

Introduction to Genesis

“On Christmas Eve 1968, astronaut Frank Borman from the *Apollo 8* spacecraft, orbiting the moon, read a message for the people of the earth: ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.’ Twenty-five years later, Borman reminisced, ‘I had an enormous feeling that there had to be a power greater than any of us. That there was a God, that there was indeed a beginning and that maybe even our choosing to read Genesis wasn’t a haphazard thing. Maybe it had been ordained in some way.’”

“The president of the Czech Republic...in his remarks on receiving the Liberty Medal in Philadelphia at Independence Hall, July 4, 1994, commented, ‘Politicians at international forums may reiterate a thousand times that the basis of the new world order must be universal respect for human rights, but it will mean nothing as long as this imperative does not derive from the respect of the miracle of being, the miracle of the universe, the miracle of nature, the miracle of our own existence...the Declaration of Independence, adopted 218 years ago in this building, states that the Creator gave man the right to liberty. It seems man can realize that liberty only if he does not forget the one who endowed him with it.’”¹

Aside from the eternal God Himself, everything has a beginning

- Every person who has ever lived had a beginning
- Every creature on the Earth had a beginning

As we seek to embark on a study of the book of Genesis, we encounter a book of beginnings

- Beginning of creation
- Beginning of mankind
- Beginning of sin
- Beginning of judgment
- Beginning of sacrifice
- Beginning of marriage
- Beginning of children
- Beginning of the nations
- Beginning of different languages
- Beginning of the Gospel²
- Beginning of order and complexity
- Beginning of the solar system
- Beginning of the atmosphere and hydrosphere
- Beginning of evil
- Beginning of language
- Beginning of religion³

If we take away the book of Genesis from the Bible, we would have a house without a foundation

- The first verse of Genesis acts as the very cornerstone of the entire biblical revelation⁴

¹ Kenneth A. Mathews, *The New American Commentary, Genesis 1-11:26*, 11.

² W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 18.

³ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 19-21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

Without Genesis, we would not understand the rest of the Scriptures

- Consider these questions⁵
 - o Can we understand Law and Gospel without Genesis?
 - o Do we have Matthew and Luke's historical Gospel without the Genesis genealogies?
 - o Does not Paul's Galatians and Romans rely on Adam and Abraham?
 - o Can we still see the future Eden in John's Apocalypse without the imagery of Genesis' past?

It makes sense, then, that the first book of the Bible describes how things came into existence

- That is, everything except God Himself since He is the Creator

It was customary for Hebrew people to name a book by the first word they contained

- In the case of Genesis, the first word is בְּרֵאשִׁית
- This Hebrew word means, "in the beginning"

The name Genesis, however, is from the Greek word γένεσις which means origin, source, or generation⁶

So it is natural to think that the first book of the Bible describes the origin or beginning of everything

- The only exception being God Himself!

This morning, I want to whet your appetite for the book of Genesis

- It is a big book – 50 chapters

But I want to give you some background information that will help us as we navigate our way through this book

- This will be an introduction to the book of Genesis
- We will begin the actual exposition of the book next week

As with any new study in a book of Scripture, you need to ask yourself a few questions

- Who wrote this book of Scripture?
- When was this book written?
- How does this book fit into the larger framework of the Bible?
- What is the purpose of this book?
- What are the major themes that emerge in this book?

This morning, I want to give you a summary of the book of Genesis so that you and I will be better equipped to understand the contents of the book

Specifically, I want to walk you through

- The purpose of Genesis
- The authorship of Genesis
- The interpretation of Genesis
- The structure of Genesis

I. Purpose of Genesis

As Genesis is the first book of the Bible, we don't have any prior books to reference

- It is very unique in this manner, unlike any other book in the Bible

⁵ Mathews, 23.

⁶ Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis*, 9.

Genesis is part of a larger series of books called the Torah or Pentateuch

- There are five books that make up this series
 - o Genesis
 - o Exodus
 - o Leviticus
 - o Numbers
 - o Deuteronomy
- This set of books is also referred to as “the Law”

So Genesis is not an isolated study in and of itself

- It is merely volume 1 of a 5 volume set

But Genesis does more than open the Torah

- Genesis is the basis for the rest of the Old Testament
- Even greater than this is the fact that Genesis opens the path for the New Testament as well

So the study of Genesis is really foundational for the study of the rest of the Scriptures⁷

- The study of Genesis will help you to have a better grasp of the greater purpose and themes of the entire Bible

So, what is the purpose of Genesis?

- This is a simple, yet profound question

As we have already mentioned, Genesis includes many beginnings

- Everything apart from God has a beginning
- Only God is eternal

Genesis begins at the only objective point of reference

- God Himself

From that point forward, Genesis will trace the growth of the human race

- But he will do so in a very limited and specific manner

The first eleven chapters of Genesis is the rapid growth of mankind after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden

- Humans multiply to fill the Earth

All seems well until Genesis 6 when sons of God came down and cohabitated with human women

- “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ And the LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.’” (6:5-7)

God then destroyed the Earth through a worldwide flood

- Through this, He allowed the human race to be killed, with the exception of Noah and his family
- 8 individuals were spared – the rest were killed

⁷ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, 8.

In a large part, the book of Genesis is a book of genealogies

- At first glance, that may seem boring
- But I assure you that the story of God's dealings with mankind is anything but boring

As we will see in chapter 12 of Genesis, God makes a promise to a man named Abram

- God makes a unilateral covenant with him

Most covenants were between two individuals

- It was a binding contract that often implied death for the one who failed to follow through

But when God made a covenant with Abram, He put Abram to sleep

- Only God was a part of the ratification of the covenant
- This meant that God, and God alone, would see to it that the covenant was brought to completion

The tracing of that fulfillment is a large part of the book of Genesis

- For that matter, the Torah is about the Abrahamic Covenant
- Expanded further, the Old Testament involves the Abrahamic Covenant
- The New Testament is not silent about the Abrahamic Covenant

God gave Abram three specific promises in the covenant:

- Blessing
- Seed
- Land

*So one purpose of Genesis is to show God's compassion to a very sinful people in giving a Divine promise to Abraham and to his seed*⁸

Why was Abram chosen?

- Simply because that is what God desired
- There was nothing special about him that caused God to choose Him

The book of Genesis begins with a universal focus and ends with a very particular focus

- The first part of Genesis begins with the creation of mankind and its rapid growth
- Then in chapter 11, the people of the Earth are scattered due to God's judgment on their pride to build a tower that reached to the heavens

From chapter 12 forward, Genesis isolates the focus to one particular family

- The reality is that you are either in or out of that family

Also woven throughout Genesis, and the rest of the Scriptures, is the scarlet thread of redemption

- Because mankind disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, death became the penalty for sin⁹

God promised to send a Deliverer to redeem mankind from their sins

- So the book of Genesis traces the lineage from which the Redeemer would come

In a nutshell, this is the essence of the purpose of Genesis

- We will expand upon this throughout our study

⁸ TMS notes from Old Testament Studies, Professor Keith Essex, 9.

⁹ Wood, 9.

II. Authorship of Genesis

Until the 19th century, both Jewish and Christian scholars generally held to Mosaic authorship¹⁰

- So what happened to cause such a change?

We have to back up and remind ourselves that Genesis is part of the Torah

- In the Jewish mind, the five books of the Pentateuch really do rise or fall together
- There is such a wonderful unity and cohesion that exists between these five books

As a matter of fact, these five books are repeatedly referred to as “the book”

- OT
 - o “the book of the covenant” (Ex 24:7; 2 Kings 23:2; 2 Chr 34:30)
 - o “the book of the law” (Deut 28:61; Joshua 8:34; 2 Kings 22:8, 11; 2 Chr 34:15; Neh 8:3)
 - o “the book of the Law of the LORD” (2 Chr 17:9; 34:14; Neh 9:3)
 - o “the book of the law of Moses” (Josh 8:31; 23:6; 2 Kings 14:6; Neh 8:1)
 - o “the book of the law of God” (Neh 8:18)
 - o “the book of Moses” (2 Chr 25:4; 35:12; Ezra 6:18; Neh 13:1)
- NT
 - o “the book of Moses” (Mk 12:26)
 - o “the book of the law” (Gal 3:10)

The fact that these five books are really “the book” tells us that the early Jews viewed all five books as written by the same author

The OT cites the law as being “the book of the law of Moses” and “the book of Moses”

God told Joshua, Moses’ successor, these words in the first chapter of Joshua, “Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you” (1:7)

- God speaks of the law as that which Moses commanded

The greatest affirmation of Mosaic authorship is by Jesus Christ Himself, “But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *passage about the burning bush*, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’” (Mk 12:26)

- Jesus references a passage in the book of Exodus as being “in the book of Moses”

On another occasion, Jesus told some hostile contemporaries, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (John 5:46-47)

- The simple truth is that Christ spoke of Moses writing the Pentateuch

But for the past two hundred years, various liberal scholars have sought to criticize the Mosaic authorship of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch

- This view is called the documentary hypothesis

Basically, what this view holds is that there were four (4) different sources for the Pentateuch¹¹

- J – a Yahwistic or Jahwistic source
- E – an Elohist source

¹⁰ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 21.

¹¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 1-17*, 13.

- P – a Priestly source
- D – Deuteronomy

They come up with this based on differences in the use of Divine names, and differences in style and vocabulary

- But these differences are not to be used against a Mosaic authorship
- Rather, differences can be seen to refer to different elements of God’s nature/character, different genres, and different audiences

The Torah itself stands unified in the fact of Mosaic authorship (Ex 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Num 33:1, 2; Deut 31:9)¹²

There is also a great amount of inward evidence in Genesis that points to the fact that the author was

- Familiar with the desert
- Must have been an eyewitness of these events
- Must have known Egypt well
- Used Egyptian words freely¹³

Luke records in the book of Acts, “**And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.**” (Acts 7:22)

- Moses was the God-ordained vessel through which this portion of Scripture was recorded

My position throughout this study of Genesis is that Moses was the human author of Genesis, as well as the rest of the Torah, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit¹⁴

III. Interpretation of Genesis

How do we interpret the book of Genesis?

- There are different opinions on this

Some treat Genesis as myth

- The events are not real or based in history
- Legend!

Others treat Genesis in an allegorical manner

- These people would see a hidden, deeper meaning behind much of what is common and straightforward

But we believe that the contents of Genesis are to be taken literally as real history

- They are the God-breathed means of telling us what really and truly happened in the ancient past

The first eleven (11) chapters of Genesis have been the subject of intense attacks

- If people doubt the beginning of the Bible, why believe the rest?

Countless individuals have tried to use Genesis 1-11 as the basis for evolution

- They misunderstand the clear meaning of the word “day” in Genesis 1
- They write off as figurative or symbolic that which is literal and historic

¹² Davis, 24.

¹³ Davis, 24-25.

¹⁴ Mathews, 24.

Let me say up front that the Bible is not a textbook on science

- However, when it mentions matters of science, the Bible speaks with clear authority
- Evolution is simply man's futile and fatal attempt to explain the beginning of everything¹⁵

John MacArthur states this premise well

- "A Biblical understanding of the creation and fall of humanity establishes the necessary foundation for the Christian world-view. Everything Scripture teaches about sin and redemption assumes the literal truth of the first three chapters of Genesis. If we wobble to any degree on the truth of this passage, we undermine the very foundations of our faith.
- If Genesis 1-3 doesn't tell us the truth, why should we believe anything else in the Bible? Without a right understanding of our origin, we have no way to understand anything about our spiritual existence. We cannot know our purpose, and we cannot be certain of our destiny. *After all, if God is not the Creator, then maybe He's not the Redeemer either.* If we cannot believe the opening chapters of Scripture, how can we be certain of anything the Bible says?"¹⁶

Genesis 1-11 is definitely historical, accurate, literal writings

- It serves as the foundation to the rest of the Scriptures

IV. Structure of Genesis

The book of Genesis is quoted from or alluded to at least 200 times in the New Testament

- However, it is every never stated that Moses is the actual author of Genesis
- *How do we respond to this?*

We believe that Moses actually penned the words for Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

- When it comes to Genesis, we believe that Moses compiled and edited the contents; however, he didn't write them as the other four books

Moses wasn't even born during the time when most of the events of Genesis took place!

- Most likely, various written sources were handed down to him from father to son in the line of the patriarchs
- Then, being guided by the Holy Spirit, Moses organized the contents in a certain manner and order¹⁷

This isn't the only time that an author of a Biblical book did compiling vs. writing a personal eyewitness account¹⁸

- Consider the opening words of Luke's Gospel, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, ³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." (1:1-4)

Moses is very clear in telling us that he is using different sources to compile the book of Genesis

- It is the use of a Hebrew word תולדות
- Different versions of the Bible translate this as account, book, records, generations, and history

¹⁵ John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning*, 23.

¹⁶ Ibid., 29. Italics mine.

¹⁷ Morris, 26.

¹⁸ Griffith-Thomas, 17.

- It is the tracing of a certain genealogy, moving from a universal to a particular perspective

If you look at your handout in the bulletin, I have given you a list of all the places where this תולדות takes place

- This will serve as our outline as we move through the book of Genesis

You will notice that some sections are longer than others

- Others are very short
- But they are all very significant

Moses' use of the תולדות accomplishes three purposes¹⁹

- It narrows the focus to the elect line of promise
- It introduces the subject matter of previous material
- It looks forward to the future progeny

This term is a hinge or transition between two sections of Scripture

- You will see this as we give you a quick snapshot of the book of Genesis

I would like to take the rest of our time together and go through the book of Genesis and show you these 11 uses of the תולדות

1:1-2:3 – no *toledot* since there is no prior material and no need to tie two sections together

- o We find here the seven days of creation spelled out for us

A. 2:4a – “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created”

- This *toledot* introduces 2:4-4:26
- It back-references creation with its echo of 1:1
- This section presents a complimentary view of creation emphasizing the origin of mankind and the Garden of Eden
- It establishes the context for the story of human sin and its consequences for the entire family (and subsequent human race)
- Special emphasis is on the Fall of man and subsequent curses placed on the man, the woman, and the serpent

B. 5:1a – “This is the book of the generations of Adam”

- This *toledot* introduces 5:1-6:8
- This section binds the Garden account with a genealogical record that traces Adam's line down to Noah
- The story is of mankind's procreation and expansion
- Chapter six records the invasion of demons cohabitating with women and this causes God to respond

C. 6:9a – “These are the records of the generations of Noah”

- This *toledot* introduces 6:9-9:29
- This section reaches back and “grabs” Noah's name since the previous section ended with him
- The universal and worldwide flood is God's means of judgment on mankind
- Noah's death completes the genealogy began in chapter 5 (thus tying these two sections together)

¹⁹ Mathews, 47.

- D. 10:1 – “Now these are *the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood.*”
- This *toledot* introduces 10:2-11:9
 - This section links this section back to 5:32, giving a sense of context of this family in the lineage of Adam
 - Noah’s sons are now the link or tie between the pre-Flood and post-Flood – a sense of continuity
 - The Tower of Babel is the main event in this section
- E. 11:10a – “*These are the records of the generations of Shem*”
- This *toledot* introduces 11:10-26
 - Shem (one of the sons of Noah) ties the present section with the tower of Babel
 - “shem” and “name” are very close in Hebrew – would have tied the two accounts together
 - Genealogy of Shem is given twice
 - 1st – context of Noah’s sons
 - 2nd – stands alone in the Babel account; traces the descent through one son, Peleg. This will serve to trace Shem-Peleg-Abram
 - Together, Adam and Shem’s genealogies elevate the chosen offspring
- F. 11:27a – “*Now these are the records of the generations of Terah*”
- This *toledot* introduces 11:27-25:11
 - Terah links the present section with the list of Shem’s descendants
 - Abram will be the focus of this section
 - Abram is a very important individual throughout the Bible, and these chapters are crucial to a proper understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant
- G. 25:12 – “*Now these are the records of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham*”
- This *toledot* introduces 25:12-18
 - The death of Abraham is followed by genealogies of his sons Ishmael and Isaac
 - The fact that Ishmael is identified as “Abraham’s son” ties this section with the previous, which told of Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael and Isaac
- H. 25:19a – “*Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son*”
- This *toledot* introduces 25:19-35:29
 - This section links with the earlier genealogy of Ishmael
 - With Ishmael, the link is made to Hagar (maternal); however, with Isaac, no reference is made to the maternal – only the paternal. This puts him in the correct lineage of tracing the male descendants that carried the seed
 - From Isaac comes the twins Esau and Jacob
 - The twelve sons of Jacob are then listed
- I. 36:1 – “*Now these are the records of the generations of Esau (that is, Edom)*”
- This *toledot* introduces 36:1-8
 - Esau links with the previous section on the disputed blessing between Jacob and Esau
- J. 36:9 – “*These then are the records of the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir.*”
- This *toledot* introduces 36:9-37:1
 - This is the second *toledot* for Esau, giving the specific lineage of the Edomites
 - Both Jacob and Esau had rival kingdoms, and their descendants are listed

K. 37:2a – “These are *the records of the generations of Jacob*”

- a. This *toledot* introduces 37:2-50:26
- b. This is the last occurrence of the *toledot* in the book of Genesis
- c. This ties Joseph’s cycle to the previous narratives regarding Jacob
- d. Jacob’s family moves to Egypt in fulfillment of Joseph’s earlier dreams

That is a quick summary of what we have before us

- No matter where you are in your knowledge of Genesis, I trust that you will benefit from this study

The book of Genesis is broken down into two (2) main sections

- Primeval age (1-11) – four main events
 - o Creation
 - o Fall
 - o Flood
 - o Nations
- Patriarchal age (12-50) – four main individuals
 - o Abraham
 - o Isaac
 - o Jacob
 - o Joseph

Far from being just “another” book of the Bible, Genesis helps us to see the very foundation and underpinnings that support the rest of the Scriptures

- Without a book of Genesis, we wouldn’t any sense of historicity of what took place in the beginning of creation

“The red thread of redemption binds every chapter together, and gives the book one of its essential marks of unity”²⁰

It is fitting that we keep this in mind as we prepare for the Lord’s Table this morning

Communion

We have gained a very short overview of the book of Genesis

- When you boil the book down to its basic level, you see the theme of redemption woven through and through

God created a perfect environment for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

- Yet, they still sinned and disobeyed God

As a result of their sin, God banished them from the Garden of Eden

- The wages of their sin was to be death (cf. Rom 6:23)

But God graciously provided redemption from their sin

- God told the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life;”¹⁵

²⁰ Griffith-Thomas, 20.

and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (3:14-15)

Later on in chapter 3, the Bible says that “the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.” (3:21)

- How gracious God was to provide a sacrifice to cover their sinfulness

We are looking back at this with the rest of the Scriptures in mind

- But the point is still the same!
- God has graciously supplied redemption to cover sins

This morning, we have the unique opportunity to celebrate what the Lord has done in the history of mankind
I am not talking about God killing an animal to cover Adam and Eve

- I am talking about God putting His own Son to death

The Lord’s Table is a time of fellowship where those of us who have been redeemed can remember the Lord’s death

For those of you who have never been born again, I would ask that you not partake in this event

- The bread and juice remind those of us who are believers of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ
- It reminds us that He bore our sins on the cross
- It assures us that we will never face His wrath

If you are here without a relationship with Christ, I would encourage you to look at the back of the bulletin and read those verses that are listed there

- They explain, in a nutshell, the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ

But for those of us who have been forgiven of our sins, this is a time of worship

- We thank God for providing such a wonderful salvation
- We thank God for allowing us to become partakers of the Divine nature
- We express our gratitude to God for allowing us to have a “true knowledge” of Jesus Christ
- We ask God to help us to walk in greater holiness, seeking to be conformed to the image of Christ

Beloved, I would urge you to take some time to examine your own hearts

- Are there areas of habitual sin that you need to deal with this morning?