

A Level and Firm Foundation

An Introduction to Genesis

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Introduction - Why this study?

It is not overstating the case to say that without understanding the book of Genesis, you cannot properly understand anything else. Imagine, for example, if the foundation of a building was not properly squared or leveled. What would happen as you built upwards on top of that foundation? Imagine the instability, and the greater potential for disaster!

In the same way, if we hope to have a meaningful life, or even just to make sense of the world such as it is, we need to have a proper *worldview foundation*. Genesis establishes the foundation for our understanding of all existence. The Genesis narrative explains not only how things came to be, but also why the world, and especially all of humanity, is in its present condition. From Genesis we derive our Cosmology, Anthropology and, of course, Theology.

Beyond all this, every other book of the Bible presupposes the reader's familiarity with the Genesis narrative; allusions to Adam and Eve, the Fall of mankind, the Flood, Abraham and the Patriarchs are to be found throughout the pages of Scripture. Without a solid understanding of Genesis, how would you be expected to understand, for example, the analogy in 1 Peter 3:20-21 between the Flood and baptism?

Statement on our approach to Genesis

I believe Genesis to be history, not mythology. I regard Adam and Eve to have been two actual persons, not made-up characters serving as symbols for humanity. I believe the Garden of Eden to have been an actual place, and man's rebellion against God to have originated there. With the exception of occasional obvious metaphors or poetic refrains, I take the Genesis narrative literally. That means I also take the six days of Creation to have been six actual days, and not merely six "indeterminate periods of time" – a view which some have adopted in order to accommodate the inordinate amount of time necessary to substantiate an evolutionary model of origins. To relegate Genesis chapters 1-11 to mythology is to undermine all of biblical authority.

Timeline of Genesis / Patriarchal history

c. 4000 BC	Creation of heavens and earth
	Creation of all life on earth
	Creation of mankind
	Fall of mankind and exile from Eden
	Devastating effects of sin quickly manifest
	The first murder
	Gradual diminishing of longevity

Rapid and pervasive spread of evil

- c. 2350 BC Destruction of all life (save the remnant) via The Flood
Reemergence of all life (via the remnant)
Rebellion against God and separation into nations by language
- c. 2000 BC The call of Abraham out of Mesopotamia
Abraham, Sarah and family settle in Canaan
God's covenant confirmed with Abraham and his offspring
- c. 1900 BC The lives of Ishmael, Isaac/Rebecca, Jacob/Leah/Rachel and Jacob's children
The betrayal of Joseph and sojourn in Egypt
Joseph narrative – his rise to power in Egypt
- c. 1876 BC The family reunited and settling in Egypt

Background on Genesis

The historical, cultural and religious underpinnings of Judaism and Christianity come to us through the pages of Genesis. In between the more extraordinary events such as the Creation, the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham's supernatural encounters with God, Genesis reveals to us many aspects of everyday life in the world of the Ancient Near East (ANE). We learn about relationships between nations, between husbands and wives, parents and children; financial negotiations and land purchases, inheritances, animal sacrifices and the significance of blood as it pertains to the enacting of treaties or covenants. We also learn about such day-to-day things as food and meal preparation, washing, having guests in the home and settling disputes. In short, we learn about the way of life in the land that would become Israel.

Title, Authorship and Date

The title Genesis is from the word γενεσεως (pronounced: geh-neh-say-ose) in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Torah) in 2:4. As with the other books of the Torah, in Hebrew Genesis is called *tyvarB* (pronounced: B'reysheet), translated "In the beginning" and taken from the key word in the first sentence of the book. As the title implies, Genesis describes the origin of all things, which really is its purpose. Secondarily, it is the foundation for Israel's history/ancestry.

Genesis doesn't name its author. But in terms of the human side of authorship, both Jewish and early Christian traditions hold Moses to have written Genesis, and there is the understanding that he likely borrowed from existing oral histories and traditions among the Jewish people. Given his upbringing in the royal house of Pharaoh (and implied advanced literary education – see Acts 7:22), he may have had access to many of those literary sources. Jewish sources that claim Mosaic authorship include the ancient rabbis, Ben Sirach (*Ecclesiasticus*), the Talmud (*Baba Bathra*), Philo of Alexandria and Josephus.

Yeshua Himself, as well as other New Covenant authors frequently ascribed Mosaic authorship to the Torah (see, for example, Matthew 8:4 and 19:7-8, Mark 7:10, 10:3-4 and 12:26, John 1:45 and 5:46, Acts 3:22, 6:14 and 15:21, 2 Corinthians 3:15).

Most of the early church fathers accepted Mosaic authorship of Genesis and the Torah, though some (Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian) felt that the Torah may have gone through a process of editing subsequent to Moses' time (perhaps through Samuel or Ezra).

Modern scholars (19th century) began theorizing that the Torah was a patchwork of different traditions that had been woven together into a unified whole. Their argument was premised on the use of differing vocabulary and writing styles, different names for God (Elohim / YHWH), the presence of doublets (i.e., Genesis ch's 1-2) and on different emphases ("Book of the Law" = Deuteronomy vs. Priestly codes). Hence the J.E.D.P. or "Documentary Hypothesis" view. There are many flaws in this view, but as it arose in the premier universities and seminaries during the (so-called) "Enlightenment" many Bible scholars still ascribe to it.

A few responses to the objections of the J.E.D.P. school:

1. Varieties in vocabulary and varieties of literary styles were quite common in other A.N.E. literature. These are insufficient bases to argue for a patchwork (multiple authorship).

2. The different names for God, according to the rabbis, have theological significance.

~yhi_l{a/ (Elohim) refers to the aspect of God as the Most Powerful One, the Creator and Sustainer of all life. h̄w"iḥy> (Adonai/YHWH) describes His relationship in covenant to Israel as Redeemer. Furthermore, both names for God appear in the first two chapters of Genesis. Therefore, it isn't an issue of rival geographic groups preferring one name over the other, nor would it demand a different period of time.

3. Other A.N.E. texts use more than one name to describe their chief deity.

Inasmuch as we hold to essential Mosaic authorship, and put the date of the Exodus at 1446 BC, the date of the writing of Genesis (and of the rest of the Torah) would be between 1446 and 1406 BC, by which time Moses had died and Joshua was leading Israel into the Promised Land.

Outline (courtesy of Bible.org)

Outline based on Moses' use of the phrase "the generations of" (*toledoth*):

1. origins of heaven and earth, 1:1-2:3

2. origins of humanity, 2:4-4:26

3. generations of Adam, 5:1-6:8

4. generations of Noah, 6:9-9:17
5. generations of the sons of Noah, 10:1-11:9
6. generations of Shem, 11:10-26
7. generations of Terah (Abraham), 11:27-25:11
8. generations of Ishmael, 25:12-18
9. generations of Isaac, 25:19-35:29
10. generations of Esau, 36:1-8
11. generations of the sons of Esau, 36:9-43
12. generations of Jacob, 37:1-50:26 (#1-11 have a Mesopotamian literary background but #12 has an Egyptian literary flavor.)

Additional Resources and Reading:

1. Article on young earth view (Answers in Genesis): <https://answersingenesis.org/creationism/young-earth/young-earth-creationist-view-summarized-and-defended/> for the arguments for a young-earth view from Answers in Genesis.
2. Article background on Genesis (Bible.org): <https://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-genesis-0>
3. Dorsey, David A., *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* © 1999 Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI
4. Hoerth, Alfred /Mattingly, Gerald /Yamauchi, Edwin M., *Peoples of the Old Testament World* © 1994, 1996 Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI
5. Mayhew, Eugene J., *Canaanites in the ANE and Old Testament: Origin and Impact of Their Religion*, © 2012 Cadieux and Maheux Press, St. Clair Shores, MI
6. Sarna, Nahum M., *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* © 1989 The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, PA
7. Pritchard, James B., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* © 1955 Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ