

# An Introduction to Genesis

God is the Beginning

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1

**Sermon Series:** *Genesis: The Beginning*

**Topic:** Genesis

## I. Introduction

Today we begin ja 14-week sermon series through the book of Genesis. Genesis is the first book of the Bible and may be the one that raises the most questions.

Why is Genesis called Genesis? Who wrote it? When was it written? Why was it written? What does it tell us? And why do a sermon series on this book?

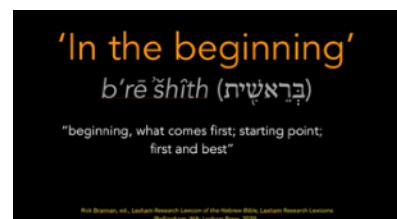
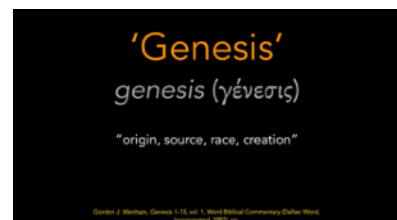
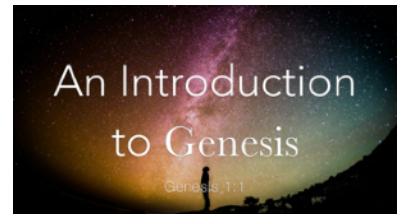
### Title

The title of this book is *Genesis*. Genesis is not actually a Hebrew word, but rather a Greek word that was transliterated from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (OT) called the Septuagint. The Greek word *γένεσις* (*genesis*) means "origin, source, race, creation."<sup>1</sup>

The Hebrew title of this book is, "*In the Beginning*," which is the meaning of the first two words of this book (בְּרֵאשִׁית *b'reshith*). This book describes the beginning of all things. It is *the book beginnings and of origins*. It describes the origins of the universe, of humanity, of sin, and of the Jewish people.

In fact, a most simple outline of the book could be,

- I. Origin of the world (1)
- II. Origin of the nations (2-11)
- III. Origin of Israel (12-50)



<sup>1</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), xxi.

## Author

Genesis is the first book of a group of five books, called the Pentateuch, that first served as the foundation of what we today know as the Bible. The author of these five books, according to both “Jewish tradition and the NT have [been] ascribed to Moses (cf. John 1:17; 5:46; 7:19, 23).<sup>2</sup> In Jewish rabbinic tradition, these books are referred to as “the Five Books of Moses.”

Mosaic authorship was nearly universally accepted until the nineteenth century, when nearly every biblical truth was doubted. Nevertheless, Mosaic authorship has been accepted by the ancient Jews, NT authors, and even Jesus himself makes it clear that he assumes Moses is the author of the Pentateuch (Jn 5:46).

The reasons for doubting Mosaic authorship stem from several editorial comments that likely would not have come from Moses himself. However, these can be easily explained by the fact Joshua, “Moses’ assistant,”<sup>3</sup> very easily could have added such comments. Or even a later editor could have added lines necessary for later generations to understand the places mentioned without changing the fact Moses authored the book. This should not dissuade us from confidence in the fact that Moses is the author Genesis. *If Jesus and the NT authors accepted Mosaic authorship of Genesis, then we too should accept it.* Since Jesus believed that Moses wrote Genesis and we are his followers, should we not follow him in this belief?

## Date

Given that Moses is the author of Genesis, we can place the date of writing during Moses’ lifetime. Moses lived from around c.1546–1406 B.C. But the events in the early chapters of Genesis obviously took place long before the life of Moses or any of his ancestors. Thus, we must make a distinction between the date of authorship of the book and the dates of the events recorded in the book.



Moses almost certainly wrote Genesis after the Exodus, which most contemporary, conservative, evangelical scholars date to around 1446 B.C.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps Moses wrote this during the 40-day period of time in which he was on Mt. Sinai alone with God (Ex 24:18).

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<sup>2</sup> John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 24:13; 33:11; Numbers 11:28; Joshua 1:1.

<sup>4</sup> This date is based upon the dating of Solomon’s fourth year to 966 B.C. and 1 Kings 6:1 which states that the Exodus had taken place 480 earlier. Moses was 80 years old at the Exodus and died at age 120.

## Purpose

We can summarize at least four purposes of the book of Genesis.

1. **To explain origins.** The first purpose of the book is, as its name indicates, to explain the origin of the universe, of humanity, of the nations, and of his sovereign election of the people of Israel to be the means of his revelation to and redemption of the world. This purpose is seen in the repeated phrase, "*These are the generations of...*," which is then followed by an individual of particular focus. This phrase is found 10x's throughout the book.<sup>5</sup>
2. **To explain humanity's primary problem.** The second purpose is to explain why this world is so broken. Genesis explains how a good creation went from good to evil, from communion to separation, from life to death, from peace to conflict, from light to darkness. Genesis explains that *sin* is humanity's primary problem. It also reveals both that God will bring righteous judgment against sin and gracious redemption from the curse of sin. God is both just and merciful.
3. **To reveal God's plan to solve that problem.** The third purpose is to reveal that even though God could have simply ended everything and started over when sin entered the world, He did not do that. Even *before*<sup>6</sup> things went wrong, He had a plan of redemption that would begin with Abraham and then follow through a long line of his descendants, which is why *genealogies are so crucial* to understanding Genesis. These *lists of descendants lead us to one particular Son of Abraham who will be the Savior of the earth.*<sup>7</sup>
4. **To offer hope and encourage faith in God.** The fourth purpose is to demonstrate God's power to restore what has been lost. Genesis demonstrates God's authority and sovereignty over all the earth and over all humanity. As we read Genesis we will come to see that God's plans and purposes in creating this world have not been thwarted through the sinfulness of man, but rather that they will be accomplished *through* it! God's great plans are providentially carried out over all nations. His ultimate plan to bring "*blessings to all families and nations of the earth*" (Gn 12:2-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4).

## Outline

The book of Genesis essentially divides into two sections that move from the wider to the narrower view; primeval history and patriarchal history. The first section is a macroscopic view

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2.

<sup>6</sup> John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis reveals that one of Abraham's descendants will be the one through whom "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (12:2-3), which helps us understand the significance of why Matthew began his gospel with a genealogy of Jesus that traces his ancestors back to Abraham (and eventually on to Adam, to who the first promise of a Savior was given).

of history of the whole world while the second section is an increasingly microscopic view that zooms in on one individual and his descendants.

- I. Primeval history (1-11)
  - A. Creation
  - B. Fall
  - C. Flood
  - D. Nations
- II. Patriarchal history (12-50)
  - A. Abraham
  - B. Isaac
  - C. Jacob
  - D. Joseph

The first 11 chapters focus on four key global events. The final 38 chapters focus on four key individual persons.

### **Why a Sermon Series on Genesis?**

Genesis is the foundation of the whole Bible. The truth revealed in this book shapes everything that happens in every other book of the Bible. It is impossible to fully understand the purpose of Jesus without first knowing the problem and promise found in Genesis. This book explains:

- Why there is a rhythm of light and darkness every day
- Why there is a sun, moon and stars
- Why there are different, days, months, years, and four seasons
- Why we worship and rest one day out of seven
- Why there is earth below and sky above
- Why there are solids and liquids
- Why there are so many different kinds of plants, vegetation, and fruit trees
- Why there are so many different kinds of birds, fish, animals, and insects
- Why your life is not an accident
- Why there are two sexes called male and female
- Where there is marriage and what it is for
- Why the basic family unit is comprised of a husband and wife; a father and a mother
- Why we all go to work every day
- Why there is death, pain, sorrow, and suffering in this world
- Why we sweat when we work and there is pain in childbirth
- Why there is also salvation from sin and suffering

- Why we wear clothes
- Why there are so many different languages in the world
- Why a rabbit or a deer will run from you
- Why the guilty hide and blame others for their own sin
- Why there is judgment and mercy
- Why we ask why

Furthermore, this book provides the foundation of the NT claim that Jesus is the Messiah and son of God. Genesis contains God's first promise to save sinners and reverse the curse of death. It provides the reason why the one who would reverse the curse will be a son of Eve, a kind of second Adam, and he will provide salvation through death. This book also reveals that one who would accomplish this great redemption will also be a son of Abraham. Thus, Genesis is the foundation of the New Testament and its teaching that Jesus is the One whom God promised to send and save from sin and death those having faith in Him.

## II. God is the Creator of All

The primary point of opening sentence and the opening chapter is that God is the Creator of all and the beginning of all.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.  
Genesis 1:1 (ESV)

These seven words are the foundation of all that is to follow in the Bible."<sup>8</sup> This sentence is effectively both a summary statement and an authoritative declaration of fact. It is kind of a heading that clues the reader in on what will follow. This is typical of Hebrew writing; first a topic is introduced and then more details follow. This sentence reveals the identity of the Creator and how the world came to exist.

### A. God is the Beginning

***In the beginning.*** The first observation is that this world has a ***beginning***. There was a time it did not exist. The ancient Greeks assumed the universe had always existed, but these opening words of Genesis reveal that it had a beginning. This world is not eternal or infinite. It is temporal and finite. If this world has a beginning, then it most certainly will also have an end. We ought not to believe the lies of The Lion King, because this world is not an unending "circle of life," but rather it is linear with a starting point and an ending point. We have been informed of its beginning and therefore we must be prepared for its conclusion.

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<sup>8</sup> John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 19.

This beginning reveals the beginning of time and of history. This is the starting point from which all else in this book will flow. God is at work in this world and this 'beginning' time has set in motion a series of unfolding events. The word 'beginning' (רֵאשִׁית *rē'šîṭ*) means "the commencement of a series of things or events; but here the context gives it the meaning of the very first beginning, the commencement of the world, when time itself began."<sup>9</sup>

**God created.** The universe and this world owes its beginning to someone other than itself. And that someone is **God**. God is the Creator of the world. The universe did not create itself or cause its own existence. The answer to Why there is something and not nothing is, because God created!

This means that this world—and everyone and everything in it—does not exist for no reason. Creators *create with purpose and plan*. Thus, there is a reason and purpose for why this world exists. There is a reason for why you and I exist. This world was created because of the will and intention of the Creator. He caused it to exist. God is the efficient first cause for this existence of all things.

The word 'God' here is אֱלֹהִים (*’ēlōhîm*), which means, "God, deity, divine being." This noun is plural, while the verb "created" is singular, which reveals that the author believes the creator is one being. God is the one God who created all things. God is unlike the idols that the godless nations worship. They do nothing, while God does creation. His personal name will be revealed to be Yahweh (2:4).

The name Yahweh is derived from the Hebrew verb *yada*, which means "to be; to exist." This is why when Moses asks God His name, He responds by saying, "I am," which could also be translated as, "I exist." That Yahweh **created** this world—which we will see in more detail next week—reveals that He did so *ex nihilo*, or "out of nothing" (Latin). God is the source of all that exists. He is the source of life and existence. He has the power to bring into existence things that do not yet exist. God is the Creator and the heavenly creatures will praise him for this.

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created."  
Revelation 4:11 (ESV)

The doctrine of creation is not an ancient and irrelevant myth. It is a doctrine affirmed from the beginning to the end of God's revealed word. It is doctrine that Jesus affirmed and it is a doctrine his followers should affirm. May this truth lead us to worship our God for all that He has done.

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<sup>9</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 29.

## B. God is the Creator of Heavens and Earth

*The heavens and the earth.* The second observation we can make is that God created “*the heavens and the earth.*” This phrase is another way of referring to all that can be seen and all that cannot be seen. It refers to the whole of the universe. The verse “could therefore be translated ‘In the beginning God created everything.’”<sup>10</sup>

He created the clouds, the winds, the moon, the sun and stars, all that is magnificent in the sky above, God created it. He created the earth, land, and sea and all that fills the deeps. Both whales and plankton were created by Him. Both minnows and marlins, sharks and shrimp. God created everything.

Heaven is the realm of God in the Bible while earth is the realm of man. The author is teaching us that God created everything in the physical realm and in the spiritual realm. God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. God is the sovereign Creator of all things. He reigns over all. His power is above all. His authority is over all.

We should also note that God existed before the world existed. He is separate from and exists independently of this world and this universe. He is the source of all that exists in this world, thus His power and greatness is incomprehensibly greater than anything found in this world.

## Conclusion

God is mighty and majestic. He is powerful and praiseworthy. He is sovereign and sufficient. He is the beginning and the end. He is Creator and He is sustainer. He started time and he will stop it. He began this universe and He will conclude it. He is the Creator of all things.

God is the origin of all things. He alone is the reason for the beginning of the heavens and the earth. He is the beginning of you and me. God created a world populated with persons because He is a personal God and He enjoys persons! He loves people. And when things went badly wrong, He graciously promised to send a redeemer, who is His only Son, Jesus of Nazareth.

This world and you and me are not here by accident. We are all here by the sovereign choice of His will, His plan, and His purpose. Human being are not autonomous. We are dependent upon Him for life and yet, He has revealed all this to us so that we may know Him. He intends for us to know that He planned this world and Created it. He planned your life and He brought you into this world. He has given each of us the gift of life, therefore let us use our life to seek Him, with all of our heart and soul.

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<sup>10</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 15.

Through faith in Jesus Christ—crucified for sin and resurrected for life—it is possible to enjoy of living and loving relationship with the Creator. O, if you do not know Him today, come home to Him through Jesus today!!

## Discussion Questions

1. Genesis begins with the words, "In the beginning, God..." What does this opening statement tell us about who God is and His relationship to everything that exists? What difference does it make that God existed before creation?
2. The sermon emphasized that the world is not self-created and that our lives are not accidents.  
How should believing that God created you affect the way you understand your identity, purpose, and value?
3. Genesis is described as the "book of beginnings" or "origins."  
What are some of the most important questions about life that Genesis helps answer? Which of those questions do people in our culture seem to struggle with most?
4. The sermon described the effects of sin as a movement from "good to evil, from communion to separation, from life to death, from peace to conflict, from light to darkness."  
Where do you see these effects of sin in the world around you? Where do you see them in your own life?
5. Genesis doesn't merely explain what went wrong; it begins to reveal God's plan to make things right.  
Why is it significant that God had a plan of redemption rather than simply abandoning His creation after humanity sinned?

6. The sermon emphasized that God's purposes are not ultimately defeated by human sinfulness but are providentially accomplished through history.  
How does that truth encourage you when circumstances seem chaotic, painful, or beyond your control?
7. Genesis gradually narrows its focus from the whole world to Abraham and his descendants, ultimately pointing toward the promised Savior.  
What does this tell us about the importance of seemingly ordinary people and events in God's larger purposes?
8. The sermon argues that Genesis is foundational to understanding Jesus and the gospel.  
Why do you think it is important to understand the beginning of the biblical story in order to understand the good news about Jesus?
9. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."  
If God truly is the Creator of everything—including us—what claims does He have on our lives? What would it look like practically to live as though that were true?
10. The sermon ultimately invites us to trust the God revealed in Genesis and to put our faith in Jesus Christ.  
What makes it difficult for people to trust God? What would it look like for you personally to trust Him more fully in this season of your life?
11. After hearing this message, what is one truth about God that you need to believe more deeply—and what would change in your life if you actually lived as though that truth were true?