

The Beginnings Era



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Introduction

Genesis 1

In the beginning God created

the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day...

Introduction

The Old Testament



Beginnings

Settlement

Kingdom

Exile/Reconstruction

Introduction

The Bible opens with the simple fact that “in the beginning God created” (Genesis 1:1). The Bible doesn’t defend or debate the idea that God created the universe. It just presents it as fact and moves on to tell the story of God’s relationship with the people He created. In lesson 4 we focus on how God got things started. We will survey the Bible’s story from Adam and Eve to Israel’s preparation to enter the Promised Land.

There are many details in the Old Testament; and without a way to organize these details, the stories and characters get confused. Think of this Old Testament Basics course as building a mental file cabinet on the Old Testament. Each of the four eras is like a file drawer. When you hear a name or a story from the Old Testament, you will know what era it fits into and how it contributes to Israel’s history. At this point it might help you to review the diagram of the Old Testament books found in the “Study Guide” for lesson 2 found under “Course Resources” on this course’s home page. This lesson focuses on the era of the “Beginnings” and includes Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers—the first three time books. The story moves from Adam and Eve to the end of Israel’s wilderness wandering recorded in Numbers.

Genesis

The story begins in Genesis, and we divide the book’s fifty chapters into two segments. Genesis 1–11 tells about the beginning of the heavens and the earth, and Genesis 12–50 tells about Israel’s beginning. It’s important to remember that Moses most likely wrote Genesis to Israel around the time of the exodus event to help the people understand who God was and how they should relate to Him. Only when we understand Genesis’s purpose can we make sense of its contents. In one sense we can say that the “beginning” that mattered most to Moses’s listeners and readers

Genesis

ORGANIZATION

1. Chapters 1–11
The beginning of heaven and earth
2. Chapters 12–50
The beginning of Israel

WRITER

Moses

PURPOSE

To help the people of the exodus understand who God was and how they should relate to Him.

Genesis

Chapters 1–11

The beginning of heaven and earth

- Israel's God, **Yahweh**, is the **supreme ruler of everything** in heaven and earth, including the Egyptians and Canaanites.
- **All humans are** special objects of **God's creation**.
- **Intimacy** between God and His creation is **fractured by** Adam and Eve's **disobedience**, resulting in their fall into sin (Genesis 3).

was the beginning of their own story recorded in Genesis 12–50. Israel's story begins with Abraham in Genesis 12 and the rest of the Old Testament is about them.

But for Israel's history recorded in Genesis 12–50 to make its intended impact on Moses's generation, Genesis explains why God chose their father Abraham and his descendants to be His special people and why it mattered so much for them to live up to their God-ordained destiny.

First, Genesis 1–11 established Yahweh, Israel's God, as the supreme ruler of everything in heaven and earth. The world and its people belong to Him because He created them. Israel need not fear the Egyptians or the Canaanites because God created and rules over them too.

Second, these eleven chapters describe all humans as special objects of God's creation.

Third, Genesis 3 tells us that the intimacy between God and His creation was fractured by the disobedience of the first people He created and the devastating results of their fall into sin. Then Genesis 4–11 describes the extent of human rebellion. Cain, one of Adam and Eve's sons, murdered his brother, Abel, and then, rather than repent, he "went out from the presence of the LORD" (4:16 NASB). More than just a Bible story, Cain's rebellion tells us that the results of Adam and Eve's sin extended to their sons and to the whole human race.

Humanity's downward spiral into disobedience continued until, "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was *great* on the earth, and that *every intent* of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil continually*" (Genesis 6:5 NASB emphasis added). Notice that in this summary verse Moses repeated how thoroughly sin had permeated the human race. In response, "The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them'" (Genesis 6:6–7 NASB). God decided to begin again with Noah and his family by sending a flood. In chapter 9 He made a covenant with Noah just as He did with Adam in Genesis 2.

But then we learn that one of Noah's sons violated that covenant; and the story of man's defiance against God and his continued

Genesis 6:5

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was **great** on the earth, and that **every intent** of the thoughts of his heart was **only evil continually**.

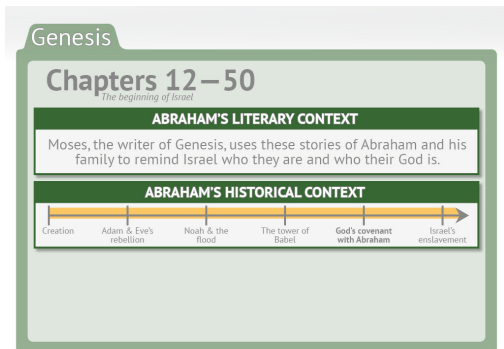
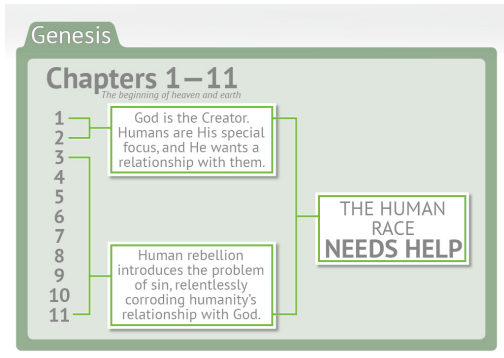
degeneration into sin culminated with the story of the tower of Babel (chap. 11). Humanity’s thoughts were still “only evil continually.”

In response, God chose another couple to carry on His will on the earth. In Genesis 11:10–12:3 Abraham is introduced. And we see the covenant God made with him that institutes Israel’s birth and describes what God intended for His newly formed people. God initiated a third beginning. The covenant He made with Abraham was repeated and expanded to Isaac and again to Jacob in the chapters of Genesis that follow and provide the foundation for the rest of the Old Testament.

To read Genesis well, we must understand its role as Moses’ explanation to Israel of her beginnings and her noble place among the nations. Genesis 1–11 introduces us to the human race. The purpose of the creation account in chapters 1–2 is not to explain how or when God created but to affirm that God is the Creator and that men and women are the special focus of His creation process. Chapters 3–11 introduce the problem of sin and its relentless, corrosive force. So when we get to the story of Abraham and his ancestors in 11:10, we clearly understand why God chose to bless Abraham’s descendants as a light to the Gentiles, and we are launched into chapters 12–50 and the account of Israel’s beginning.

In Genesis 12–50 Moses reminded Israel who their God actually was and who they were as His people. They believed they were helpless slaves, but Moses reminded them that God saw them as Abraham and Sarah’s heirs. God had promised them centuries ago He would personally bless them and their descendants forever. And now those descendants were Egyptian slaves. That’s why in Exodus 2:24 God commanded Moses to tell Israel, “God heard their groaning and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” And that’s why God introduced Himself to Moses six times as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (3:6, 15, 16; 4:5; 6:3–4, 8).

When you read about Abraham, put him in his *historical* context. But also put him in Moses’ *literary* context. Moses reminded the enslaved Israelites that as Abraham’s descendants they were God’s chosen people. Israel did not belong to their Egyptian overlords. Israel belonged to God, and He would certainly deliver them from slavery. No power in the heavens or the earth God created could thwart His plan. But for that plan to make any sense to these



enslaved people, they had to understand who Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were; and so Moses devoted thirty-eight of Genesis's fifty chapters to tell them.

Exodus

Exodus picks up the story from where Genesis left it. When Genesis ended, Israel was living as guests of the pharaoh. When Exodus opens, they are Pharaoh's slaves. There is a four-hundred-year period between Genesis and Exodus. During that time Israel's numbers grew and the Egyptians enslaved them because they were afraid they would take over their country. God's enslaved people prayed to Him for deliverance; and because of His covenant with Abraham, God empowered Moses to lead them out of Egypt.

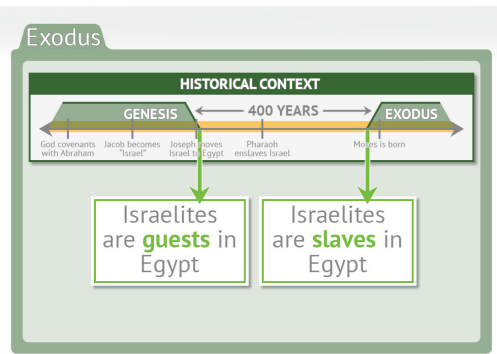
Most people have heard about the events recorded in Exodus. God afflicted Egypt with ten plagues to persuade Pharaoh to release Israel from their bondage. God parted the Red Sea so Israel could escape from Pharaoh's armies. God fed Israel with manna and provided water from a rock. But the high point of Exodus's story is when Israel stopped at Mount Sinai, and God gave them the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses. During the year at Sinai, Israel built the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant that set them apart from all the other nations on earth. Only they could claim God's visible presence among them.

At Sinai God turned Israel into a nation. He was their King, and the Mosaic law was their constitution. They also had a covenant with God that promised His blessing if they obeyed His laws and His curses if they disobeyed them. That covenant would govern Israel's history throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

Numbers

After a year at Sinai, Israel was ready to begin their journey to Canaan and to settle in their new home. They traveled to Kadesh-Barnea, the southern entrance to Canaan, and sent twelve spies into the land to check it out. When the spies returned, ten of them convinced the nation they could not conquer the Canaanites. In response to the ten spies' report, the people refused to move forward into the land God had promised to give them. They feared the giants more than they trusted God (13:1–14:4).

Moses, Aaron (Israel's high priest), and two of the ten spies, Joshua and Caleb, reminded Israel that they were God's people.



Exodus

Chapters 19–40
Israel becomes a nation

- Israel meets God at Mount Sinai.
- God turns Israel into a nation.

"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Exodus 19:5-6

Israel at Mount Sinai | The Ten Commandments | The Tabernacle & the Ark

Numbers

Chapters 1–12
From Sinai to the Promised Land

- After a year at Sinai, Israel journeys to the **Promised Land**.
- Twelve spies** are sent to check out Canaan.

Map labels: CANAAN, Kadesh-Barnea, Wilderness of Paran, Sinai, Red Sea, Nile River, The Israelites' route from Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea, The Israelites' route from Kadesh-Barnea to the Promised Land.

Numbers

Chapters 15 – 36From Sinai to the Promised Land

- God answers the Israelites' rebellious prayer.
- Israel **wanders the desert for 40 years** until those who disobeyed God had died.



They insisted that God was able to give them the land He had promised. But Israel rebelled and prayed that God would not make them enter this land with its fierce enemies. God answered their prayer, and the remainder of Numbers tells the tragic story of Israel wandering in the desert for almost forty years until the generation who disobeyed God died. It would be up to their children to inhabit the land of promise.

Israel was not the last people to disobey God and spend their life aimlessly wandering in their own desert. We all have to make that choice every day, don't we? Over and over again we have to decide if we are smarter than God, or if God is much wiser than we are. The message of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers is that following God's way of life is the only wise option. It seems like a pretty simple choice, doesn't it?

Numbers

**Following God's way of life
is the only wise option.**

