

Introduction to Genesis

The English title comes from the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew (3rd cent. B.C.) and means "origin, birth or generation." The Hebrew title is *áðàùéú* (from *øÅàùÑÄéú* [*reshiyth /ray·sheeth*]) taken from the opening word translated "in the beginning."

Author

The earliest extant records universally attribute the book to Moses. Deuteronomy 1:8; 2 Kings 13:23 and 1 Chronicles 1:1 allude to Genesis as part of the Law of Moses. (Cf. also Matt. 19:4-8; Luke 16:29-31; 24:27; John 5:46-47; 7:19, 23.)

Internally, the book is a literary whole, unified in thematic development. In addition, the story of Joseph reveals several evidences of Egyptian local color. (39:4; 40:9-11 and 41:40 have all been illuminated by archaeological discoveries in Egypt.) Educated by the Egyptians, Moses could have written in several languages and scripts.

His first book serves as an incredible introduction not only to Exodus but also to the whole of the Bible. Mosaic authorship can be safely assumed. Increasing archaeological data has served to confirm Mosaic authorship and embarrass those who have argued against it. A case in point is the fact that it has now been demonstrated that writing was very old by 1500 B.C. instead of unknown as the critics had once claimed.

Date and Setting

The exact date is not given, but Moses could have used any number of written or oral records and most likely wrote it in the wilderness of Sinai after the Exodus in 1445 B.C. (There is voluminous literature written regarding the date of the book. An early date is assumed here.) As Israel became a nation, they needed teaching on the origin, not only of the human race, but also of the nations they would face in Canaan (chap. 10). Especially did they need to know of the covenant made with Abraham, which, among other promises, gave them the land of the Canaanites. The prophecy given to Abraham (15:15-16) not only promised their return but also implied God's will to destroy the wicked inhabitants, whose time for judgment had come. The nation of Israel had, as it were, been born in the womb of Egypt. They needed to recognize their roots as being in the land to which they were going. This should have produced faith that as God had cared for the Patriarchs, so He would care for the nation. The book concludes with a further prediction of the national destiny by Joseph's request to return his bones to the land of their inheritance (50:25).

Theme and Purpose

The book begins with basic material on the beginning of the earth, the birds, the fish, the animals and, finally, the crown of Creation--man. J. Sidlow Baxter has suggested that verse one provides a refutation of six principal false philosophies popular throughout history:

"In the beginning God"--that denies Atheism with its doctrine of no God.

"In the beginning God"--that denies Polytheism with its doctrine of many gods.

"In the beginning God created"--that denies Fatalism with its doctrine of chance.

"In the beginning God created"--that denies Evolution with its doctrine of infinite becoming.

"God created heaven and earth"--that denies Pantheism which makes God and the universe identical.

"God created heaven and earth"--that denies Materialism which asserts the eternity of matter.

More specifically, the book's theme revolves around how God chose one man out of all the nations, through whom He would make a nation to bless all nations. Chapters 1-11 (20%) cover over two thousand years of history from Creation to about 2135 B.C. (obviously this date is subject to debate, but is simply taking the literal date from the book itself.

Obviously, other dating systems can be considered), when Abraham was born. Chapters 12-50 (80%) cover less than three hundred years. (Joseph died about 1837 B.C.) Thus, the book is selective, thematic history, not a broad "story of mankind."

In addition, the book was written to prepare Israel to understand their patriarchal roots and their divine destiny as possessors of the land of the Canaanites. Gene sis was thus written to build the faith of a "slave" people that they might become a mighty nation by depending upon God.

Contribution to the Bible

Genesis provides the foundation upon which the entire Bible is built. Without it, redemption's story would have no historical basis. It provides the plot of the biblical "drama" which climaxes in the book of Revelation. Scroggie says it well when he comments,

As to scope, GENESIS tells us the beginning of everything, except God. The beginning of the universe, of life, of man, of the sabbath, of covenants, of nomenclature, of marriage, of sin, of redemption, of death, of family life, of sacrifices, of nations, of government, of music, of literature, of art, of agriculture, of mechanics, of cities, and of languages; indeed, of everything we know. As to its limits, it is only the beginning; there is here no finality (Scroggie, *Know Your Bible*, p. 21).

Christ in Genesis

Christ is the Seed of the woman (3:15), the Seed of Abraham (12:3) and the Shiloh descended from Judah (49:10). Christ is also the Life-giver in contrast to Adam who brought death (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). Christ is the ultimate object to whom the sacrifices point (Gen. 3:21; John 1:29). In addition, the "sacrifice" of Isaac points to the death of Christ, who was the Lamb provided by God (Gen. 22). Christ is also prefigured in Melchizedek, to whom Abraham paid tithes (Gen. 14:18-20; Ps. 110:1; Heb. 7:1-17). Joseph's life is also at least an illustration of Christ. Both were the objects of their father's love; both were hated and rejected by those closest to them; both were sold for a price, condemned as innocent and raised from humiliation to blessing by the power of God.

- By Tom R. Hawkins, <https://bible.org/seriespage/1-introduction-genesis>