

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF GENESIS

Genesis is the first of the 66 books of the Bible. Through the study of Genesis we can lay foundations for the study and understanding of the whole Bible. Jesus quotes Genesis, and he teaches us that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is also the God of Jesus Christ. God Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the Creator of all things. If we want to know God who created us, then we must study the Bible; and we must study Genesis. Through the study of Genesis we can lay a firm Biblical foundation for our faith. As we study this book, we want to meet and come to know the God of Genesis. So we must approach the study of Genesis with humble, learning minds and prayerful hearts.

What is the book of Genesis all about?

(i) The word "Genesis" comes from the first word in the Hebrew Bible, "In the beginning..." So Genesis is a book of beginnings. It begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth. We find here the beginnings of the world, of all material things, of life, man, sin, salvation and faith. Here we also find the beginnings of death, curse, and judgment; the beginnings of the gospel, blessing and redemptive history. There are also the beginnings of culture, language and nations.

(ii) According to tradition, the author of Genesis is Moses. Genesis is sometimes called the "First Book of Moses." It is the first book of the Pentateuch, the 5 books of Moses. These 5 books-- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy--record the beginnings of the history of God's chosen people, Israel.

In Genesis we meet the Patriarchs--Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and learn that God is the Sovereign Creator and Possessor of all the earth. From Exodus through Deuteronomy, Moses himself is the dominant person. Moses writes about God's redemptive history. God delivers the slaves from Egypt and begins the task of molding a slave people into a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. Here, we meet God who is the Sovereign Ruler of history.

(iii) Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" is the major premise of the Bible. We cannot understand the Bible unless we accept the fact that God is the Creator and Sovereign Ruler of all things. He gave us the Bible over a period of 1600 years through more than 40 different writers, but it is one story.

(iv) Genesis 1:31, "And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good..." God's purpose in creation was good. He created the heavens and the earth and all things for his own glory. He created man in his own image, for his glory. Genesis teaches us creation order: God is first, mankind is under God, and mankind is over all the rest of creation. When this creation order is kept, men are happy and God is pleased. But the great tragedy of the world occurred in Genesis 3--the fall of man. Because of Satan's temptation, man sinned. Sin entered the world, and death followed (Ro 5:12). Man broke spiritual order and God's good creation became corrupt and violent. All creation was cursed.

(v) In Genesis 3:15, God cursed Satan. He promised that the offspring of the woman would someday crush his head. Bad news for Satan is good news for mankind. Since the fall, God has sought to redeem mankind and restore in him his broken image. God and man long for Paradise and creation order to be restored.

(vi) The promise God gave Abraham in Genesis 12:2,3, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you", is the continuing theme of Genesis. The great redemptive theme of the Bible has its real source here, and it flows down through history, reaching its climax in Jesus Christ. Then, it continues to flow through the apostles whom he sent to the ends of the earth to make the blessing a reality for all people.

THE FUNCTION OF THE GENEALOGIES IN GENESIS

In the book of Genesis the formula phrase, "these are the generations of" or, "these are the descendants of" or in the NIV, "this is the account of" is repeated 10 times. The author uses this phrase to divide the book into 10 major sections. Here is a brief outline summary.

1. 2:4 "This is an account of the heavens and the earth." [narrative]
2. 5:1 "This is the written account of Adam's line." [names]
3. 6:9 "This is the account of Noah." [narrative]
4. 10:1 "This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth." [names and places]
5. 11:10 "This is the account of Shem." [names]
6. 11:27 "This is the account of Terah." [narrative]
7. 25:12 This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael." [names of the 12 princes of Ishmael]
8. 25:19 "This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac." [narrative of birth and early youth of Jacob and Esau]
9. 36:1 This is the account of Esau." [long list of names of Esau's descendants, including the Edomites]
10. 37:2 "This is the account of Jacob." [narrative]

1. ends the basic creation story and sets the stage for the fall.
2. Bridge from Adam to Noah
3. Introduces the flood narrative
4. Ends the period of primeval history; sets the stage for a new beginning of redemptive history
5. Shem's genealogy is repeated, leading to Abram
6. introduces Abram narrative (11:27-25:11)
7. Ends Abraham narrative
8. Introduces the Jacob narrative (25:19-35:29)
9. Ends Jacob narrative
10. Introduces the narrative of Joseph and his brothers

The genealogies in the book of Genesis seem to serve either a literary or an historical purpose. Some are used to conclude and/or begin the main narrative sections. Some are used as historical bridges.

The longest genealogical section is in chapters 10-11. This section marks the conclusion of the introduction. Chapters 1-11 sets the stage for God's redemptive work in history. God is the Creator of all the earth. He created a good world, but because of the Fall, sin entered and spread, bringing death to all men. God was so grieved that he destroyed the earth with a flood and began again with one man, Noah. But the sin problem was not solved. It continued to spread. Beginning in Chapter 12, God begins a new redemptive work through Abraham and his descendants. Jesus Christ is the climax of God's redemptive history.

The next longest genealogical section is chapter 36, the genealogy of Esau. Esau and the Edomites are not major actors in God's history, but this genealogical section marks a major division in the Genesis story. 36:1 says, "This is the account of Esau" and 37:2 says, "This is the account of Jacob." Esau's story ends with a list of names; Jacob's story is the story of the conception of the nation which bore his name, Israel. Exodus records the birth of this nation, and the rest of the Old Testament is about God's dealings with this nation.