

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS

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Title

“It was standard practice in the ancient Near East to call a literary work by its initial word or phrase” (Anchor Bible, 1964)

Hebrew first word: be-rešit, ‘in beginning’

Greek: Genesis.

Latin: In principio.

Historical Setting (Galen, 2022)

- Prehuman origins
- Primal human history
- Israel’s ancestry
- Common law and morality

Historicity required for:

- Israel’s right to occupy the Land
- Jesus’ use in Matthew 19
- Scripture’s appeal to divine authority
- Uniqueness amongst ancient cosmologies

Authorship

- Human names remain unknown to us.
- Neither Jesus nor his apostles attribute Genesis to Moses.
- Its transmission and translation have been guided by God himself through millennia.
- Had Genesis not been revealed, then every generation would have deduced God’s nature from observing his creation.

Purpose

- Pursue a polemic against pagan cosmologies.
- Define a theological worldview for human thought, belief and morality.
- Distinguish the divine nature from everything created.
- Assert the will and the power of a singular divinity over all creation

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Uniqueness of the God of the Bible

- The biblical God has no imaginable pre-creative or primordial cause. (He is the First Cause.)
- A lawful, law-enforcing God creates a world that can be studied scientifically. (Pagan gods were too capricious, and Islam's god is too arbitrary.)
- No fantastic legends about warring gods and cavorting demigods.
- There is no race, people, nation or tribe that deserves to rule over others or to abuse them.

Message (*Genesis 1–11*, Lexham, 2012)

“As a prequel, Gen 1–11 provides a background to the message of the entire Bible; it introduces God, reveals His power in creation, and illuminates God's expectations for humanity.”

Major Themes

- Yahweh is creator of all things
- The cosmic conflict between God and gods.
- The wickedness of humanity and the problem of sin
- God's dispersion of humanity
- God's choosing of Israel

Literary Genre

- Mix of prose and poetry
- History or myth, fact or fable?
- Aetiology ~ etiology: sources, origins. “the stories make sense when read as a traditional Israelite account of origins.”

Sources

“The Pentateuch itself comes to us as an anonymous work.”

Mixed text from:

1. Ancient writings and oral tradition.
2. Mosaic writings (see Exod 24:4–8; Deut 31:9–11)
3. Pagan materials
4. Editorial work
5. Scribal emendations

Documentary Hypothesis (Galen)

Genesis combines earlier written documents:

J from Jehovah: Use of the name Yahweh for God.

E from Elohim: use of the name Elohim for God.

P from 'priest': use of the name Almighty and the term toledot (generations, records).

Residue: everything else.

- Advantage: explains apparent contradictions and various literary forms.
- Weakness: no evidence, circular reasoning, atheist presuppositions.
- Critique: Other ancient literatures employ many names of a same deity.

Genesis' God (Dennis Prager, 2019)

- An universal God of all ethnicities: all humans are equals.
- An invisible, spiritual God: non-physical reality.
- A moral God: non-capricious, justice must prevail.
- A supernatural God: no nature gods.
- A loving God: joyful relationships with humans.
- God's image: universal human worth and rights.

Science and creation (Prager)

- Science cannot measure, prove or disprove the non-material.
- Science cannot explain why there is anything, and not nothing?
- Science cannot account for the emergence of life.
- Science cannot explain the emergence of self-aware consciousness in a non-conscious world.

Interpretations of Genesis (Galen, 2022)

1. Greek Septuagint translation
2. Ancient cultures and cosmologies
3. Aramaic targum translations and comments
4. Other ancient Jewish literature
5. New Testament writers
6. Talmud and rabbinic commentaries
7. Christian church 'fathers'
8. Linguistics, anthropology, and sociology
9. Personal impressions and guesses

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Church fathers' views of creation (Craig Allert, 2018)

Sought 'higher meanings' inferred from the Genesis text.

1. **Antiochians** = rhetorical method.

The text itself implies other meanings.

E.g., God must have first created matter *ex nihilo*, from which he fashioned the world.

2. **Alexandrines** = philosophical method.

The text is a kind of code that must be broken.

E.g., Plato was right. The world must have been created from existing matter.

Conclusion (Galen, 2022)

- Genesis was revealed or inspired by the Creator himself.
- Genesis has been transmitted to every generation since ancient times.
- Genesis serves as a standard of truth for human speculation and belief.
- Genesis must be transmitted and translated for every ethnicity.

Interpretive challenges

- Cosmogony – what does Genesis teach about origins
- Cosmology – what does Genesis teach about physical reality
- Historicity – what Genesis teaches about real persons, places and events
- Credibility – whether we must believe what Genesis teaches

Cosmology [koz-mol-uh-jee], noun

1. the branch of philosophy dealing with the origin and general structure of the universe, with its parts, elements, and laws, and especially with such of its characteristics as space, time, causality, and freedom.

2. the branch of astronomy that deals with the general structure and evolution of the universe.

Cosmogony [koz-mog-uh-nee], noun

1. a theory or story of the origin and development of the universe, the solar system, or the earth-moon system. — www.dictionary.com