



THE GOSPEL IN
GENESIS

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CONTENTS

PURPOSE OF THE SERIES	6
AUTHOR	6
TITLE AND GENRE	7
PURPOSE OF GENESIS	7
THEOLOGY	8
KEY PEOPLE	11
TIMELINE OF ADAM	13
GOSPEL IN GENESIS	13
OUTLINE	14
RESOURCES FOR STUDY	14
KEY VERSES	15

PURPOSE OF THE SERIES

Genesis was written to tell the story of the Lord. We see that from the very beginnings, God created. Genesis truly is the story not of creation, not of humanity, but the story of a God who is intimately involved in His creation. Our sermon series, “the gospel in Genesis” builds on the foundations set in the very first book of the Bible. The good news is that God was, is, and is to come. May we reflect and rejoice on the good news of our Savior.

We cannot properly separate Genesis from the rest of the Pentateuch (Gen-Deut) or from the rest of the OT and Bible. The entire biblical narrative has its beginnings and roots in the foundational story set forth in Genesis, the story of the Lord God. Therefore, Genesis is foundational to the entire story of God and without Genesis, we do not have a complete understanding of the gospel.

AUTHOR

The traditional author of Genesis is Moses. The Bible attributes large portions of text in the Pentateuch (also called the five books of Moses) to this leader of the Israelite community including: the 10 commandments (Exod 20-23), the Holiness Code/laws (Lev 1; 27), and instructions on the journey to the Promised Land (Num 1; 36). Also, numerous sections in Deuteronomy are attributed by the biblical text to Moses (Deut, 1-4; 5-26; 30; 27-28; 31; and 33:1-29). Jesus also affirms Mosaic authority concerning legal matters (Matt 8:4) and circumcision (John 7:22; Acts 15:1). Additionally, “Moses’ superb training, exceptional spiritual gifts and divine call uniquely qualified him to compose the essential content and shape of Genesis and the Pentateuch.”¹

¹ Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 22.

Moses' training in the courts of Pharaoh's palace provided him with knowledge and access to the Ancient Near Eastern legal codes and modern literary styles.

TITLE AND GENRE

In conformity with the standard practices of the Ancient Near Eastern practice of naming literary works by their first word or words, the Hebrew title of Genesis is in the beginning (bereshith). The English title Genesis comes from the Latin *geneos* or the generations/origins of (Gen. 2:4)

The Hebrew word toledoth, generations of, appears in Genesis 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1, 9; 37:2 and gives us clues to the biblical author's intent. These genealogies provide a literary bracket or bridge between larger narratives. So for the modern reader, these lengthy genealogies, although they may seem out of place help finish one story before moving to another and connect the literary dots between the patriarchs and other major biblical characters.

PURPOSE

The purpose of Genesis is not primarily scientific. This does not insinuate that the first biblical book ignores science or natural order; rather, the aim of Genesis is not to focus the reader's attention on creation but the Creator. For example, in Genesis 1:3 God said "let there be light" and He called the light day and the darkness night on the first day. Several verses later the biblical narrative describes how Yahweh created the stars, sun, and moon on the fourth day without addressing scientifically how we have light on day one without the sun created three days later. Genesis points us to a greater reality; the Creator is more important than the creation.

Secondly, the purpose of Genesis is not historical. Again, this does not imply that Genesis is unhistorical or fiction. Rather, the primary purpose of Genesis is not to give the audience a historical summary of every kingdom throughout time. So you will not find much about the Shang dynasties of China, emperors of Japan, or the Celtic kingdoms of northern Europe. God's Word specifically addresses the salvation history of Israel, God's chosen nation and the earliest patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

If the primary purpose of Genesis is not scientific or historical, what then is the goal of the biblical text? We find clues to this aim embedded in the earliest stories of the Bible. In Genesis chapter one we find the name Elohim used thirty-five times in the first thirty-five verses. This is not accidental but is an intentional literary design that points us back to the main point. Everything in Genesis focuses our attention upon God (Elohim). Creation points to God, man is created in the image of God, God makes a covenant following the flood, and it is God who intervenes following the sin of Genesis chapter three and the infamous tower of Babel in Genesis chapter eleven. Genesis, and the entire Pentateuch is the story of what God is doing. Primarily, Genesis helps the reader focus on specifics of the story without missing the main point, that everything proclaims the glory and sovereign authority of the Creator God.

THEOLOGY

Chaos to Order. When opening the Bible, the observant reader quickly encounters a world that is not like the one we know today. Genesis 1:2 relates, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters." In Ancient Hebrew thought, formless and empty meant that

the cosmos was empty of purpose, meaning, and function—a place that had no order or intelligibility. Without the Creator we find no purpose in the heart and soul of any individual or within the universe. It is the Lord God who gives us purpose in the midst of chaos. In Genesis, from the very beginning we see God giving purpose, God creating, God giving breath, and God putting order into His creation.

Image of God. *Gen. 1:26* Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” In the Ancient Near East, any image was seen as possessing the essence of the deity that empowered it to carry out divine functions. In Hebrew thought, physical likeness was not the primary importance, but a more abstract, idealized representation of identity relating to the office/role and the value connected to the image. Across the ancient world, the image of God did the work of God on the earth. In the Israelite context as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, people are in the image of God in that they embody his qualities and do his work. They are symbols of his presence and act on his behalf as his representatives.² The image of God in Genesis 1:26 is uniquely tied to the dominion of man upon the earth. We are created in His image because we are created to do his work and represent the Lord with the totality of our being.

Sin and Redemption. Sin and its devastating effects are vividly portrayed in the opening book of the Bible. First, we find God creating everything good and then resting from His work showing the completed nature of the task. In the Garden of Eden, we find man (Adam) dwelling with a good God in a good creation.
2 John H Walton. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 212.

ation and communing with the Lord face to face. This relationship was abruptly shattered when Adam and Eve sinned (Gen 3:6) and immediately hid themselves at the sound of the Lord (Gen 3:8).

This initial sin led to a cursing of the serpent, strife, pain in child birth, unnatural desire for leadership, cursing of the ground, work difficulties, and ultimately death and a permanent broken relationship with the Triune God. However, Genesis gives us a glimpse at redemptive hope. Genesis points the reader to a day when a seed of Adam will bruise the head of the serpent and break the curse that is called sin, which hangs over humanity. Genesis 3:15 sets the stage for the coming Messiah who will reconcile the devastating effects of sin.

Royal Lineage. Another clear theological theme of Genesis is the extensive focus on genealogies, royal lineage, and seed (See Gen 3:15; 5:1; and 10:1). The use of seed allows the author to trace lineage through the male line and emphasizes the singular lineage of Adam throughout Genesis. This singular lineage may also be one of royalty. The divine promise to Abraham and other allusions to kingship hint at the present and future nobility of Adam's seed ultimately fulfilled in the promised Messiah. Another reference to seed is the enmity that exists between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman after the fall. This connection may be a foreshadowing of God's punishment against evil through the life of David, again showing the need for the Son of God who crushed the head of the serpent through the resurrection.

Land. In the beginning, God created a unique harmony between the land and humanity. Initially, one can see the active function of the earth in God's creative activity. Not only does Genesis exhibit God's formation of the earth and land, it also

established that man was first made from the ground. The use of “adam” (man), and “adama” (ground) in Hebrew reinforces the dynamic connection between humanity and the earth. The theme of land continues in Genesis chapter three as the ground is cursed because of the sins of Adam. One can see the continuation of the land theme when Cain is driven from the earth (Gen 4:10) and again in the decreasing fertility of the soil because of sin in the time of Noah. The use of land in Genesis is also evidenced in the positive. Noah’s obedience leads God to promise never to curse the ground (Gen 9:11). Abraham is told his descendants will occupy a new land (Gen 12:1), and Jacob is assured reconciliation and return to the land of his fathers (Gen 31:3). These narrative episodes in Genesis display the frequent importance of the land in the Genesis account. Again we are reminded of the importance of land when Jesus will return and bring a new heavens and new earth (Rev 21:1).

KEY PEOPLE

Adam the name means “human.” Adam was the first man/person created by the Lord God in the Garden (Gen 1:27). Adam not only represents an individual but often substitutes for the collective humankind (1 Cor 15:22). Adam introduces sin into the world and points to the second Adam (Jesus) who will redeem and reconcile all humanity (Adam) for those who believe.

Eve is the first woman in history and is created in response to Adam’s need for a companion (Gen 1:18). Unlike Adam, Eve is not formed from the dust of the ground but from the rib of Adam showing the unique complementation relationship between man and woman. Eve has the status of the mother of “all living,” and birthed her first son Cain who later murdered his younger brother. Additionally, from Eve will come the seed who will crush the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15).

Serpent. In Genesis chapter three the crafty serpent recommended Adam and Eve eat from the tree that was in the midst of the garden (Gen 3:3). Although not identified in Genesis, the totality of God’s Word shows that the serpent was in fact the adversary Satan. As a result of his disobedience the serpent was cursed by Yahweh (Gen. 3:14), confined to the dust, and would have eternal enmity and strife with humanity.

Cain. The eldest son of Adam and Eve (Gen 4:1). Cain was a worker of the ground and offered an unacceptable sacrifice to the Lord (Heb 11:4). Ultimately, Cain’s lacking sacrifice led to envy of his brother Abel, anger, and murder. Cain was banished from the presence of the Lord following his sin and was marked by God to prevent retaliation.

Noah. His name means “to provide comfort.” Noah was a righteous man living in a wicked generation. In fact, Noah was the lone blameless man when the hearts of men continually did evil (Gen 6:3), leading God to pronounce a flood that would destroy all mankind and the reigning iniquity. Noah is then tasked with building an ark (a large square like vessel) that would protect his family and specific animals from the flood. At age 600 (Gen 7:11) God shut the ark and a forty day flood ensued. After the flood Noah, his family, and the animals, leave the ark. He then immediately built an altar to the Lord. Because of Noah’s righteousness Yahweh covenanted with Noah never to again flood the entire earth with a covenantal sign of the rainbow.³

Shem. The oldest of three sons of Noah. He received the blessing from Noah (Gen 9:1) and was the ancestor of many peoples including Abraham and the Israelite community. For this reason, Luke mentions Shem in the genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:36).

³ Although we think of rainbows as beautiful meteorological phenomena. The bow (archery) was an ancient sign of judgment and destruction. Thus, the Lord used a sign of judgment to remind the world of His righteous love.

TIMELINE OF ADAM

- ADAM IS BORN (AGE OF ADAM = 0)
- Seth is Born (Age of Adam 130)
- Enoch is Born (Age 622)
- Methuselah [Oldest man in the Bible] is Born (Age 687)
- Lamech [Noah's Father] is Born (Age 874)
- Adam Died (Age 930)
- Noah Born (126 years after Adam's death)

THE GOSPEL IN GENESIS

Genesis 3:15 has been labeled the protoevangelion, first gospel, because it foreshadows the struggle of humanity with sin and ultimately shows the victory offered through Jesus Christ. The offspring of the serpent will fight against the offspring of Eve. The seed of the serpent here does not refer to mini-snakes or future demons. Rather, the offspring of the serpent reflects natural humanity that has rebelled (sinful nature) against God. From this point forward all offspring will be divided into two categories the seed of the serpent (those living in rebellion) and the seed of the second Adam (the elect). For the first time the readers of the Bible get a clear picture of a future hope, redemption, and reconciliation following the devastating effects of sin upon our relationship with God.

Outline

Genesis 1-11 – “Primeval History”

- Four major stories

Creation (Gen. 1-2), Fall (Gen. 3-4), Flood (Gen. 6-9),
Tower of Babel (Gen. 11)

Genesis 12-50 – “Patriarchal History”

- Four major stories

Abraham (Gen. 12-23), Isaac (Gen. 24-26), Jacob (Gen. 27-35),
Joseph (Gen. 37-50)

RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

Devotional Commentaries

John Walton, *Genesis* NIVAC

Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation

Critical Commentaries

Victor Hamilton, *Genesis*, 2 vols. NICOT

Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis*, 2 vols. NAC

Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, JPST

Bruce Waltke, *Genesis*

Gordon Wenham, *Genesis*, 2 vols. WBC

Key verses

Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Gen 2:3 God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it He rested from His work of creation.

Gen 3:15 I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

Gen 4:7 If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Gen 6:7 Then the LORD said, "I will wipe off from the face of the earth mankind, whom I created, together with the animals, creatures that crawl, and birds of the sky—for I regret that I made them."

Gen 9:13 I have placed My bow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.