

Genesis

Part II - Abraham, Chapters 12-25

Introduction

The book of Genesis is a book of beginnings. As the first book of the Pentateuch, its original purpose was to provide background, concepts, and context for the rest of the Pentateuch – the story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, the giving of the law, and their journey through the wilderness. However, as the first book of the Bible, purposes of God begun in Genesis flow through the Pentateuch and continue through the Old Testament and even to ultimate fulfillment in Christ, Himself. For a full introduction to Genesis, please refer to the [handout](#)¹ from the initial “Introduction” lesson of this class.

Themes in Chapters 1-11

As we have studied the book so far, the following are some of the themes that have emerged in this prologue section of Genesis:

- The LORD God, creator of the heavens and the earth
- Relationship of God and Man
 - Good, bad, and the ugly
 - God’s view of man – we are created in his image
 - Our commission
 - God’s blessing: be fruitful and multiply
- Man’s connection to the land
- Man’s corruption and how God brings judgment at the time, but also grace
- God’s purposes – God seems to have a purpose that He is bringing about in answer to sin
- Covenant
 - God’s covenant with Noah
 - God’s covenant with Abram

Review Chapters 1-11

Genesis 1:1-2:3 – The Prologue

The account of creation in Genesis 1 is remarkably brief. However, its purpose is not to provide a detailed, scientific description of how the universe came to be but to communicate spiritual truths that Israel needed to understand about this God, Yahweh, who was choosing them, especially as it differed from other ancient Near East understandings of gods and creation.

It begins with the most significant truth that God, and only God, created the heavens and the earth. The rest of the account is highly structured, almost poetic, which enables the author to elegantly express his points in a very condensed format. And the author uses breaks from the pattern to provide emphasis of the most critical points. Verse 2 states that *the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the face of the deep*. Following this, the first 3 days are devoted to giving form to the formless (light, sky, land) and the next 3 days consist of filling the emptiness (luminaries, birds and fish, animals and man) with God declaring each “day’s” work good and finally “very good.”

Unlike other ancient creation accounts in which man is an afterthought created by the gods to be their servants, here, man is at the culmination of God’s creation. The change in pattern to describe the creation of mankind sets it apart and signifies its importance. In this case, God first announces His plan to create man and to create him in his own image and to give mankind dominion over the rest of

¹ See http://www.parkstreet.org/sites/default/files/papers/genesis_1-11_intro.pdf . All previous handouts can be found at <http://www.parkstreet.org/library/christian-education>

creation. Thus God declares all of mankind to be his royal representative and steward on earth. And lastly, God *blessed* His creation that it would be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

On the final day of this section, God rested. He then blessed the seventh day and made it “holy” – meaning it was set aside for His use. Note how this shows the purpose of the book of Genesis as background and foundation for the rest of the Pentateuch as this gives the basis for the Sabbath to be defined and codified later in the law.

Genesis 2:4-4:26 – The Generations of Heaven and Earth

After the introduction in chapter 1, the rest of Genesis is marked into sections with the phrase “this is the account of [some name]...”. This is probably better translated as in the ESV as “These are the generations of [some name]”. The section that follows then describes what results *from* that person or in the case of verse 2:4, *the heavens and the earth*. These sections may contain genealogies or narratives or both. This first “official” section is a narrative, picking up with the creation of mankind and adding details to that part of the creation account. It then proceeds through the narrative of the Garden of Eden, the fall, and the story of Cain and Abel.

Creation of Adam, Garden of Eden, Creation of Eve

The narrative now describes how man is created from the dust of the earth – the first connection of mankind to the land. Life is breathed into him by God from whom all life proceeds. God then plants a garden in Eden (like a royal park or arboretum typically associated with a palace) with *every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food* and places the man there fully provided for. However, the man was then put to work. Even before the fall, man was intended to have a purpose and activity. Work was intrinsic to human life. In this case, the work had connotations of priestly service to God. At the same time, the man is given a single command to follow. Of all the trees, he would be allowed to eat, including the tree of life, but not of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

At this point of the narrative, God determines that something is “not good” because the man is alone. This reveals something about humanity in that we are not designed to live alone, but are meant to be in relationship with others. God sets about creating a suitable helper, but first leads the man to discover this need for himself. The man sets about the work of understanding the creatures he is to care for, but discovers that none fills that need for companionship. Thus, God forms woman from man – not a distinct creation separate from man, but made from him, so that she would be a “kindred being” – like him, but not exactly like him. The section then ends with this as the model for marriage – a bonding of man and woman in a covenant relationship.

The Fall, Eviction, Cain & Abel

In chapter 3, sin enters the world. As it opens, a new character is introduced in the form of the serpent, the craftiest of the beasts, and with the serpent comes the temptation for evil. He approaches the woman with a mixture of questions, truth and lies to persuade her to disobey God’s command. In his words, we find some of the ways that even now we are tempted to sin: doubt in the trustworthiness of God, belief that He is withholding something good from us, doubt that the consequences of disobedience are so bad. In this case, she is persuaded it must be a good thing to be “like God knowing good and evil” where “knowledge of good and evil” likely means the ability to make moral judgments on one’s own apart from God. She eats and gives to the man to eat. And in this act of rebellion, their eyes are opened and their innocence is gone. They realize they are naked, meaning they now know shame and guilt.

God now appears, walking in the garden. In their guilt and shame, the man and his wife now hide themselves because they know they are naked in contrast to 2:25 when they were naked and unashamed. The relationship of God and man is now changed from being able to delight in His presence to fear. God calls out to the man and draws out a confession (and excuses) first from him and then from the woman. The serpent is not allowed a confession for God moves to judgment and curses the serpent with

humiliation. The woman and man are also judged, but not cursed. However, the blessings of God are now tinged with pain and toil – in child bearing for the woman and in working the land for the man.

Chapter 3 ends with their eviction from the privilege of the Garden of Eden, without access to the tree of life (a sentence of death) and distanced from the presence of God. However, even in judgment, God provides clothing for them indicating His continued care.

Chapter 4 continues the narrative with the first two sons of Adam and Eve. With Cain and Abel, we see that the corruption of mankind continues. Each brings a sacrifice, but only Abel's is accepted which causes Cain to become angry and jealous. God attempts to reason with Cain to keep him from sinning in his anger, but Cain kills Abel and now faces the judgment of God. But again, even in judgment, God is gracious and merciful. Cain is *cursed from the ground* so that he will no longer have success as a tiller of the land and is forced to be a fugitive and wanderer. And yet, God allows Cain to live, to have His protection, and to have a family and a city to dwell in. He is fruitful and multiplies.

Genesis 5-6:8 – The Generations of Adam

In this section, God's dealings with Adam, his sons, and then Noah are the highlights. The genealogy in chapter 5 connects the story and line from Adam to Noah, and shows how God has chosen to use one family line to receive his particular blessing. Genealogies were selective so that not all generations are represented. As a result, they cannot be used reliably to measure time. It begins with a repetition of the creation of the mankind from chapter 1 so that this is now a continuation of that creation as mankind multiplies on the earth. The pattern of each genealogy listing is the same with four exceptions (which highlights them): Seth is in the image of Adam (thus carrying the image of God of the original creation). Enoch walked faithfully with God and God took him. Noah's name is explained and all three of his sons listed.

Genesis 6:1-8 now concludes this section with a pair of narratives that provide insight into what has been happening during this time as man has multiplied on the land. The first narrative describes the marrying of the *sons of God* with the *daughters of man*. While a controversial narrative in determining the nature of the *sons of God*, it is here that God, whose breath is our source of life, determines that He will limit the lifespan of mankind. In the second narrative, God now acknowledges the how great man's evil has become: *wickedness was great on the earth, every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*. It is to the point where God's heart is sorely grieved. He must act and determines to blot out all life (all that has breath), except that Noah had found favor with God indicating a path of hope.

Genesis 6:9-9:29 – The Generations of Noah

This second section of chapter six begins by telling the story of how God decides to spare Noah and his family from the coming catastrophe that God was bringing in judgment. The story of the flood covers 4 chapters and is the longest story of this prologue section. This gives an indication of its significance. It begins with the character of Noah in contrast to everyone else - *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God*. Since chapter 3, mankind appears to have been becoming more and more corrupt, and God has determined to make an *end of all flesh*. However, Noah and his family are to be spared! The rest of chapter 6 details the ark that Noah is to build and the animals he is to bring with him. And Noah obeyed.

Chapters 7 and 8 describe the actual flood as it comes and recedes. It is firmly anchored in real time with references to a real calendar and thus the story is treated as history rather than fable. However the number of days for the stages are arranged in a chiasmic pattern indicating that they may be symbolic or to facilitate the oral retelling of the account. However, at the center of the pattern, God remembers Noah, meaning that God's faithfulness to Noah was still present.

With its use of repetition, 7:21-23 emphasize the totality of the flood and that it did as God had determined:

Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

It is at this point that God remembers Noah and the floods recede. At the end of chapter 8, the text yet again repeats the necessity for this act, *the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth*. And yet, this time, despite this, God promises that he will never again destroy all life as he had done. Another plan would now be put into place.

The story of Noah concludes in chapter 9. As a second Adam, God blesses Noah and repeats the blessing/injunction, “Be fruitful and multiply.” Mankind will continue to have dominion over the whole earth, and again the special distinction of being made in God’s image is reiterated in the command to not take the life of another human being. God then establishes a covenant with Noah and all his descendants that *the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh*. The story of Noah concludes with the narrative of Noah’s drunkenness and the inappropriate behavior/sin of his youngest son, Ham. The result is the blessing of the two older sons and the cursing of the descendants of Ham, i.e. Canaan. Again, a key point in preparation for the Exodus story to come.

Genesis 10:1-11:9 – The Generations of Ham and Japheth

Chapter 10 is primarily a genealogy, but with additional biographic and geographic material. The primary concern seems to be the identification of various nations; for that reason, chapter 10 is widely known as the “Table of Nations” with a genealogy that describes the nations that proceed from Noah. It is somewhere within this time frame that the narrative of the Tower of Babel in chapter 11 occurs, possibly during the time of Peleg as that is when *the earth was divided*.

The first part of chapter 11 details the account of the Tower of Babel in which God yet again intervenes in the plans of men. The tower that was being built was likely a ziggurat structure meant to mimic a mountain and a way to reach the dwelling places of the gods. The stated purpose was *to make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth*. However, the LORD looks on this unfavorably due to the pride of the people or their disobedience in filling the earth or the pagan nature of the structure. He indirectly puts a stop to the building by confusing their languages, and then disperses the people.

Genesis 11:10 – 12:9 – The Generations of Shem and Terah, Call of Abram

The generations of Shem are repeated from chapter 10 with more detail. This emphasizes that the descendants of Shem are the main interest for Genesis, the line through which God will work. The end of chapter 11 begins the “generations of Terah”, the father of Abraham. Thus, this is the beginning of the next section that will include the narrative of Abraham and conclude with the generations of Ishmael and Isaac.

Terah begins the journey to Canaan, but it is Abram that in chapter 12 leaves his father and relatives and sets out for Canaan according to God’s command. God now establishes a covenant with Abram to make of him a great nation and to bless him so that he will be a blessing and through him all the nations will be blessed. And thus we return to the start of Genesis and God’s ultimate desire to bless all mankind despite our sin and corruption. God will not destroy us, but bless us.

Preview of Genesis 12-25 – The Life of Abraham

Genesis now focuses on the line of promise – the line of Abraham. These stories now focus on the origins of Israel as the context for the rest of the Pentateuch beginning in Exodus. The challenge for us will be to not simply treat these stories as providing history or context, but to also understand key concepts about God and His relationship to His people illustrated in these stories that apply to the whole history of God’s plan for redemption and to our lives today.

Outline – Generations of Terah, Ishmael

- 11:7-32: Generations of Terah (already covered last spring)
- 12:1-9: Call of Abram in Haran to go to Canaan
- 12:10-20: Abram continues to Egypt
- 13:1-18: Abram and Lot separate, God's promise of the land
- 14:1-24: Abram rescues Lot, blessed by Melchizedek
- 15:1-21: God's covenant with Abram
- 16:1-16: Sarai and Hagar, Birth of Ishmael
- 17:1-27: Abram to Abraham, Sign of the Covenant, Promise of Isaac
- 18:1-33: Abraham intercedes for Sodom
- 19:1-38: God rescues Lot. Origins of nations of Moab and Ammon
- 20:1-18: Abraham and Abimelech
- 21:1-34: Birth of Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael, Treaty with Abimelech
- 22:1-24: Sacrifice of Isaac
- 23:1-20: Death of Sarah, burial land acquired
- 24:1-67: A wife for Isaac
- 25:1-18: Death of Abraham, Generations of Ishmael

Themes

In addition to the overall themes of Genesis, this next section will also include the following:

- Covenant and God's promises
- God's involvement in Abraham's life and in history
- God's ways vs. man's ways
- Abraham as an imperfect man of faith
- The land of Canaan
- Sin continues

Goals

The following are what we hope will be the result of attending this class – whether it is a single class or a section or you are able to stay with us for the entire book:

- We will gain a better understanding of the character of God as revealed in Genesis
- We will grasp the power of God as the Creator of the universe and as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and what that means for our lives
- We will see the purposes of God played out in the life of Abraham and take comfort in His mercy, compassion, and control
- We will learn what it means to be God's servants and His people
- Our faith will increase as we learn to trust in God's goodness, compassion, mercy, and sovereignty