

## LESSON 1

# Introducing Genesis

*The Book of Beginnings and the Foundation of Biblical Revelation*

**MAIN IDEA** Genesis is the theological foundation of the Bible. It reveals the sovereign Creator, explains humanity's fall, introduces God's covenant promises, and begins the redemptive story fulfilled in Christ.

## Lesson Objectives

- Understand why Genesis is essential for reading the entire biblical canon.
- Identify the literary structure and two major divisions of Genesis.
- Explain the major themes of blessing, seed, land, covenant, and sin.
- Trace how Genesis prepares readers for the Pentateuch and the gospel.
- Apply Genesis by trusting God's promises and living under His sovereign rule.

## Teaching Overview

Genesis is more than a record of origins. It begins with the eternal God, presents the creation and rebellion of humanity, and shows God preserving and advancing His redemptive purpose through covenant promise. Its carefully organized account moves from the whole world to one chosen family, while its themes become the framework for the rest of Scripture. The book ends with promises still awaiting fulfillment, teaching God's people to live by faith in the God who keeps His word.

## Key Scripture Passages

**Genesis 1:1:** The opening declaration begins with God as the eternal Creator and source of all reality.

**Genesis 3:15:** Introduces the conflict between the serpent and the promised offspring, creating an expectation of victory.

**Genesis 6–9:** Displays judgment, preserving grace, and the Noahic covenant.

**Genesis 11:1–9:** Shows human pride and self-made greatness at Babel.

**Genesis 12:1–3:** Centers the book on God's covenant promise of land, offspring, name, and blessing to the nations.

**Genesis 50:20, 24–26:** Closes with divine providence and confidence in promises not yet fully realized.

**Romans 5:12–21; Galatians 3:6–16:** Show how New Testament teaching about Adam and Abraham depends upon Genesis.

**Revelation 21–22:** Completes the Bible's movement from a lost Eden to restored creation and God's dwelling with His people.

## 1. Why Genesis Matters

- Genesis supplies the foundation for creation, human identity and dignity, sin, death, covenant, Israel, redemption, and Christ as the Second Adam.
- Its theology appears in beginning form. Later Scripture develops and fulfills what Genesis introduces.
- Genesis records origins, but its controlling subject is God. The book does not explain God's beginning because He has none.

**THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE** Read Genesis as the opening movement of one unified Bible, not as an isolated collection of ancient stories.

## 2. The Title of Genesis

- The English title comes through the Latin Vulgate from the Greek Septuagint and communicates origin, beginning, or source.
- The Hebrew title, Bereshith, means “In the beginning,” following the practice of naming a book by its opening words.
- Genesis addresses the beginnings of creation, humanity, marriage, sin, civilization, nations, and Israel, yet it begins where theology must begin: with God.

**THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE** Let the Creator define reality, identity, morality, and purpose rather than treating human experience as the starting point.

## 3. The Literary Structure of Genesis

- The recurring formula “These are the generations of...” is called toledot. The term can mean generations, descendants, family history, account, or record.
- The formula organizes Genesis as a unified narrative and traces the historical result that proceeds from a person or family line.
- The narrative progressively narrows: humanity, Adam, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Israel.
- This narrowing highlights the chosen line through which God advances His promises. Genesis gives eleven chapters to primeval history and thirty-nine to the covenant family.

**THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE** Pay attention to literary structure. The arrangement of the text helps reveal the theological message of the text.

## 4. Composition, Authorship, and Unity

- Jewish and Christian interpretation historically received Genesis as part of the Mosaic Pentateuch.
- Modern source criticism proposed multiple sources, commonly identified as J, E, D, and P, based on features such as divine names, apparent parallels, and stylistic variation.
- Hamilton discusses these theories while emphasizing literary and theological unity. Mathews emphasizes the cohesive final form and identifies Moses as author/compiler.
- For interpretation, the inspired final text takes priority over hypothetical reconstructions behind it.

**THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE** Approach Genesis with confidence in its coherent, canonical message while engaging scholarly questions carefully and humbly.

## 5. The Two Major Divisions

- Genesis 1–11, primeval history, addresses humanity as a whole through creation, the fall, Cain and Abel, the flood, and Babel.
- The repeated pattern is rebellion, judgment, and preserving grace. Human alienation grows, but grace never disappears.
- Genesis 12–50, patriarchal history, narrows from the nations to Abraham’s family and from universal history to covenant history.
- At Babel humanity seeks to make a name; Abraham receives a name and blessing from God. The broad movement is creation, degeneration, and regeneration.

**THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE** Reject self-made greatness and receive identity, vocation, and blessing as gifts of God’s grace.

## 6. Major Theological Themes

- Blessing: Begins in creation, continues after the fall, passes through Noah, and is concentrated in the promise to Abraham for the good of the nations.
- Seed: Genealogies, family accounts, and covenant promises trace the chosen offspring through whom God's purpose advances.
- Land: Humanity loses Eden; Abraham is promised land; the patriarchs live by faith before receiving full possession.
- Covenant: The Noahic and Abrahamic covenants establish major categories for God's faithful relationship with His people.
- Sin and grace: Rebellion, violence, pride, deception, and unbelief expose human need. Even the patriarchs are flawed, so hope rests in God's faithfulness rather than human achievement.

**THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE** Measure faithfulness by trust in God's word, not by visible possession of every promised outcome.

## 7. Genesis and the Pentateuch

- Genesis introduces the unified story that continues through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
- The Pentateuch moves from creation and the patriarchs to exodus, Sinai, wilderness, Moab, and preparation for conquest.
- Genesis introduces promises; Exodus emphasizes relationship with God; Leviticus orders worship; Numbers moves toward inheritance; Deuteronomy prepares the next generation for the land.
- The central promises concern descendants, relationship with God, and land. Their roots are in Genesis.

**THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE** Read each biblical book within the unfolding covenant story rather than as a self-contained manual.

## 8. Genesis and the Gospel

- Genesis establishes the categories needed to understand Christ: creation, Adam, sin, judgment, promise, offspring, covenant, blessing, and new creation.
- The book creates three expectations: God's creative purpose will bring blessing, humanity's enemy will be defeated, and blessing will come through Abraham's offspring.
- The New Testament presents Christ as the fulfillment of these hopes. The Bible's final restoration of creation answers the loss introduced in Genesis.

**THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE** Read Genesis with responsible attention to its own context and to its place in the whole canon that culminates in Christ.

## Commentary and Scholarly Insights

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|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Author</b>         | Kenneth A. Mathews                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Source</b>         | Genesis 1–11:26, New American Commentary, vol. 1A                                                                                                     |
| <b>Summary</b>        | Genesis supplies the literary and theological foundation of the canon. Its themes appear in early form and are developed throughout later revelation. |
| <b>Why It Matters</b> | Supports the lesson’s central claim that Genesis is necessary for understanding the Bible’s unified message.                                          |

  

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| <b>Author</b>         | Victor P. Hamilton                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Source</b>         | The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17, New International Commentary on the Old Testament                                                                                            |
| <b>Summary</b>        | Genesis records origins, but its deepest subject is the eternal Creator. Hamilton also shows how the toledot headings trace the selected line through which God’s plan advances. |
| <b>Why It Matters</b> | Supports the lesson’s focus on God, literary structure, and the narrowing movement toward the covenant family.                                                                   |

  

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| <b>Author</b>         | Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Source</b>         | Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Summary</b>        | Toledot is broader than a list of names. It can describe the authoritative historical account, family history, and descendants associated with a person or line. |
| <b>Why It Matters</b> | Clarifies the key Hebrew term used to organize Genesis.                                                                                                          |

  

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| <b>Author</b>  | Sidney Greidanus                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Source</b>  | Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons                                                                          |
| <b>Summary</b> | The repeated “These are the generations of...” formula structures the narrative and traces Israel’s ancestry through the patriarchal line. |

## Why It Matters

Helps students see that Genesis is a carefully arranged story that moves toward God's redemptive purpose.

## Theology in Practice

| Sphere   | Actionable Application                                                                                                                             |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Personal | Begin with God rather than self. Receive identity as a creature made by God, confess sin honestly, and trust promises that may not yet be visible. |
| Family   | Teach creation, human dignity, marriage, sin, grace, and promise as parts of one biblical story. Model patient trust in God's providence.          |
| Church   | Read and teach Scripture canonically. Preserve the connection between creation, covenant, Christ, and new creation.                                |
| Ministry | Avoid moralizing isolated stories. Show how each passage contributes to God's redemptive purpose and calls hearers to faith and obedience.         |

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why would the Gospels, Romans, Hebrews, and Revelation be difficult to understand without Genesis?
2. Why does Scripture begin by assuming God's existence rather than attempting to prove it?
3. What does the toledot structure teach about the unity and purpose of Genesis?
4. Why does Genesis devote much more space to one covenant family than to primeval world history?
5. How does Abraham function as God's answer to the pride and scattering of Babel?
6. Which major Genesis theme do you see most clearly developed elsewhere in Scripture?
7. How does Genesis prepare readers for Exodus and the rest of the Pentateuch?
8. Where are you currently being called to live by a promise whose fulfillment you cannot yet see?

### Personal Notes

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## Key Takeaways

- Genesis is the theological foundation of the biblical canon.
- Genesis is about beginnings, but it is ultimately about the eternal, sovereign Creator.
- The toledot structure unifies the book and traces the covenant line of promise.
- Genesis 1–11 reveals humanity's crisis; Genesis 12–50 concentrates God's promised answer in Abraham's family.
- God faithfully advances His redemptive purposes despite human sin, and those purposes reach fulfillment in Christ.

**FINAL SUMMARY** The sovereign Creator faithfully advances His redemptive purposes through history despite human sin until His promises are completely fulfilled.

## Resources Used in This Lesson

- Kenneth A. Mathews, Genesis 1–11:26, vol. 1A, The New American Commentary.
- Victor P. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament.
- Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words.
- Sidney Greidanus, Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons.