

Genesis

Genesis is the book of beginnings. In its fifty chapters we see human history from creation to Babel (chapters 1-11) and from Abraham to Joseph (chapters 12-50). The first eleven chapters introduce the Creator God and the beginnings of life, sin, judgment, family, worship, and salvation. The remainder of the book focuses on the lives of four patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph). From these “founding fathers” will come the nation of Israel and ultimately the savior, Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

The first part of Genesis focuses on the beginning and spread of sin in the world and culminates with the devastating Flood in the days of Noah. The second part of the book focuses on God’s dealings with one man, Abraham, through whom God promises to bring salvation and blessing to the world. Abraham and his descendants learn firsthand that it is always safe to trust the Lord. From Abraham... to Isaac... to Jacob... to Joseph... God’s promises begin to come to fruition in a great nation possessing a great land.

Genesis is a Greek word meaning “origin, source, generation, or beginning.” The original Hebrew title *Bereshith* means “In the Beginning.”

AUTHOR

Genesis does not directly name its author. Although Genesis ends some three centuries before Moses was born, all of Scripture and church history agree that Moses authored the book.

The Old Testament is abundant with both direct and indirect testimonies to the Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch (see Exodus 17:14; Leviticus 1:1-2; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 1:1; Joshua 1:7; Ezra 6:18; Malachi 4:4). The New Testament also contains many references to Moses as the author (see Matthew 8:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:29; John 7:19; Romans 10:19; 1 Corinthians 9:9). The early church and the first-century Jewish historian Josephus believed in the Mosaic authorship. The Jerusalem Talmud (a collection of Jewish law and tradition) supports Moses as author.

No man in all of Israel’s history was better prepared or qualified to write its history. Trained in the “wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22), Moses had been providentially prepared to understand and integrate, under the inspiration of God, all the available records, manuscripts, and oral narratives of Israel’s history.

DATE & SETTING

Genesis divides neatly into three geographical settings: (1) the Fertile Crescent (chapters 1-11); (2) Israel (chapters 12-36); (3) Egypt (chapters 37-50). The setting of the first eleven chapters changes rapidly as it spans more than two thousand years and fifteen hundred miles. It paints the majestic acts of the Creation, the Garden of Eden, the Flood, and the towering citadel of Babel.

The middle section of Genesis rapidly focuses from the 2,000 years spent in the Fertile Crescent to less than two hundred years in the small country of Canaan. Surrounded by the rampant immorality and idolatry of the Canaanites, the godliness of Abraham rapidly degenerates into gross immorality in some of his descendants.

In the last fourteen chapters, God dramatically saves the small Israelite nation from extinction by transferring the “seventy souls” to Egypt so that they may grow and multiply (Genesis 46:27). Genesis spans more time than any other book in the Bible; in fact, it covers more than all sixty-five other books of the Bible put together.