

GENESIS

We live in a world shattered,

Each step reechoes the cracking of broken glass,
Shards removed at first from aching feet
but then . . . finally . . . tolerated,
Longing to recover the tranquil garden of gentle grass.

Some days you might not feel it, but I bet that often you do. I call it “the longing.” Often, it is felt most on days that are either best or worst. It happens when the world seems almost perfect (like a warm day at the shore with tall waves to ride and lavender sunsets), or when horror surrounds you (like hearing of the death of a friend). You long for the day at the beach to never end. You long for your friend to rise from the casket. You long . . . for it.

Many have explained “the longing” in different ways. My favorite explanation came from the poet Dante Alighieri. He said that winds blew out from the top of the Mountain of Purgatory on the opposite side of the world and made us long for “it.” (Don’t get me wrong there is no mountain in the Pacific like this, but I still like the story.) The Garden of Eden was set at the top of this mountain. These winds carried the scent of the Earthly Paradise out over the world. Each night

this brought back to us memories of a land that only a few humans had ever seen but that all of us somehow yearn for, the land of Eden. This sweet smell made us long to go back into the garden with God, with peace. This is what we long for in the best and worst of times.

Many centuries ago our first father began a sad journey, the journey of his exile. His path leads through the years to you . . . to today. As our father first stepped out of the garden into a world cursed and fighting against him, he knew he had shattered the world.

He carried with him, however, one glimmer of hope. He was promised that someday, Someone, a Seed would come and open the gates of the garden again. He could go back home again then. This is where the longing started.

You stand at the beginning of another journey. Before you is the first book of the Bible, Genesis. In it and the many other books you will be studying are wonders that you can not now imagine. Come along for the journey. Our destination is set. We hope to see our ancestral home once more, but first we have to figure out how we got here.



In this detail from the fresco in the Sistine Chapel, we look back to the dawn of Time and see the creation of the sun and moon.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Author and Context

Both Jewish and Christian scholars have historically maintained that Moses was the author of Genesis. While this has been questioned by modern scholarship, Mosaic authorship or editorship is quite reasonable. First, Moses was certainly capable of writing the book, educated as he was in all the learning of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). Second, the text of Genesis is structured around ten sections¹ which begin with the Hebrew word *toledoth*, “These are the generations of . . .” (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2). It is likely that these were written sources which the author edited and compiled into their present form. As a prince in Egypt, Moses would have had access to such written records, whether among the Egyptians or the Israelites. Third, and most significant, both Jesus and the apostles assume that Moses was the author (e.g., Matt. 8:4; Mark 7:10; John 1:17; 7:22; Acts 3:22; Rom. 10:5; etc.). Since Jesus was omniscient, that is He knew everything and the apostles wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit, the conclusion that Moses was the author follows quite naturally.²

Abraham welcomes heavenly visitors to a meal.



Growing up in the Egyptian court during the New Kingdom in Ancient Egypt, Moses (c. 1526–1406 B.C.) would have been exposed to one of the most sophisticated, wealthy, and powerful kingdoms the earth had yet seen. Under the tutelage of his adoptive mother, most likely the powerful Hatshepsut, Moses could have become a major player in Egyptian history. However, he considered the “reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb. 11:26) and numbered himself with the people of God, leading them out of bondage, revealing to them the precious law of God, and bringing them to the brink of the Promised Land.

Significance

Genesis is a masterpiece. Using a wide variety of literary genres (writing styles) and techniques, Genesis successfully acquaints the sons of Israel with their fathers and enables them to see both their faithfulness and weakness. As a result, it enables the Israelites to depart from Egypt knowing their role in God’s plan. Despite their own weakness, God would use them to bless the nations if they would but love and serve Him. The same holds true today for us who are the sons of Abraham by faith (Rom. 4:16, 17).

The word *Genesis* means beginnings. Nearly all ideas, events, and themes developed later in the Bible have their beginning in this book. The frequent references to God as Creator (e.g., Ps. 8; 19; Isa. 40:28; Rom. 1:25) drive us back to Genesis. The ubiquitous or ever present nature of sin which prompts the fall of Israel again and again (Deut. 27:9-26; Judg. 2:11-23; 2 Kings 17:7-20; 24:1-5) receives its explanation in the Fall. Our hope for deliverance from corruption bases itself upon the repeated promises in Genesis—the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head (3:15), the Descendant of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (12:3; 22:18), the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (22:13,14), and the Ruler who would arise from the tribe of Judah (49:8-12).

The significance of Genesis is not limited to the biblical text. Throughout history, Genesis has shaped the thinking and imagination of millions. Writers have imitated its stories. Scientists have used and abused the creation account. Artists and musicians have sought to capture its passion and emotion. It is hard to overestimate the influence of Genesis.

Main Characters

The major character who pervades Genesis is the Triune God of heaven and earth, Yahweh. In the beginning He speaks the world into existence, creating all things “very good.” After the Fall, He repeatedly evaluates the works of the sons of men. Eventually He chooses a people for Himself and preserves them from certain destruction despite their foolishness and treachery.

The other characters are divisible according to the two main sections of the book. Chapters I through 11 discuss the early history of the world, known as primeval history. During this period the major figures are Adam and Eve, the first couple, Cain and Abel, the first siblings, and Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the founders of a new humanity following the flood.

The second section of the book, chapters 12 through 50, chronicles the beginning of God’s redemptive (the way He would save a people) program through a single family. The three patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—figure largely in this story. Associated with them are a variety of other fascinating characters. With Abraham, we see his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, his wife’s maid-servant Hagar, his child Ishmael, and his promised son Isaac. With Isaac we witness his wife Rebekah and his sons Esau and Jacob. With Jacob, renamed Israel, we meet his brother Esau, his uncle Laban, his wives Leah and Rachel, and his twelve children, the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Noteworthy among them are Judah and Joseph who play pivotal roles in the last portion of the book.

Summary and Setting

Interestingly enough, Genesis has two different historical settings. First, it has the original setting in which the events occurred: the Fertile Crescent and Egypt from creation until the death of Joseph around 1805 B.C., the lion’s share of the material spanning from the call of Abraham in 2091 B.C. (12:4) to the death of Jacob around 1859 B.C. (49:33ff). Second, it has the setting in which it was finally written: Israel was either still in the land of Egypt or had just departed under the leadership of Moses and the time was around 1446 B.C.

The book of Genesis treats its story like a chef peeling an onion. Starting with a broad focus upon the world at large, the book gradually, by removing one layer after another, highlights the selection of the twelve tribes of Israel as God’s chosen people. The book begins with the universe as it bursts upon the scene, new and fresh from its Creator’s hands but soon twisted by man’s rebellion. This rebellion reaps horrendous consequences. Brother is set against brother and in time all men rise up in rebellion against God. Yet in the midst of this rebellion, God works to fulfill His promise to bring forth a Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent (Gen. 3:15). He delivers Noah and his family from judgment and brings them safely through the deluge. God then covenants with Noah, promising never again to destroy the earth in such a fashion but to provide a stable environment in which His Gospel promise would be fulfilled.

As the book progresses, its focus narrows step by step. God’s promised deliverance will not come through Ham and Japheth but through Shem. Yet it will not come through all of Shem’s descendants but only through those of Terah, the father of Abraham. And to Abraham the gospel promise is reissued, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; cf. Gal. 3:8).

But God has not finished narrowing the scope of his redemptive purpose. Not all of Abraham’s children shall be incorporated into God’s plan—Ishmael is passed over and the story focuses upon Isaac, whose life is redeemed by the ram which God provides in the thicket. Then Esau is left behind and the story of Jacob becomes paramount. Jacob is renamed Israel and his sons, the sons of Israel, become the twelve tribes through whom God’s redemptive purposes for the world will be fulfilled.

The sons of Israel, however, fail to perceive their role in the plan of God. They quarrel and complain and treat their brother Joseph treacherously, selling him into slavery in Egypt. But God’s promises cannot be thwarted. He uses their jealousy and spite to change their character and preserve them in the land of Egypt; they meant it for evil, but God intended it for good (50:20). And so the book ends, awaiting the fulfillment of God’s promise to lead His people to the promised land (50:24, 25; cf. 15:12–16).

Worldview

J.R.R. Tolkien's superb *The Lord of the Rings* epic never fails to stir my imagination. It has spawned whole industries. Book stores are lined with "Tolkien like" material (much of which deserves as little attention as it receives). Hollywood produced three blockbuster movies based on Tolkien's epic. When these movies came out they caused quite a stir, and many people were so inspired by them that they actually picked up the books and began to read. Or, better yet, perhaps they picked up the books first and read them before they went to see the movies.

But imagine for a moment that you did watch the first movie and were so inspired by what you saw that you picked up *The Fellowship of the Ring* and began to read Tolkien's tale. Let us pretend that you were so excited that you decided to skip the prologue with its extended discourse on the history of hobbits and jump right into Chapter I. You would, of course, immediately bump into Bilbo Baggins. And as you

read, you would find that Bilbo is not your typical hobbit. It seems that Bilbo has had some odd adventures, has actually been out of the Shire and is now fabulously rich as a result. You pause in your reading. "I'd like to know about that adventure," you say to yourself. Suppressing this desire, however, you press on—you want to read about Sauron and Isengard. But the desire continues to increase as tantalizing details from the past leak out—a magic ring, a wizard, frozen trolls, the House of Elrond, and the son of Gloin. You get a nagging feeling that you are missing an important piece of the puzzle. "Will I never have any peace?" you ask yourself. So you decide to glance at the Prologue. And there you find mention of an earlier book, *The Hobbit*, where many of these tantalizing details are discussed. Heaving a great sigh, you decide to become a true Tolkien aficionado. You close *The Fellowship of the Ring* and go to the store where you pick up a copy of *The Hobbit* and you begin to read at the beginning.

The point of this vignette is to illustrate that the first book of a series often sets the stage for the entire set. Frequently it reveals key information without which the other books are cryptic or make no sense. What is the basic story line or plot? Who are the major characters? The heroes? The villains? What problems do the characters face? How will they overcome these problems? The answers to these and other questions are often provided in the first book.

So it is with the Bible. The book of Genesis sets the stage for the entire book—both Old and New Testaments and for all of life. Without an understanding of Genesis the reader of Deuteronomy, the Psalms, or Matthew is going to be at a loss to understand fully what is being discussed. On the contrary, the man or woman who knows Genesis will both understand and enjoy the latter books much more.

To understand this "introduction" to the Bible and to all of life, one must understand the main characters and the main problem that faces these characters.

The reward for this grand epic, however, is unlike reading the *Rings* trilogy or *The Hobbit*. Much more is at stake; much more can be gained because this epic is the story of your race. The great problem set forth in Genesis is your great problem, and to grasp God's answer to this problem at Calvary you must understand Genesis.



Scripture tells of a flaming sword outside of the garden to keep out Adam and Eve.

God Is Personal

The great main character of this story is the Lord God of heaven and earth, Who is unlike any other being.

One of the interesting aspects of God's personhood is that He interacts with Himself. This indicates that God is Triune—He is three persons in one nature. While the full revelation of the Triune character of God comes in the New Testament, Genesis contains at least two clear allusions to this central biblical doctrine. First, within the first three verses of Chapter 1 we have all three persons of the Trinity mentioned: God, the Spirit of God, and the Word of God. Second, God refers to Himself in the plural, "Let Us make man . . ." (1:26), "Behold the man has become like one of Us . . ." (3:22), "Let Us go down . . ." (11:7). Some have argued that this use of the plural is the "plural of majesty" as when a queen says, "We would like crumpets with our tea." Others have argued that this is a reference to other heavenly beings such as angels. However, in the light of later revelation it seems that the most reasonable explanation is that this is a foreshadowing of the Triune character of God.

Genesis not only reveals the Triune nature of God, it also assumes that there is only one true God. In the context of Egyptian culture and belief, the opening chapter of Genesis is revolutionary. The Egyptians associated the various portions of creation with a multitude of different deities who each had their respective sphere(s) of authority. Genesis overthrows this entire way of

CREATION MYTHS

Many in academia refer to Genesis as a creation myth. While the Bible is not "mythological," there are creation myths from vastly diverse cultures and civilizations.

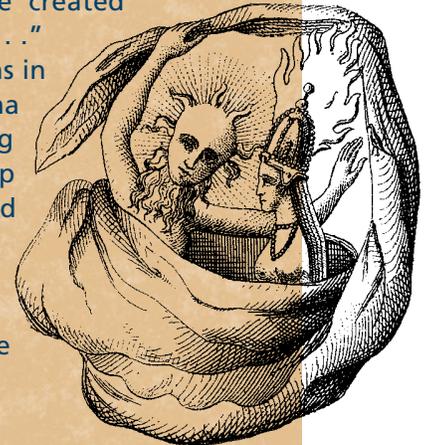
The Sumerians held that the primeval sea existed first and within that the heaven and the earth were formed. The stars, planets, sun and moon were formed between heaven and earth. The Babylonian story is similar: "When in the height heaven was not named, and the earth beneath did not yet bear a name, and the primeval Apsu, who begat them, and chaos, Tiamut, the mother of them both their waters were mingled together, and no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen; when of the gods none had been called into being, and none bore a name, and no destinies were ordained; then were created the gods in the midst of heaven . . ."

There are several creation myths in Hinduism. One myth tells of Brahma sitting in a lotus flower, floating and tossing on the sea. He lifted up his arms and calmed the wind and the ocean. Then he split the lotus flower into three. He stretched one part into the heavens, another part into the earth, and with the third part he created the skies.

In ancient Egypt several versions of creation emerged. In one there was the swirling watery chaos from which arose

Atum, the primordial god represented in the form of a human and a serpent. He created the gods, then men were created from his tears. In another myth, the god Ptah is the supreme deity and creator of Atum: "He who made all and created the gods . . . who gave birth to the gods, and from whom every thing came forth, foods, provisions, divine offerings, all good things."

There have been many reports from missionaries in the last century that pre-literate tribes often have "sacred narratives" which are quite similar to, and provide a kind of echo for, the truth of Biblical creation.



In Hinduism, Brahma is the supreme god whose essence pervades the entire universe.

thinking by tracing the origin of everything to the creative power of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The gods of Egypt, Moses declares in Genesis 1, are mere idols (cf. Ps. 115:1-8).

God is Sovereign

Like all good epics, the history of the world has a producer and director.

As the Creator of all, the God of Genesis is also the Lord of all, or Sovereign. This means, first, that God is distinctly different from His creation. While God has existed from eternity, the world began to exist when God called it into being. God created the world *ex nihilo*, out of nothing (cf. Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3). While God is not dependent on anything for His own existence, all of creation depends on Him.

God's sovereignty extends over all the earth. The God of Scripture is immanently involved in His creation, not passively and distantly watching all that transpires. The creation is His and He does with it as He sees fit. He destroys the earth with a flood, He confuses the tongues at Babel, He destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, He turns Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, He chooses Jacob rather than Esau. The list could go on, but the point is the same: God acts in the world as He sees fit.

God's sovereignty would be frightening if it were not simultaneously revealed that God is holy, righteous, and good. His sovereignty is the power to do all those things which He wants to do. Of course, all that He wants to do is good and right because He is Goodness and Righteousness. When Abraham was informed of the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he feared for the lives of the righteous within the city and asked, "Shall not the Judge of all

the earth deal justly?" The ensuing conversation between God and Abraham reveals that God does indeed deal justly and mercifully with sinners.

So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

God's goodness, however does not make Him too lax and indulgent to visit calamity on his enemies. Cain is cast out for murder, the earth is flooded because of man's wickedness, languages are confused because of pride, Sodom and Gomorrah

are incinerated for their debauchery, and two of Judah's sons are killed for their "evil."

While God condemns ungodliness, He promises to bless those who love Him and keep His commandments. God's treatment of those who serve Him is in sharp contrast to pagan deities who may or may not be favorably disposed to those who seek their aid. The gods are foremost man's enemies. In contrast, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob always works for the good of those who love Him and keep His commandments. He never punishes the godly for following in His paths. Thus, He takes Enoch to himself, He preserves the life of Noah, He rewards the faithfulness of Abraham, and He blesses the integrity of Joseph.

God is Covenantal

This God who is unique and sovereign is also love. The reason God works for the good of His people is because He loves them. This love is demonstrated by the fellowship God has with His people. First, He communicates with them. He does not leave them ignorant of Himself and His standards; He reveals Himself via direct revelation, blessings, dreams, prophecies, angelic visitations. Second, He establishes a clearly defined relationship (or covenant) with them, promising to bless them if they will but love and serve Him but threatening to chastise and even destroy them should they rebel. We see this in His relationship with Adam (2:15-17), in His covenant with Noah and his offspring (9:8-17), and in His covenant with Abraham and his descendants (17:1-14).

God is Covenantal

In His covenant with Adam³ God gives clearly defined privileges, expectations, and consequences. He grants that Adam and Eve can eat from any tree in the garden, presumably even from the tree of life. However, God restricts them from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warns them that if they eat of its fruit, they "will surely die." Adam and Eve despise the Word of the Lord and listen to the word of the serpent. As a result, God demonstrates His faithfulness—He fulfills His word of judgment, and mankind becomes subject to death and decay.

After the Fall, God sets in motion a plan to save His ruined creation. His plan, much like Tolkien's *Hobbit*, involves some strange choices. We might expect God to immediately wipe out the wicked

After the Fall, God sets in motion a plan to save His ruined creation. His plan, much like Tolkien's *Hobbit*, involves some strange choices. We might expect God to immediately wipe out the wicked

or raise up some army of the righteous. God often, however, chooses the few and the obscure, just as Tolkien calls on the frightened and apprehensive Bilbo to do great things and to set in motion the actions far beyond his imagination. So God looks at times to single families like Noah and his children. God calls Abraham to be the father of many nations. Ironically, when God first comes to Abraham he is an idol worshipper who has been unable to have any children. What irony!

God's covenant with Noah likewise stresses God's faithfulness. While we are accustomed to think of the regularity of the seasons as a matter of scientific necessity, Genesis presents this regularity as a testimony of God's faithfulness. Why does the sun rise each morning? Why does winter turn to spring? Why do birds fly? Apples fall from trees? Why do cows moo? The answer, according to Genesis, is because God is faithful—He orchestrates both the mundane and the spectacular events in the world (cf. Ps. 104; Col. 1:17).

God's covenant with Abraham shines brighter than the sun. Again and again God manifests His determination to fulfill His promises in the life of Abraham and His descendants. Nowhere is this portrayed more forcefully than in Genesis 15. It was a common practice in the Ancient Near East to establish covenants by slaying an animal, cutting the animal in two and then placing the two pieces opposite one another. The participants of the covenant would then walk through the pieces as they recited the terms of the covenant. The action symbolized the covenanters' vow either to fulfill the terms of the covenant or to become like the divided animal—dead. The remarkable part of Genesis 15 is that, though there are two parties to the covenant, God and Abraham, only one of them walks

through the pieces. God, symbolized by the flaming pot, passes through the pieces and thus declares to Abraham—either I will fulfill my promise to grant you a son or I will die. The latter of course is impossible. What follows? God will certainly grant a son. What a testimony of God's faithfulness!⁴

This testimony continues throughout Genesis as God fulfills His promises despite the foibles, trickery, and treachery of men. He blesses the faithful efforts of His people and makes them successful. Likewise, God turns the evil actions of His own people to *their* eventual good. While not excusing sin, Genesis emphasizes that God is faithful and does whatever is necessary to fulfill His promises.



Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

God is Merciful

As in Tolkien's epic where the weaknesses of even a Hobbit like Bilbo is eventually unmasked, the biblical characters prove that they are sinners in need of grace. During his adventure, as you might remember, Bilbo finds a "precious" magic ring. Eventually, he begins to fall under it powers, and we see his weakness. In the same manner, the biblical heroes all have feet of clay. Noah falls into drunkenness. Sarah laughs at God's promise of an heir. Abraham seeks to fulfill God's promise in his own strength by fathering Ishmael. Isaac tries to bless Esau instead of Jacob. The patriarchs even sell their brother, Joseph, into slavery. All are in need of mercy.

Genesis emphasizes the mercy of God alongside His covenantal faithfulness. Though Adam and Eve rebel against Him, He does not completely disown them but promises to deliver them from the craft of the serpent (3:15), provides them with clothing to cover their shame and symbolize their forgiveness (3:21), and expels them from the garden lest they live forever in their fallen state (3:22-24). Though God destroys the world in a great deluge, He "remembers" (8:1) Noah and delivers Him. Though Sarai is brought into the harem of Pharaoh, God delivers her and preserves her to bear the promised child (12:10-20). The God of Genesis is a God who delights to show mercy.

Man Reflects the Image of God

The other main character in Genesis is mankind. Man begins his time on earth as a true and righteous reflector of God's glory. Man is like a mirror reflecting back to God the wonder of His own glorious love.

Originally, man was made in the image of God. What is he as the image of God? First, he is personal. Just as God speaks, acts and judges, so man speaks, acts and judges. He has the capacity to think and reason. He can analyze and assess.

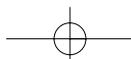
Second, like God, man is initially sovereign, but in a limited way. He is sovereign, first, in the sense that he is a mini-creator. Many creatures are like God in this way. Beavers make dams; birds make nests; bumble bees make honey. But man has the unique ability to create, not simply things that he needs, but frivolous things—things which have no apparent link to his needs—bookshelves, video games, sculptures, and Oreos. The reason man can and should create such things is because God did. God did not need the universe; He created it because He wanted to. It delighted Him. And just as there is a fundamental distinction between God and the universe, there is also a distinction between the things man makes and man himself.⁵

Man is also sovereign because God has invested man with authority over the creatures of the earth.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea' And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea' (1:26, 28).

Like God, man is covenantal. God created man to live not in isolation from but in relation to God and other creatures. Man always lives *coram Deo*, before the face of God. God walks in the garden and finds Adam when he is trying to cover his sin (3:8-11). God "comes down" to see what the men of a particular region are

Isaac is shown mercy and a ram is given for the sacrifice to God.



doing (11:7; 18:21). All men are in a covenantal relationship with God. Some men acknowledge this relationship, and others choose to suppress it (e.g., 19:9 cf. Rom. 1:18–32), but everyone is accountable to God. Man also lives in relationship with other people. In the opening chapters of Genesis, the covenant of marriage is created by God as a perpetual statute (2:24). Sons are identified in relation to their fathers and nations in relation to their father, or patriarch (10:1ff). Man is responsible to see that justice is upheld and to hold perpetrators of injustice, notably murder, accountable (9:6). Man always exists in covenantal relation with other people—in the family, the church, and the state. Third, Adam himself bore a special covenantal relationship to the entire creation. Adam was appointed by God as the head of creation. When Adam sinned against the Lord, the earth was plunged into ruin and decay and all of Adam's descendants were born in a state of moral corruption. In other words, man is born into sin and born a sinner.

Man is a Distorted Reflection

Early in the story of Genesis, however, Adam, the righteous mirror reflecting God's glory, is shattered by sin. As a sinner man no longer perfectly bears the image of God, but he still bears God's image.

This fall into sin creates the great problem for the human race. Adam was created "very good." Sin, however, made man love evil and commit sin. For now, because he is created in the image of God, there are certain things which man is but other things he ought to be but is not.

Man ought to be holy, righteous, and good. God created man to joyfully receive His commands and obey them. He told Adam and Eve to abstain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they disobeyed, He visited them with death and cast them out of the garden. He demanded that they

obey. This expectation of obedience recurs again and again in Genesis. When God looked down upon the earth prior to the Flood, He "saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and . . . the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was

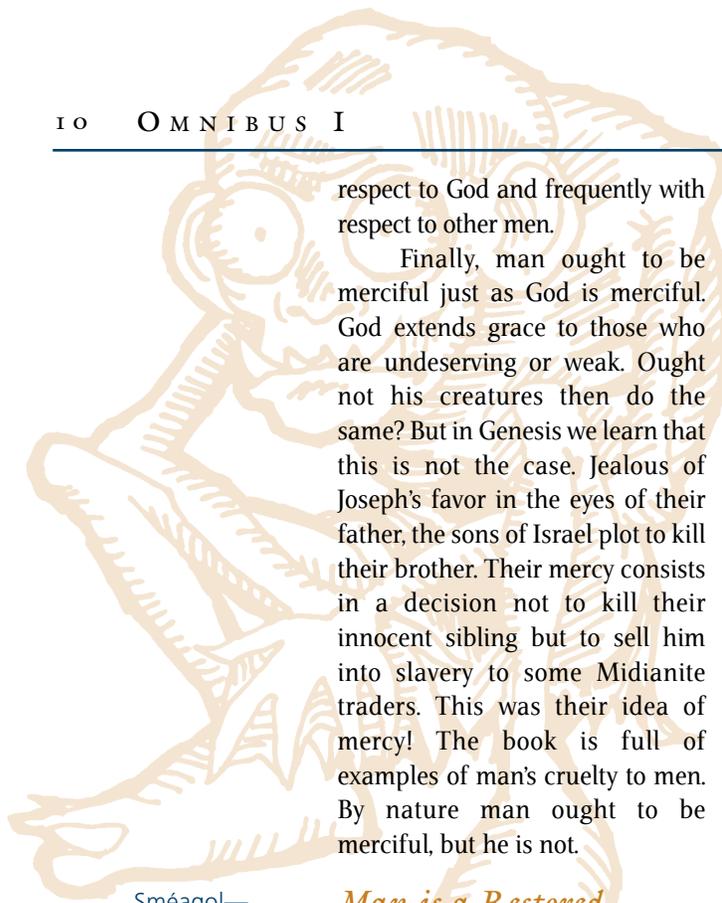
grieved in His heart" (6:5,6). As a result, He judges man for his disobedience with the great deluge. God expected that His law would be obeyed. However, as a result of the Fall, man no longer had the capacity to do good on his own initiative. Following the Flood, God declares that "the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21). By nature man ought to be



"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made."

holy, righteous and good, but he is not.

Also man ought to be faithful both to God and to other men. Just as God is faithful to fulfill his covenantal obligations and promises, man ought to fulfill his. Sadly, this does not happen. Beginning in the opening chapters of Genesis, man turns against his sovereign Lord. Although God created man to live in fellowship with Him, man rejected this relationship. As a result, man's covenantal faithfulness to other men is also undermined. Isaac endeavors to avoid the Word of the Lord and give the blessing to Esau, forcing Rebekah and Jacob to resort to trickery in order to fulfill God's prophecy. Laban treacherously betrays Jacob, forcing him to work for seven years and then failing to give Rachel in fulfillment of his promise. By nature, therefore, man is a covenant breaker, always with



Sméagol—
or Gollum—
from Tolkien's
epic *The Lord
of the Rings*

respect to God and frequently with respect to other men.

Finally, man ought to be merciful just as God is merciful. God extends grace to those who are undeserving or weak. Ought not his creatures then do the same? But in Genesis we learn that this is not the case. Jealous of Joseph's favor in the eyes of their father, the sons of Israel plot to kill their brother. Their mercy consists in a decision not to kill their innocent sibling but to sell him into slavery to some Midianite traders. This was their idea of mercy! The book is full of examples of man's cruelty to men. By nature man ought to be merciful, but he is not.

Man is a Restored Image-Bearer

The problem of sin must be solved and the shattered mirror of man must be restored. Fortunately,

Genesis does not leave us with what man ought to be by nature but is not. It leads us on to what man can be by grace. This basic distinction is set up in the garden, when God establishes a dichotomy between the seed of the serpent and the Seed of the woman. The seed of the serpent are those who build up the kingdom of Satan and rebellious man. The Seed of the woman is ultimately Christ and also, in Him, those who build up the kingdom of God and redeemed man.

This redemption follows a basic pattern. First, God extends his grace to a man. Second, He speaks a word to him, expecting that he will receive His word and believe it. Third, the man responds by approaching

him via blood sacrifice as an acknowledgement of his sin (this pattern can be seen as early as Genesis 4 with Abel). Finally, the faithful man demonstrates his faith and gratitude by living in obedience to God's law.

This pattern is evident throughout Genesis: See *Chart 1*.

Genesis sets the stage for the greatest epic, the real history of the world in which God redeems Adam's fallen race through Christ. God's story sets the stage for all future history. It also sets the pattern for all great stories throughout history. As we recall Tolkien's *Hobbit*, we see that he echoes Genesis in many ways. The insignificant, like Bilbo of Bag End, are called to become great players in the history of their imaginary world. This, of course, repeats the pattern of the patriarchs, who are called to important roles in the history of God's saving plan.

The Hobbit also leaves us with the same sense as Genesis. Both end leaving us in a state of hope and expectation mixed with foreboding. What will become of the Ring? What will happen to Bilbo? We haven't seen the last of Gollum, have we? Now, we are ready to dive into the *Fellowship* with new understanding. In a similar way, Genesis leaves us with the expectation that God will bring about great things through the family of Abraham. We hope that we will again enter the garden. We long for the Seed of the woman to appear. This expectation, however, is mixed with foreboding of coming slavery and the fact that the problems of the Fall have still left the world in pieces as we leave the book. God's original creative act has been distorted and corrupted, but God Himself has not been thwarted.

—Stuart W. Bryan

For Further Reading

Spielvogel, Jackson. *Western Civilization*. Fifth Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003. 1-33.

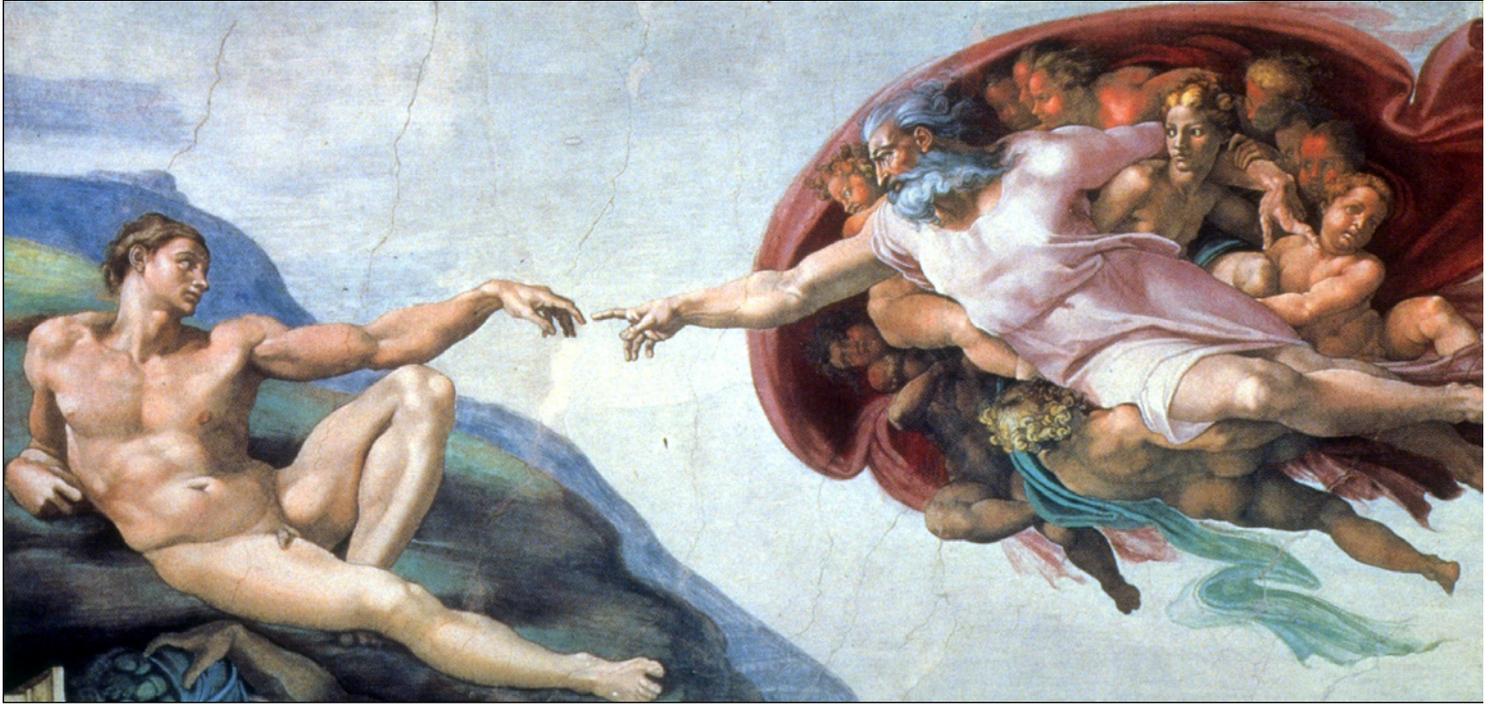
Veritas Press Bible Cards: Genesis through Joshua. Lancaster, PA: Veritas Press. Creation (1), The Fall in the Garden (2), The Flood (5), God's Covenant with Abraham (9), Twelve Tribes of Israel (17).

Jordan, James. *Primeval Saints*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001.

Leithart, Peter J. *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2000. Pages 17-70.

Chart 1: **PATTERNS OF OBEDIENCE**

	NOAH	ABRAHAM	JACOB
God's Man	6:8	12:1	25:23
God's word to the man	6:13	12:1-3	28:13-15
Man's sacrifice for sin	8:20-22	12:7, 13:4	33:20
Man's obedience	6:22	15:6	35:2



SESSION I: PRELUDE

The Mystery of Michelangelo's *Creation of Man*

This is the famous fresco painting by Michelangelo that is on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It shows the creation of man spoken of in Genesis. This, of course, shows a very unbiblical picture of God. He is not a grey haired old man. The cherubim are not pudgy little babies. This, however, is not the controversial part. Look behind God. One character is not like the others. Just under God's left arm is a beautiful woman (who is not like the cherubs). Artists and art historians dispute her identity.

Write a paragraph explaining who she is (Hint: on another part of the ceiling Eve is pictured but she does not look like this woman).⁶

Detail of Eve from *The Temptation and Expulsion*.



Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:

Comprehension Questions

1. When and by whom was Genesis written?
2. What does the word *Genesis* mean?
3. How would one divide Genesis into a two part outline?
4. What purpose does the word *toledoth* serve in Genesis? What does it mean?
5. Make a list of the things we learn about God from the book of Genesis.
6. Why did the Fall introduce a distinction between what man is as the image of God and what man ought to be?
7. What is a covenant? With whom did God enter into covenants in Genesis?



READING FOR SESSION II:

Genesis 1:1-11:26 (This reading is the *Toledoth 1-5* mentioned in the *Author and Context* section.)

SESSION II: DEBATE

Genesis 1:1–11:26

A Question to Argue

How long did it take God to create the world?

Read the three views of Creation held by Christians in the church today outlined below. Then discuss or write short responses to the objections to each view, thinking through how advocates of each view would seek to defend their position.

THE HISTORIC SEVEN 24-HOUR DAYS POSITION.

This view takes Genesis literally. It states that God created the world in six days. Each day was a 24-hour period. It holds that this creation happened in the order set forth in Scripture and that God rested the Seventh Day. This view also holds that all death was the result of the Fall. This pattern of work and rest set up the weekly paradigm that we are all to follow.

THE DAY-AGE POSITION.

This position asserts that the “days” in Genesis are not 24-hour days, but that each Day represents an age that could have been years or even millennia long. It bases its interpretation of the Hebrew word *yom* (day) on verses like Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8. It looks at the Sabbath rest of God on the Seventh day as His rest from His creative activity which continues to this day. This view does believe that animal death occurred before the Fall.

THE FRAMEWORK POSITION.

This view believes that the seven days of creation are not to be taken as literal, twenty-four hour days, but are instead figurative, topical descriptions of God’s creation of the world. As evidence they point to the fact that there is a pattern in Genesis 1 in which God creates realms in days 1–3 (light and dark in the

heavens, the sky and sea, and dry land) and their rulers in days 4–6 (sun and moon to “rule” the day and night, birds and fish to rule the sky and sea, animals and finally man to rule the dry land). This view asserts that the Genesis language offers snapshots of the divine creativity, but that this language is by nature metaphorical. The chief thing not to be taken literally according to the framework position is the chronological sequence. This view does not, however, commit to any specific time frame for creation; neither does it commit itself to any specific order of events. It also allows for the possibility of death in all but man (who bears God’s image) before the Fall and points to the Sabbath as God’s eternal enthronement over creation, and the eternal rest to which all creation ultimately points and is fulfilled in Christ.

Objections

OBJECTIONS TO THE SEVEN 24-HOUR DAYS POSITION:

1. How can you know that days 1–3 are “normal 24-hour days” if the sun and moon had not yet been created?
2. How can you hold this view since modern science has found that the earth is about 4 billion years old?

OBJECTIONS TO THE DAY-AGE POSITION:

1. In the few Old Testament passages in which the words *day* or *days* are not to be taken literally (normal 24-hour days), doesn’t the context determine this meaning? What in the context of Genesis 1 tells us that *day* does not mean what it normally means (i.e., a normal 24-hour day)?
2. Isn’t your view just an attempt to force the conclusions of modern science into the biblical text?

OBJECTIONS TO THE FRAMEWORK POSITION:

1. It can be said that the language of Genesis 1 points



to a poetic structure (i.e., Realms on Days 1–3 and Rulers on Days 4–6). While this seems clear, why does this pattern prove that the language is figurative? Or, put another way, why couldn't God have done his creative work in a poetic pattern?

2. Do you think that this complicated theory is really what God was trying to convey with the language of Genesis 1 or is this just another attempt to make our Bibles fit the conclusions of modern science?

Write a paragraph promoting which view of creation you think is correct.



READING FOR SESSION III: Genesis 11:27–37:1 (Toledoth 6–9)

SESSION III: DISCUSSION

Genesis 11:27–37:1

A Question to Consider

Should someone ever be punished or rewarded for the actions of another?

Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:

Text Analysis

1. What one prohibition did God give to Adam in Genesis 2?
2. Why did Eve disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit?
3. Why did Adam eat? (See I Timothy 2:14 if you need some clarification)
4. What punishments resulted from Adam's sin?
5. What curse does the ground receive because of Adam?
6. What curse do Adam and Eve receive because of Adam's sin?

7. How do we know that this curse is carried on to their children?

Cultural Analysis

1. In athletic events, if one player does something wrong (e.g., drops an easy fly ball in the bottom of the ninth inning, allowing two runs to score and his team to lose), is it fair for his whole team to be punished for it (i.e., lose the game)?
2. If a child robbed a store, what would our culture say about sending the parents of that thieving child to jail?
3. Why does our culture react differently in these circumstance? Is this biblical?

Biblical Analysis

Read Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–22 thoughtfully out loud. These passages can be difficult to understand so make sure you have your Bibles open while you discuss it.

1. In both of these passages to what is Adam's sin compared?
2. In Romans 5:12, why did death spread to all men?
3. In Romans 5:13–14 how were the sins of those that lived between Adam and Moses different than (not in the likeness of) Adam's sin?
4. What does Romans 5:18–19 make clear about Adam's sin?
5. In 1 Corinthians 15:22, what happen to all men in Adam?

SUMMA



Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the questions above.

Is it righteous to punish or reward some people for the actions of another? What does culture believe and what does Scripture teach?



READING FOR SESSION IV: Genesis 37:2–50:26 (Toledoth 10)



Chart 2: PARTS OF A COVENANT

ASPECT OF COVENANT	NOAH	ABRAHAM
Promise	Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. (9:11)	I will be a God to you and your children (17:7). You will receive a Seed (15:5). Your descendants will be like the stars (15:5). You will receive a land (12:8). I will bless the world through you (12:3).
Law	Protecting the image of God seems closely related to this covenant. (9:1-7)	Walk before me and be blameless (17:1)
Blessing	Food, multiplication and safety. (9:1-4)	Seed, land, wealth, blessing to the world. <i>See above.</i>
Sign	Rainbow (9:13 ff)	Circumcision (17:9 ff)

ASPECT OF COVENANT	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	QUESTION
Promise	John 17:1-3, Matt. 28:20	What does Christ pray for? What does He promise for His Church?
Law	Rom. 13:9, Gal. 3:13-14;	What is this Law in this passage the same as? What does this tell you about God's rules of righteousness?
Blessing	Rom. 4:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:4-5	Whose blessings has the Church inherited? How has this promise expanded? If we are what 2 Pet. 2:4-5 says, is the Church still his people?
Sign	Matt. 28:19; I Cor. 11:24-26	What are the signs of the New Covenant? How do they relate to the sign of Circumcision and Passover given to Israel?

SESSION IV: ANALYSIS

Genesis 37:2-50:26

A Question to Consider

What is a covenant?

Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:

Text Analysis

Reread: Genesis 9:1-17 and Genesis 15

1. According to the similarities of these passages, what is a covenant?
2. One theologian has said that God's covenant is basically a relationship (or bond) of life or death significance ruled over by God.⁷ What do you see in these two passages that supports this view?

Biblical Analysis

What are the essential parts of a covenant?

Answer the questions in Chart 2.

SESSION V: DISCUSSION

A Question to Consider

Can God accomplish His will by using sinful people in the process?

Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:

Text Analysis

1. Does God ordain that sinful actions take place? Consider Genesis 45:4-8; 50:19, 20; Exodus 4:21; Matthew 26:54; Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:28.
2. Does this remove man's responsibility for his sin? Consider the above passages, Ecclesiastes 7:29 and Romans 9:19-26.

Biblical Analysis

1. What does it mean that God is sovereign? Consider the following Scriptures:

- He accomplishes His will (Ps. 115:3; 135:5-7;



Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. **JACOB BLESSING THE SONS OF JOSEPH.** 1656. Oil on canvas. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel, Germany.

Dan. 4:17, 34, 35; Eph. 1:11)

- He brings about trivial things (Ex. 34:24; Prov. 16:1, 9, 33)
- Calamity is under His rule (Isa. 45:7; Lam. 3:37, 38)

SUMMA



Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the questions above.

How can God accomplish His purposes through the sinful actions of human beings and still be holy, just, and good?

OPTIONAL SESSION

Analyzing the Art

Begin class by analyzing this painting by Rembrandt.

1. Who are the characters in this painting?
2. Where in Genesis is this scene described?
3. What is Joseph endeavoring to do with Jacob's hand?
4. Does Rembrandt capture the emotion which the biblical text ascribes to Joseph at this point? What emotion is portrayed?
5. Which of the boys appears the more pious? Why?
6. What event does this blessing recall from Jacob's own life?
7. Rembrandt's painting changes a number of things in the biblical text, both by addition and omission. Can you identify them? Why do you suppose he did this?

ENDNOTES

- 1 Technically there are eleven sections. The two toledoth sections about Esau have been combined (36:1–8 and 36:9–37:1).
- 2 The identification of Moses as the primary author of Genesis does not exclude some later editorial revisions or additions. For instance, Genesis 11:31 associates Ur with the tribe of the Chaldeans, a group of people who did not emerge until after Moses' death. For a fuller treatment of Mosaic authorship consult Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994) pp. 38–48.
- 3 Some people are uncomfortable describing Adam's relationship with God as a covenant. However, Scripture explicitly identifies this relationship as a covenant (Hos. 6:7), and all the elements of a covenant are present: privileges, expectations, blessings, consequences, etc. For a fuller treatment, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980) chapter 5.
- 4 Hebrews 6:13–20 discusses this passage in Genesis 15 and uses it to encourage us to trust in God's faithfulness through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 5 This point is related to the Nicene Creed's statement that Jesus was *genitum non factum* (begotten, not made). Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, meaning of course that Jesus has the same nature as God Himself (Jesus is divine). We are adopted sons of God. We do not have His nature because we are creatures. Nevertheless, through Christ, we receive all the benefits that He as the Son of God deserves. For example, we shall inherit the earth.
- 6 For a fascinating discussion of this question, see James Romaine's chapter on Creativity in: Ned Bustard, ed. *It was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God* (Baltimore: Square Halo Publishing, 2000) pp. 159–201.
- 7 O.P. Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980) pp. 3–15. This gives the definition for covenant, saying that it is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. For the adventurous student or the inquisitive parent this chapter of this book does a great job explaining covenants.