

## GENESIS, THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS

### TITLE

The first phrase in the Hebrew text of Gen 1:1 is *bereshith* (“in [the] beginning”), which is also the Hebrew title of the book (books in ancient times customarily were named after their first word or two). The English title, Genesis, is Greek in origin and comes from the word *geneseos*, which appears in the pre-Christian Greek translation (Septuagint) of Gen 2:4; 5:1. Depending on its context, the word can mean “birth,” “genealogy,” or “history of origin.” In both its Hebrew and Greek forms, then, the traditional title of Genesis appropriately describes its contents, since it is primarily a book of beginnings.

### AUTHOR

Historically, Jews and Christians alike have held that Moses was the author/compiler of the first five books (the Pentateuch) of the OT. The Bible itself suggests Mosaic authorship of Genesis, since Acts 5:1 refers to circumcision as “the custom taught by Moses,” referring to Gen 17.

*Did Moses have access to historical records? Did written records exist back then? Or, did he write Genesis from oral tradition? Or, perhaps he got it directly from God by dictation on Mt. Sinai or on another occasion? We really don't know.*

### MESSAGE

Genesis speaks of beginnings—of the heavens and the earth, of light and darkness, of seas and skies, of land and vegetation, of sun and moon and stars, of sea and air and land animals, of human beings (made in God’s own image, the climax of his creative activity), of marriage and family, of society and civilization, of sin and redemption.

I think Genesis sets the theme of the whole Bible. Theme: God in his graciousness and love initiates, man fails/sins, God reaches out in graciousness and love to redeem man. Despite our sinfulness, weaknesses, and failings, God doesn’t give up in loving, redeeming, and using us for his glory and ultimate purpose. In short: God’s creation, man’s failure, God’s redemption, God wins. Isn’t this our story?

The book of Genesis speaks about relationships, highlighting those between God and his creation, between God and humankind, and between human beings. It clearly teaches that the one true God is sovereign over all that exists (i.e., his entire creation), and that he often exercises his sovereignty to overturn human actions and plans. It introduces us to the way in which God initiates and makes covenants with his chosen people, pledging his love and faithfulness to them and calling them to promise theirs to him. It establishes sacrifice as the substitution of life for life (Gen 22). It gives us the first hint of God’s provision for redemption from the forces of evil (cp Gen 3:13 with Rom 16:17-20) and contains the oldest and most profound statement concerning the significance of faith (Gen 15:6). More than half of Heb 11—a NT list of the faithful—refers to characters in Genesis.

A phrase word in Genesis is *elleh toledoth* ("these are the generations"), which also serves to divide the book into its ten major parts and which includes such concepts as birth, genealogy and history.

<b>"THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF..."</b>		
<b>Formula</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Location</b>
In the beginning God...	Creation	1:1 - 2:3
This is the account of the heaven and the earth	Creation	2:4 - 4:26
This is the written account of Adam's line	Genealogy: Seth to Noah	5:1 - 6:8
This is the account of Noah	Flood & Covenant	6:9 - 9:29
This is the account of Shem, Ham & Japheth	Table of Nations & Babel	10:1 - 11:9
This is the account of Shem	Genealogy: Shem to Abraham	11:10-26
This is the account of Terah	Story of Abraham	11:27 - 25:11
This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael	Genealogy of Ishmael	25:12-18
This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac	Transition of blessing from Isaac to Jacob	25:19 - 35:29
This is the account of Esau	Genealogy of Esau	36:1-43
This is the account of Jacob	Joseph & Israel in Egypt	37:1 - 50:26

There is a symmetrical pattern that finds Abraham at its center.

Adam	Abraham	Israel in Egypt
Genesis 2:4 - 11:26		Genesis 11:27 - 50:26
5 <i>Toledoth</i> from Adam to Abraham		5 <i>Toledoth</i> from Abraham to Israel

## OUTLINE

Creation of the universe and of the human race 1.1—2.25

The beginning of sin and suffering 3.1—24

From Adam to Noah 4.1—5.32

Noah and the flood 6.1—10.32

The tower of Babylon 11.1—9

From Shem to Abram 11.10—32

The patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob 12.1—35.29

The descendants of Esau 36.1—43

Joseph and his brothers 37.1—45.28

The Israelites in Egypt 46.1—50.26

### More Basic Outline

*Creation/Generation 1-2*

*Degeneration 3-11*

*Regeneration/Redemption 12-40*

The first 11 chapters of Genesis form a prologue to the rest of the Pentateuch (if not the whole Bible).

<b>GENESIS 1-11</b>	<b>GENESIS 12-50</b>
Events predominant	Persons predominant
" Creation	" Abraham
" The Fall into sin	" Isaac
" The Flood	" Jacob
" The Tower of Babel	" Joseph
The Race as a Whole	The Family of Abraham

The New Testament counterpart to Genesis is the book of Revelation. What is introduced in the book of Genesis finds its conclusion in Revelation.

<b>Genesis</b>	<b>Revelation</b>
Creation of the heavens and earth.	A new heaven and a new earth.
The Tree of Life in the Garden.	The Tree of Life in the New Jerusalem.
A river runs through the Garden.	A river runs through the New Jerusalem.
The first marriage: Adam and Eve.	The last marriage: The last Adam to the church.
The beginning of the career of Satan.	The end of Satan's career: The Lake of Fire.
Death enters.	Death is destroyed.
Man lost privileges because of sin.	Man regains privileges because of Christ's payment for sin.
Beginning of sorrow, pain and death.	Christ wipes away all tears.
The first murder.	No more death.
The beginning of Babylon.	Babylon destroyed.

## INTERPRETION APPROACHES TO THE CREATION ACCOUNT

1) **Young Earth.** Creation occurred 6,000 years ago, during six 24-hour days, in order described.

2.) **Day-age.** The days of Genesis are each periods of indefinite length.

3) **Gap.** There is a gap of a few billion years between Gen 1:1 and Gen 1:2.

4) **Allegory.** The creation account is an allegory; its message is the spiritual truth contained in the allegory. This is a very old position in Christian interpretation, although until the conflict with science developed the account was usually (but not always) thought to be true *both* literally and allegorically. As is often the case with allegories, the precise meaning that's supposed to be conveyed varies with the reader.

5) **Creation Poem Interpretation.** The number and ordering of "days" of Genesis 1 are chosen for poetic and thematic reasons rather than historical reasons.

6) **Reworked myth.** The creation account is a Mesopotamian creation myth that has been carefully reworked to express theological truths (monotheism, supremacy of Israel's God over the forces of nature, etc.). The myth is simply the medium through which these truths are conveyed.

7) **Theology uber alles.** The question of the historical truth of the account is of no importance whatsoever. All that matters is the theological truths it contains. A different formulation would be that the Bible should only be expected to be reliable in matters of theological importance; it's not intended to be a science or history textbook, and hence need not be entirely accurate in those areas.