

Genesis Bible Studies

Leaders Version

Introduction to Genesis

INTRODUCTION

Genesis means "origin," "beginning," and the book of Genesis is about beginnings. In it, God lays the groundwork for the rest of Scripture, His revelation of Himself to man. Genesis becomes the foundations for Torah (or Pentateuch, the first five books of the bible), the entire Old Testament, and even the New Testament.

Genesis begins with God's creation of the world, and gradually shifts its focus to the most blessed occupant, mankind. From this climax, the stories reveals man's plunge into rebellion and its serious consequences – shame, death, homelessness, idolatry, war, hatred, jealousy, etc. Two more low points mark this account of primeval history (chapters 1-11): the flood and the tower of Babel. In all three accounts, because of sin, man came into seemingly irredeemable corruption. Yet God's covenantal love prevents ultimate disasters from happening through His merciful judgements.

After Babel, the story narrows to follow one family line — Abraham and his descendants. Through these four generations (chapters 12-50), God plans to offer salvation from the consequences of the Fall to the whole human race. God calls Abraham from Mesopotamia to Canaan and make promises with him, Abram would have numerous descendants who will form a great nation, a gift of land (15:18-21, 17:8) and he would serve as a channel of God's blessings to others. The rest of the stories in Genesis have this consistent theme of the fulfilment of these promises.

Here is a brief outline showing the four main events of primeval history and the four generations of Abraham's family.¹

I. Primeval History (chapters 1-11)

- A. Creation
- B. Fall
- C. Flood
- D. Babel

II. Patriarchal History (chapters 12-50)

- A. Abraham
- B. Isaac
- C. Jacob
- D. Joseph

The end of Genesis makes us ponder: Israel now settled in Egypt, when and how God will fulfil his promises to Abraham? This is an answer the rest of the bible trying to answer, and ultimately the fulfilment is found in the salvation act of Jesus Christ.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Genesis is the first of five books called the Pentateuch. Although during the last century there were critics questioning the Mosaic authorship, a strong case can still be made for the traditional view that Moses wrote most of the Pentateuch. He may have used existing sources and his writings may have been edited after his death. We may assume the message of Genesis was given to Israel during the years in the wilderness. It is therefore important to understand the historical and cultural background during that period.

For about four hundred years Israel were enslaved in Egypt without any written scripture, only some oral patriarchal traditions. They replaced the worship of God into cultic worship of the gods of other nations. They

¹ Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Corporation, 1966), volume 1, page 29.

gradually lost the knowledge and faith of their forefathers. Their culture was essentially pagan. Therefore God called them to keep his covenant, to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). When they arrived at Mount Sinai, their worldview is little different from neighbour countries. A spiritual revival of their theology and lifestyle was both imminent and necessary. Genesis was written in such a hope, that people may take a clean break from pagan religion and return to the God of their forefathers.

Study 1 – The creation of the world

Who are we? Why are we here? What is the meaning of life? These are often questions people ask. The first chapters of Genesis are crafted to answer these burning questions, convey key truths and overcome key errors about God, the world, and man.

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

- As you read through the passage, what words and phrases do you find repeated?

	Forming....		Filling....
Day 1	(Genesis 1:3-5)	Day 4	(Genesis 1:14-19)
Day 2	(Genesis 1:6-8)	Day 5	(Genesis 1:20-23)
Day 3	(Genesis 1:9-13)	Day 6	(Genesis 1:24-31)
Day 7	(Genesis 2:1-3)		

- On days 1-3, God gave form to what had been the formless darkness of chaos. In the left column above, write how God did this. (Observe the repeated word "separated" or "divided" in 1:3-13.)
- On days 4-6, how do God's commands add fullness to the emptiness? In the right column above, write how God did this.
- Identify and discuss the correspondence of these two sets of days (1-4, 2-5 & 3-6). How does this structure demonstrate God's purpose of creation? (Pay particular attention on the functions of the lights, and man) What does this pattern tell you about God and his creation?
- In what ways do you think God views his creation being 'good'? (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25)?
- On day 7, how is this day different than the previous days? List the difference in the table above. What is the significance of these differences?
- In what ways are man and woman unique among God's creation (Genesis 1:26-27)? What are the similarities/differences between God's work of creation and the commands and responsibilities he gave to man and woman? Have you fulfilled the commands God given to man?
- What knowledge of God have you gained through out this study? How does this passage help you to give greater appreciation to the Creator?

LEADER'S NOTES:

Question 1. In Genesis chapter 1, “And God said...” occurs 10 times; “and God saw that it was good/very good” seven times; “after his/their kind” 10 times; “And the evening and the morning were the ...day” six times. These repetitions demonstrate God creates the world in an orderly manner, contrary to the formless situation.

Questions 2-4: Like zooming of camera lens, in this passage the focus gradually shifts from the sky to mankind. The forms are there to provide grounds for the fillings. The fillings (lights, birds, fish, animals, and man) not only make the forms lively, but inherit authority from God the authority to manage the world. The lights were to ‘separate the day from the night’ and as ‘signs and for seasons, and for days and years’ (v.1:14). Man was to ‘have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ (v1:28).

Also notice there are interdependent relationships between the Days. The plants and grass created in Day 3 (v.1:12) were to serve as food for animals and man created in Day 5 (v1:30) and Day 6.

From the above observations we may make the following conclusion:

1. God is the creator, he creates through his word. (God said) God is without peer and competitor. He does not have to establish his power in struggle with other members of a polytheistic pantheon. His word is supreme: a simple fiat is sufficient. He speaks and it is done.
2. God is orderly, which reflects in his creation (the repetitions).
3. God enjoys the creation himself (good/very good).
4. God provides for the creation (the interdependence between the creatures).
5. God has authority and he is a law-giver. Yet he wishes to share some of his authority with the creatures.
6. God has a purpose for his creation. Every creature was created with a purpose (plants were created to serve man and animals as food, lights were created to separate day/night and as signs for seasons, days and years, fish and birds were to multiply and be fruitful).
7. Man was created in God’s image shows he is special in God’s eyes. The whole narrative moves toward the creation of man. Everything is made for man’s benefit.

Gordon Wenham:

“The narrative structure also highlights the third and the sixth days of creation. Both days have a double announcement of the divine word “And God said” (vv 9, 11, 24, 26) and the approval formula twice (vv 10, 12, 25, 31), so that they correspond to each other formally. But there is also a correspondence in the contents of the days. Day 3 deals with the creation of the land and plants, while day 6 deals with the animals that live on the land and man, and God permits them to eat the plants. Similar correspondences link days 1 and 4: day 1 mentions the creation of light, day 4 the creation of the light-producing bodies. Day 2 discusses the creation of the sky, day 5 the birds of heaven. Diagrammatically this may be represented as follows:

Day 1	Light	Day 4	Luminaries
Day 2	Sky	Day 5	Birds and Fish
Day 3	Land (Plants)	Day 6	Animals and Man (Plants for food)
	Day 7		Sabbath

The narrative has two poles, heaven and earth (1:1, 2:1), and its focus moves from heaven to earth, finishing with a close-up on man (vv 26–30). This shift of focus is again reflected in the arrangement of the creative acts.”²

Question 5. The creation account reveals that God brings order, beauty and harmony out of an originally chaotic situation. .

² Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary : Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, 6 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002).

Question 6. In verse 1:31, God saw everything that he had made, and it was 'very good'. This indicates a completion of creation, which echoes 2:1, 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.'

Wenham suggests: "*the account of the seventh day, stands apart from the standard framework of each of the other six days. The terms "heaven and earth," "God," "create" reappear in the reverse order to that of 1:1, and this inverted echo of the opening verse rounds off the section. The threefold mention of the seventh day, each time in a sentence of seven Hebrew words, draws attention to the special character of the Sabbath. In this way form and content emphasize the distinctiveness of the seventh day.*"³

Thus Day 7 has its special theological significance. The world reflects its creator. God rests the seventh day indicates the creation should rest like God does. One may quickly recall the importance of the Sabbath day in the Old Testament (Exod. 16:29, 20:10). In the book of Joshua, Israel finally enters the promised land of rest (Deut. 12:9-10), but they never have the full peace as was promised by God. In the OT "day of rest" and "land of rest" were never fulfilled until the coming of Jesus, where he promised an eternal rest (Matt 11:28-29, John 4:13-14). While Christians have received this "rest" the ultimate fulfillment will be at the second coming. (Heb. 4:8-11).

Question 7. Man was created in God's image, in His likeness. Scholars are divided regarding how to interpret this particular phrase. Yet from the context we may at least claim man is God's representative on earth, therefore his life should be sacred (cf. Leviticus 11:44). Man has the authority from God to rule the animal kingdom, but the exact qualities are not listed from the text. In Genesis 9:6, God states "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." We may conclude that being made in God's image makes us special and sets us apart from the rest of the creation. Man should obey God's command, properly exercise his authority towards the creation and love God wholeheartedly.

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6. Gordon J. Wenham, "Vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15", Word Biblical Commentary, Word, Incorporated, 2002.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary : Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, 7 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002).