

Introduction to Genesis  
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This morning I'm beginning a sermon series on the book of Genesis, and I plan for us to spend several months studying this great book. The book of beginnings. The Hebrew title for this book is *bereshith*, which is simply the first word of the book, "In the beginning." The English title we use is from the Greek word *genesis*, which means "beginning." In this book we read about the origin of mankind, the origin of life, the origin of this universe. One of the fundamental, basic questions of life is: Where did I come from? Or in general: Where did all of this come from? As we seek to understand the purpose of life, the purpose of existence, we not only want to understand the end point, toward which everything is moving. But we want to understand the starting point, from which everything has come. And then we can place ourselves in between those two points and know how we fit into the big picture.

Many people look back to the origin of the universe and speculate that it all came into being by chance, and the order we now see in the world is a result of random processes. The late Carl Sagan said "we are the products of a long series of biological accidents." And if you believe that, it will affect the way you live, and it will affect how you think about the future, and about death. It will affect the way you relate to others. It will affect your view of work, and family, and pleasure and pain, and good and evil, and truth and falsehood.

Praise God that He has not left us to ourselves to figure out why we're here. And we don't need to despair, thinking we are products of biological accidents. There is a God, and He created us. And He has spoken to us in this Book, and He has revealed to us the creation story. We can read in the book of Genesis that God made everything that is, and we can understand the purpose for which He made it. For these reasons I'm extremely excited for the time we'll spend studying and meditating on the book of Genesis. I pray that we will understand God better, and that we will understand ourselves better, and that we'll love and trust Christ more because of the things God has been doing since the very beginning of time.

This morning I just want to introduce Genesis, and I want to do that by highlighting four themes. The themes are: God, Mankind, Christ, and Salvation, and I'll make a couple points and observations under each of those headings.

You may not think about Genesis as a theological book, like you would think of Romans or Ephesians as weighty theological portions of the Bible. You may think of Genesis simply as historical narrative. It contains the stories of Adam and Eve, and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. But what makes Genesis so exciting and rich is that these stories communicate deep and profound truths about God and Man and Christ and Salvation. Genesis certainly is historical narrative. But it's so much more than interesting stories about our forefathers. In this book we see who God is, and who we are, and we see what went wrong with this creation, and we are pointed toward the only hope there is for making things right again.

I. God

Let's begin with God. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God

created the heavens and the earth.” God is that powerful. God is ALL-powerful. He is omnipotent. He simply speaks, and things leap into existence. He created everything that exists from nothing. *Ex nihilo*, out of nothing He created the heavens and the earth. It’s difficult even to image this. There are many humans who are very creative, but none who can make something out of nothing. Only God can do that.

God is powerful to create, and He is sovereign over His creation. This is another attribute of God we see in Genesis. Since He made all of this, it belongs to Him. And He can do with His creation as He pleases. It has pleased Him to shower grace and mercy on many, in spite of the fact that we have all rebelled against Him. And for those He chooses to bless, He works all things together for their good. Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” That’s not just a New Testament truth. An almost identical statement is found at the end of Genesis, in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph’s brothers had sinned against him, they mistreated him, they threw him in a pit and then sold him into slavery. And now, at the very end of Genesis those brothers are at Joseph’s mercy, because Joseph is now a powerful ruler in Egypt. But do you remember what Joseph said to them? In Genesis 50:20 he said, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” God is sovereign over His creation. He is even sovereign over sin and evil and suffering.

God alone is sovereign. He created everything that is, and He created out of nothing. And He works all things “according to the purpose of his will” (Eph 1:5).

## II. Mankind.

Next, we can look at what Genesis says about mankind. The first thing we learn about ourselves is that we are created in God’s image. We are fundamentally set apart from the rest of creation. We are God’s special and unique masterpiece. He made everything else, and then He made us as a kind of grand finale. In Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God made us in His image. He made us like Himself, and He made us to be His representatives on this earth, to have dominion over it.

We understand that we are depraved sinners, but we also need to understand that sin is not the most basic characteristic of mankind. Because before sin entered the world, man and woman existed as God’s sinless image-bearers. And now, even though sin has tainted and twisted that good creation, still every person has worth and value as one of God’s image-bearers.

Another thing we learn about mankind is that God, in His infinite and wonderful creativity, made us male and female. Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Then a few verses later, in verse 31, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was VERY good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” We ought to marvel at God’s goodness in creating us male and female. He created Adam first, and then created a helper fit for him. None of the animals were a helper fit for Adam. So God caused Adam to sleep, and took out one of his ribs and created Eve. In chapter 2:23

Adam exclaims, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

The third and tragic thing we learn about mankind is that we have fallen into sin. Adam and Eve, although they had everything they needed to enjoy God forever, they rebelled against Him and ate the fruit He commanded them not to eat. They were punished and sent out of the garden. Their lives then were filled with pain and sorrow, and eventually they died.

The following chapters show how devastating this fall into sin was, and is. There was strife between Cain and Abel, and it was so bad that Cain killed his brother Abel. The downward spiral continued to escalate until God decided to destroy everything through the flood. But still, the effects of sin continue. In chapter 11 the people said, “let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” Mankind was continuing, and continues today, to rebel against God’s plan and God’s commands. We refuse to live for God’s name, and instead want to make a name for ourselves.

The punishment for sin is death. God had commanded Adam in chapter 2:16-17, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Adam and Eve experienced a kind of spiritual death when they were banished from the place God had made for them. They were cast out of His presence. Those in the day of the flood, also, experienced God’s punishment for sin. And all who die in their sin will suffer the eternal consequences of separation from God.

We learn in the book of Genesis both wonderful and terrible realities concerning mankind. Wonderfully, we are created in God’s image, and we are created male and female. But tragically, we are severely and totally tainted by sin. If that was the end of the story, it would be a sad story, indeed. But there’s hope, and we see the seeds of this hope in the pages of Genesis.

### III. Christ

This brings us to the third heading, which is “Christ.” We see Christ in the storyline of Genesis. First of all, in chapter 3 verse 15. This is where God is pronouncing His curse on the serpent, and He says, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The offspring of the woman ultimately refers to Christ, and thus this verse is known as the first gospel message in the Bible. Immediately following the first sin, God makes this promise that one will come from the seed of the woman who will crush Satan. Or, as Hebrews 2:14 puts it, “through death” he will “destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.” The devil bruised Christ’s heel in that Christ was put to death on the cross. But through His death, Christ bruised the devil’s head, and has guaranteed His complete victory over him.

God’s grace is astounding, that in the midst of punishment and chastisement, He offers hope. God punished Adam and Eve for their sin, but He also began to reveal His great plan for redeeming sinful humanity. Adam and Eve’s sin was not the end of the story.

Another amazing passage in Genesis is chapter 22, where God instructs Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. God said to Abraham, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." The relationship between Abraham and Isaac is such a powerful picture of God the Father's relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ (His only Son, whom He loves). There is a deep, unique love that binds them together. And yet just as Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, God the Father chose to offer up His own beloved Son as a sacrifice for sin.

There is also a foreshadowing of Christ in the ram, which God provides for the sacrifice. As Abraham and Isaac were walking toward the place for the sacrifice, Isaac asked, "where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" And Abraham replied, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." Then Abraham was about to kill this son of promise, believing that God would bring him back from the dead (as Hebrews 11 tells us), but the angel of the Lord stopped him. And behind Abraham was a ram, which he offered up as a burnt offering "instead of his son" (22:13). The ram served as a substitute for Isaac. God provided a substitute. And Abraham called the place, "The Lord will provide" (22:14). The Lord WILL provide. God WILL provide the lamb for the burnt offering. And for those in the Old Testament who had eyes to see, they must have understood that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:4). And so they, like Isaac, must have asked, "Where is the lamb?" Where is THE lamb? Where is the lamb that all these other sacrifices are pointing toward? And like Abraham, they trusted that God will provide the lamb.

Over 2,000 years passed before the lamb finally arrived. Over 2,000 years from the time God instructed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to the time God sent His own Son as the sacrificial lamb. John the Baptist rejoiced to behold and announce the arrival of God's lamb, the sacrificial lamb, the substitute for sinners. John proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Where is the lamb? God will provide the lamb! God HAS provided the lamb. And He is Jesus Christ. He is the one whom God offered as our substitute. He is the One who died in the place of sinners. He is God's only Son, His beloved Son, and He died so that we don't have to die. He took upon Himself the punishment for sin.

#### IV. Salvation

The final point I want to highlight from Genesis this morning is what we see about salvation. How is the glorious truth of Jesus' sacrifice applied to us? Not everyone is forgiven because of Jesus' sacrifice. But those of faith are saved. Those who believe. Those who trust in Christ. Salvation is by faith, and by faith alone. This essential truth of Christianity can be seen in the first book of the Bible. Right here in Genesis we see how God saves individuals by grace through faith, and not through works.

Let's think about the story of Abraham's life, which begins at the end of chapter 11. And then God's call of Abram (which was his name at that point) is found in chapter 12. The first thing we should notice is that God didn't choose Abram because of anything good about him. A few chapters earlier, Gen 6:5 says, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And Abram was no exception to this. Just like none of

us are an exception to that statement. Abram was an idolater. He had no faith in the true God. There was nothing good in him.

God did not look down on the earth and find a man of faith. Instead, God looked down and graciously and sovereignly faith in this man, Abrah. God chose Abram. God chose to bless this pagan idolater in order to magnify His own Name and display His grace. God said, “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Abram didn’t deserve any of these blessings. He hadn’t done anything that deserved God’s favor in this remarkable way. But it was God’s good pleasure to bless Abram and to make him a blessing.

Then, in chapter 15, God makes another amazing promise to Abram. Abram was despairing because he was childless. God took him outside and told him to count the stars, if he could. And God told Abram, “So shall your offspring be.” The next verse, Genesis 15:6, establishes the biblical truth of salvation by faith. It says, “And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Do you see this? Abram was saved by faith! He was not saved because he was good. He was not saved because he produced a righteousness of his own by works. No, he was saved by God’s grace through faith. Abram believed the Lord. He believed in God’s promise. And God counted Abram righteous. Abram was considered to be righteous in God’s sight by faith.

In the New Testament letter of Romans, Paul expounds the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and in chapter 4 of Romans he uses Abraham as a prime example. He quotes Genesis 15:6 in order to prove that justification is by faith and not by works. “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’” (Rom 4:2-3). From the very beginning of the Bible God is revealing His grace and His sovereignty, and His gracious plan of redemption. All things are from Him, and through Him, and to Him, and we can see this in powerful ways in the life of the great patriarch, Abraham.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize this introduction to Genesis, this morning I’ve simply led us through a few of the major theological truths we’re going to see as we work our way through this exciting book. We will learn about God, and His creative ability and His sovereignty over His creation, and His purpose to use all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. We will learn about mankind, how we are created in God’s image, created as male and female, and also how we are all thoroughly tainted by the affects of the Fall. We will see Christ foreshadowed in the storyline of Genesis. He is the One who will crush the head of Satan. He is the beloved Son, whom the Father chose to sacrifice. He is the One who became our substitute. Finally, we will see that from the very beginning of God’s dealing with humanity, salvation is by God’s grace and it is through faith alone.

There are many more precious and instructive truths in Genesis that I haven’t mentioned this morning. That’s why I’m looking forward to the coming months, as we mine the depths of God’s Word in this particular book of the Bible. I encourage you to pray that God will change your heart, and change all of us, as we look into His truth week-by-week and day-by-day. And pray particularly that God will use our time in the

book of Genesis to expand our vision of Him, and to increase our awareness of our own depravity, and to give us a greater love for Christ and the Gospel.