed (based on archaeological discoveries) dates as late as 400 BC (after the Babylonian captivity) for the writing of Genesis.

But since the religious practices set forth in the Law of Moses were clearly in force by the time of the Kings of Israel and Judah, if Genesis and the remainder of the Torah were written by the same author(s) at the same time, Genesis must have been written before the beginning of the Babylonian exile in 587 BC. Of course, these religious ceremonies may have simply been passed down by oral tradition. However, it is clear from 2 Chronicles 34:8-21 that the Law must have been written down before the 18th year of King Josiah of Judah (622 BC).

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While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD given through [by the hand of] Moses. 2 Chronicles 34:14 (ESV)

Clearly, for Hilkiah to find the book of the Law in 622 BC, there must have been a book written sometime before that in the temple for him to find, right? Furthermore, 2 Chronicles 34:14 says that the book of the Law was given “by the hand of Moses” (just as the text of the Law itself states). So, unless there was some “vast right-wing conspiracy” spanning hundreds of years by the various scribes serving after the Babylonian exile to make it look like Moses wrote the book of the Law hundreds of years prior, it seems that Genesis – the first book of the Law – was most likely inscribed by Moses prior to his death around 1450 BC.

Barring any compelling evidence to the contrary, we will stick with the traditional view that Moses was the author of the entire Torah, and therefore the five books are roughly 3500 years old. The oldest known surviving manuscripts of portions of the Torah (Numbers) date to around 650-587 BC. This stands to reason since the Babylonians destroyed the temple and its archives in 587 BC.

Approach to Our Genesis Study

Before we begin our study of Genesis, I think it’s important to establish a systematic approach to the book.

- **Genesis is God’s Word** – We have mentioned this before, but it bears repeating. All scripture is God-breathed, as Paul reminded Timothy. Not only that – God’s Word is sufficient. The best expositor of the Word is the Word itself. Except as distinctly necessary for understanding and rightly dividing unclear passages, we will eschew what others have written and said about the Word, allowing God Himself to teach us by His Word. As usual, this will require extensive cross-reference throughout our study. The watchword of the Protestant Reformation was – sola scriptura (scripture alone). That was a wise approach to seeking God then, and it remains so.
- **Our Study Must Be Spirit Led and Spirit Driven** – I have mentioned before that when I was in High School, I read the entire KJV as part of a one-semester English course called “The Bible as Literature.” However, since I did not know the LORD at that time, and didn’t have His Spirit guiding me, I didn’t come away from that study with any real benefit applicable to my life. With that as a cautionary tale, we will focus on seeking God’s illumination of the passages under consideration when we gather for study.
- **No Rationalization of God’s Miracles** – I recently read an article in the Times of Israel about a newly released archaeological study of the Jordanian plain along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. The study found pottery and stone at several sites that had been exposed to extreme heat along with indications that agriculture in the once-fertile area had been suddenly abandoned for several hundred years during the time of the Israelite patriarchs. The study authors contended that an air burst explosion of a large meteor thousands of times more powerful than the atomic weapons used against Japan is the most likely explanation. Not only would that explain evidence of such high temperatures, the resulting displacement of hyper-salinized water from the Dead Sea would have caused the once arable land to stop yielding crops for several generations.

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I found the article fascinating and plausible. But we already know from Genesis that God rained sulfur and fire down from Heaven onto this area when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Although the exact locations of the cities of the plain and the small city to which God allowed Lot to escape remain uncertain, God surely destroyed them by intense fire in that time, and all the human beings living in those cities perished. We know this because God says so in His Word. God's Word makes no explanation about how He accomplished the destruction. Perhaps He *did* use a meteor airburst. He doesn't say, and neither shall we try to make any "scientific" rationalizations of this miracle or any of God's other miracles that He tells us about in Genesis.

- **Seeking Jesus in Genesis** – Martin Luther famously said that all scripture pertains to Jesus. Throughout our study, by God's grace and by the leading of His Spirit, we will try to seek out Jesus in the pages of Genesis. After all, the very purpose of our studying Genesis together is to draw closer to Jesus in our hearts. Not only that. Our fondest hope is that by diligent study alongside our brothers and sisters, we might be better equipped to share His Gospel with others as the apostle Peter exhorted us to do.

but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

Looking Ahead

With that foundation, let's plunge into our study of God's Word, beginning with the beginning.