

## Genesis: A Book of Firsts

### Before You Begin

Remember that the goal in Bible reading is not just to know **about** God but to know Him. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge only makes us arrogant and obnoxious!

We are trying to understand what the Bible meant to the people who first heard it. Then we think about a truth or principle that would apply to our lives as the body of Christ and as individual Christians.

Use a translation that helps you understand. There are many good ones out there. The best translation is one that you will read! Ask for help from someone familiar with translations if this is confusing to you.

It's okay to use helps like study Bibles and commentaries, but don't let those notes keep you from focusing on the Bible itself! God's inspired Word is the Bible, not somebody's notes!

You are long removed from the culture of people in the Old Testament. You will sometimes read about places you have never heard of and names that you cannot even begin to pronounce. Most of us are just not accustomed to a culture in which men had several wives. They were very group / community / family oriented people. Their faith was not nearly as individualized as ours seems to be. You may cringe at times when you see how God acts. God always works with people where they are, doing for them what they need most. There is always a good reason for what God does, even when we think a particular action seems strange. Don't just ask **what** God did, but **why**?

You may not understand everything you read automatically. You may have questions. Good for you! Men and women have been studying the Bible for years and don't understand everything. What we are attempting to do is to help you get the bigger picture. Don't get bogged down in what you don't grasp. Grow from what you do grasp!

### Brief Overview of Genesis

**Genesis** tells about many beginnings: the first revelation of God Himself to mankind, the first plants and animals, the first man and woman, the first sin, the first covenants God made with man, the first news of God's desire to fellowship with His people, and the first news of God's longing to restore fallen man.

Because this book is mostly narrative, it has a major plot and subplots. The **major plot** has to do with God intervening in the history of human failure. He chose a man and his family to begin a special nation that would help people return to God. Even though famous characters like Moses, Noah, Abraham, and Joseph have major roles in this story, always remember that this is **His Story!** It's mostly about an awesome **God!**

There is a "big picture" framing device that can be easily overlooked. God uses Noah to preserve human life during the great flood (Chapters 6-9), and Joseph to preserve human life during the great drought (Chapters 37-50).

### Major Subplots

#### 1) The first two covenants God makes with His people:

God promised Noah and his sons that He would never again use a flood to cut off all life from the earth (9:8-17). The sign of this covenant would be a rainbow. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation used to bless all the nations. The sign of this covenant would be circumcision.

#### 2) The curse on the serpent after he deceived Eve (3:14-15).

This curse put hostility between the serpent and the woman and their offspring or seed. This anticipates God's special battle against evil and those who manifest evil. Spiritual warfare continues until this day.

### **3) God's choice of the younger or the most unlikely to bear the righteous seed or offspring.**

Have you noticed that God regularly bypasses cultural rules? In that culture, the firstborn were favored. However, God did not choose firstborn Cain, but Seth; not Ishmael but Isaac; not Esau but Jacob; not Reuben but Judah.

Have you also noticed that the godly seed is frequently born of an otherwise barren woman (Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel)? You'll see this again in I Samuel Chapter 1 with Hannah and in Luke Chapter 1 with Elizabeth.

The chosen ones are not chosen because of their own goodness. Their flaws are recorded for all to see. What makes them godly seed is that in the end they trusted God and His promise.

### **4) Judah takes the leading role among the brothers in the "Joseph" or Jacob narrative.**

He guarantees the safety of his brother Benjamin in 43:8-9 and is willing to take his place in 44:18-34. His action points to Jacob's blessing in 49:8-12, which reads that "the scepter will not depart from Judah." This blessing points to the Davidic kingdom and beyond that to Jesus Christ.

### **5) The connection with the next book in the Bible, Exodus, begins with the genealogy of Ham (one of Noah's three sons) in 10:13-14. One of Ham's sons is Mizraim. That is the Hebrew name for Egypt.**

This is what may be called a "linear" genealogy. That is, it traces the line of descent from an ancestor forward. For example, Genesis 5 begins with Adam and ends with Noah. The genealogies show how people spread to the various parts of the ancient world. They don't claim to document each and every generation. In that culture, ancestry was one of the most important things about a person. Elsewhere in the Bible are "vertical" genealogies that present the development of a single family, like we what we would do with our family trees. See 36:1-5 for an example. This type of genealogy was meant to show who belonged in the group and who did not.

## **Structure**

There are two basic segments to the Genesis narrative:

**Chapters 1-11** serve as a "prehistory" with stories of creation, human origins, the fall of humanity, and the persistent progress of evil – all against the backdrop of God's amazing patience and love.

**Chapters 12 -50** tell of the beginning of redemption of man through Abraham and his seed. The focus is on the stories of Abraham (11:27-25:11), Jacob (25:12-27:1, and Joseph (Chapters 37-50). You will see that in each case, these major stories come under the family stories of their fathers: Terah, Isaac, and Jacob. These stories are structured in part around a phrase that occurs ten times in the book: "This is the account of..."

The overall narrative begins immediately after the prologue in 1:1 through 2:3. It will flow from the first family in the Garden of Eden, to Adam's family on through Noah and Shem. Then it moves to Terah and Abraham. Finally, the narrative moves through Isaac to Jacob (Israel), and thus to Joseph.

Simultaneously, the family lines of the rejected sons (Cain, Ishmael, and Esau) are also given so that the chosen seed and the rejected brother are set off in contrast.

One more thing by way of connecting Genesis with the rest of the Bible: Did you know that Eden is restored in the final vision of the book of Revelation Chapter 22:1-5?