

WEEK 2 | GENESIS

Genesis is the book of beginnings and contains the foundation for much of the theology of the Old Testament. . . An understanding of the book's content and message is essential to the study of the rest of the Bible. It is not a book of science, though scientists are right to investigate its claims. It is not a book of biographies, though much can be learned from the lives of men and women portrayed in its pages. It is not a book of history, though history is the path it follows. It is a book of theology, though its task is not accomplished systematically.¹

The book of Genesis is the beginning of God's revelation and relates the beginning of history itself. It covers more history than the rest of the Bible combined, spanning from creation to the death of Joseph circa 1806 BC, yet is highly selective in what it relates about the early millennia of creation.

STRUCTURE

Outline

- I. Primeval History (1-11)
- II. Patriarchal History (12-50)

While this gives us a broad structure of the book, a close reading reveals that the narrative is organized around and progresses through genealogies. The marker is the Hebrew word *toledot*, meaning "generation" or "genealogy." Eleven are given in the book:

- Genesis 2:4 – These are the [*toledot*] of the heavens and the earth when they were created...
- Genesis 5:1 – This is the book of the [*toledot*]of Adam.
- Genesis 6:9 – These are the [*toledot*]of Noah.
- Genesis 10:1 – These are the [*toledot*]of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
- Genesis 10:32 – These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their [*toledot*], in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.
- Genesis 11:10 – These are the [*toledot*]of Shem.
- Genesis 11:27 – These are the [*toledot*]of Terah.
- Genesis 25:12 – These are the [*toledot*] of Ishmael, Abraham's son. . .
- Genesis 25:19 – These are the [*toledot*] of Isaac, Abraham's son. . .
- Genesis 36:1 – These are the [*toledot*] of Esau (that is, Edom).
- Genesis 37:2 – These are the [*toledot*] of Jacob.

Each time *toledot* is used, a new storyline is presented, and the narrative is advanced. More specifically, the book narrows in focus, beginning with creation in general → Adam, the father of

¹ Hill & Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 78.

all men → Noah → Abraham → Isaac → Jacob and his twelve sons, with Judah eventually taking a place of preeminence. Moses uses these generational markers to highlight God's election of Abraham and his offspring as the means by which God will accomplish redemption. This narrowing of focus will continue in Scripture as God chooses David from the tribe of Judah and, ultimately, David's offspring, Jesus the Christ.

PURPOSE

The title Genesis means "origins" or "beginnings," and is an apt way to describe the purpose of the book. In many ways, Genesis is meant to be the beginning of God's story. As its first character, God is shown to be the sovereign, all-powerful Creator; He is the source and ultimate end of all things. It also narrates the entrance of sin into God's perfect creation and explains why the world is fallen. Perhaps most importantly, Genesis shows us that the sovereign Creator God is also merciful and gracious as He commits Himself to redeem and bless humanity through Abraham and his offspring.

THEMES

- 1) The Abrahamic Covenant (12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 18:17-19; 22:15-18; 26:2-5, 23-25; 28:10-17; 35:9-12; 50:24)
- 2) God as Creator (1-2; 6-8; 15:1)
- 3) God as Sovereign (37-50, c.f. 50:20)
- 4) The Sinfulness of Man (3, 4, 6, 11, 19)
- 5) The Judgment and Mercy of God (3, 4, 6, 11, 19)
- 6) The Grace of God (3:15; The Covenants)