

I OVERVIEW OF GENESIS

- **Purpose:** To record God's creation of the world and His desire to have a people set apart to worship Him.
- **Author:** Moses.
- **Audience:** The people of Israel.
- **Date Written:** 1450-1410 BC.
- **Blueprint:**
- **Creation (1:1-2:4)**
- **Adam (2:4-5:32):** Adam and Eve/Cain and Abel/Adam's descendents
- Noah (6:1-11:32): The flood/repopulating the earth/tower of Babel
- **Abraham (12:1-25:18): God's promise/Abram and Lot/God's promise of a son to Abram/Sodom and Gomorrah/Near sacrifice of Isaac/Isaac and Rebekah/Abraham dies**
- **Isaac (25:19-28:9):** Jacob and Esau/Isaac and Abimelech/Jacob gets Isaac's blessing
- **Jacob (28:10-36:43):** Jacob starts a family/Jacob returns home
- **Joseph (37:1-50:26):** Joseph sold into slavery/Judah and Tamar/Joseph thrown in prison/Joseph placed in charge of Egypt/Joseph and his brothers meet in Egypt/Jacob's family moves to Egypt/Jacob and Joseph die in Egypt

MEGATHEMES OF GENESIS

Theme	Explanation	Importance
Beginnings	Genesis explains the universe, the earth, people, sin and God's plan of salvation	Genesis teaches us that the earth is well made and good and that people are special to God and unique. God creates and sustains all life
Disobedience	People always face choices and disobedience occurs when people choose not to follow God's plan of living	Genesis explains why people are evil and why they choose to do wrong. Even the great men and women of the Bible failed God and disobeyed
Sin	Sin ruins people's lives and happens when we disobey God	Living God's way makes life productive and fulfilling
Promises	God makes promises (i.e., covenants) to help and protect people	God always keeps His promises. He promises to love us, accept us, and forgive us
Obedience	The opposite of sin is obedience and obeying God restores our relationship to Him	The only way to enjoy God's promises is to obey Him
Prosperity	True prosperity and fulfillment come as a result of obeying God. Such prosperity is much deeper than material wealth	When people obey God they find peace with Him, with others and with themselves
Israel	God started the nation of Israel in order to have a dedicated people who would (1) keep His ways alive in the world; (2) proclaim to the world what He is really like; and, (3) prepare the world for the birth of Christ	God is looking for people today to follow Him. We are to proclaim God's truth and love to all nations and be faithful to carry out the mission God has given us.

II SCRIPTURE

RATIFYING THE COVENANT (15:1-21)

In Genesis 15, Abram receives a word from the Lord, which happens in many different ways: (1) by a personal appearance of God; (2) by an audible voice; (3) by visions or dreams; (4) by the ministry of angels; (5) by the working of the Spirit of God upon the mind; (6) by the making alive of a passage of Scripture to our hearts; or, (7) by the ministry of a prophet or preacher.

(1): **The word of the Lord comes to Abram in a vision:** God is telling Abram that though he has sacrificed for His sake, He will more than make up what he has given up for the Lord. God told Abram this because he recognized that he was afraid for good reason, and gives him a reason to put away his fears. Abram may have feared revenge from the conquered kings he defeated in **Genesis 14:15**. God identified Himself as a shield as He did in **Psalms 3:3, 28:7, and 33:20**.

God gave Abram two reasons for courage: (1) He promised to protect him; and (2) He promised a great reward. God knows how to become the answer to our need, and when we need a shield or a reward, He becomes those things for us.

(2-3): **Abram honestly expresses his doubts:** Abram appreciated God's promise, but at the same time, there was a sense that it wasn't enough without a son! He asked God where are the descendants You promised me?" Eliezer, his most trusted servant was to become his heir, but Abram wanted his own son to become the heir.

Abram's question clearly meant that he doubted God, but there is a difference between a doubt that denies God's promise and a doubt which desires God's promise. Abram honestly wants to believe and looks to God to strengthen his faith.

(4-5): **God speaks to Abram's doubts with a promise:** God reminds Abram of the promise originally recorded in **Genesis 12:2** and **Genesis 13:15-16**. God often states a promise with such certainty, we believe it will be fulfilled right away, **but the fulfillment of this promise was still 15 years away**. God works on a different timetable than us (**II Peter 3:8**) and tests our faith by not giving us what we want when we want it.

God not only tells Abram the promise again, but He confirms it with an illustration of the stars in the sky that show how vast the number of Abram's descendants would be.

(6): **Abram's response of faith to God's promise:** When Abram put his trust in God's promise to him God credited this belief (i.e., faith) to Abram's account as righteousness. There are essentially two types of righteousness: (1) righteousness we accomplish by our own efforts; and, (2) righteousness accounted to us by the work of God when we believe. Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness, we must have God's righteousness accounted to us by doing just what Abram did; believing in the Lord (**John 3:16; Hebrews 11:6**).

Romans 4:9-10, Romans 9:22 and **Galatians 3:6** makes much of the fact that this righteousness was accounted to Abram before he was circumcised (**Genesis 17**). No one could say Abram was made righteous because of his obedience or fulfillment of religious law or ritual. It was faith and faith alone that caused God to account Abram as righteous (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

This is one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of the truth of salvation by grace, through faith. This is the first time "believe" is used in Scripture and this is the first time righteousness is used. It is the gospel in the Old Testament, quoted four times in the New Testament.

(7-8): Abram's doubts surface again: Remarkably, Abram asks "How shall I know that I will inherit it," right after God had just accounted him righteous. Like all fallen people, Abram is experiencing what many of those who are accounted righteous experience (e.g., difficulty sustaining faith). Remember, Abram had no title deed to the land but all he had was God's promise. He was looking for confirmation and assurance that he was doing God's will and he didn't have a Bible to read about it.

(9-11): Abram prepares to make a covenant with God: In ancient times, contracts were made by the sacrificial cutting of animals, with the split carcasses of the animals lying on the ground. Then both parties to the covenant would walk through the animal parts together, repeating the terms of the covenant. The Lord made a covenant in **Genesis 15:18** is literally, "the Lord cut a covenant." This is a covenant so serious it is sealed with blood. God offers Abram a contract to settle his doubts.

(12-16): Prologue to the covenant: At the end of the day, God causes a deep sleep to fall upon Abram and tells Abram of the slavery and hardship Israel will endure in Egypt (**Exodus 1:1-14**), yet after four generations would come back into the Promised Land.

(17-21): The covenant is executed: Abram has a strange vision in which he sees God pass through the animal parts all by Himself and represents Himself by two emblems: (1) a smoking oven; and, (2) a burning torch. God showed Abram that this was a unilateral covenant, as Abram never "signed" the covenant, because God "signed" it for both of them. The fire and smoke represent God's holiness, His zeal for righteousness and His judgment upon all nations.

The smoking oven symbolizes the pillar of cloud representing the presence of God (**Exodus 13:21-22**), the smoke on Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19:18**), and the cloud of God's Shekinah glory (**I Kings 8:10-12**). The burning torch symbolizes the burning bush displaying the presence of God before Moses (**Exodus 3:4**), and of the fire from heaven which sometimes consumed sacrifices God was well pleased with (**I Kings 18:38, I Chronicles 21:26, II Chronicles 7:1**).

Similarly, the Father walked through the broken and bloody body of Jesus Christ to establish His new covenant with us, and God also signed it for both of us. Man enters into each covenant by faith.

ACTING OUTSIDE THE COVENANT (16:1-16)

Genesis 16 shows us what happens when God is not trusted at His Word. Abram and Sarai are frustrated at how long it is taking to have a child and spot Hagar out of the corner of their eyes. The accepted cultural practice of surrogate motherhood becomes an appealing, but morally incorrect, option.

(1-2): Sari proposes a child for Abram through Hagar: Sarai encouraged Abram to take part in an ancient surrogate mother arrangement. According to custom, the child would be considered to be the child of Abram and Sarai. Even though this early form of

surrogate motherhood was common and accepted in that day, it was morally incorrect.
God is clearly not leading Abram and Sarai.

Sarai did not trust the promise of God that Abram would be the father of many nations. So in an effort to "help God out," she allowed her husband make her servant pregnant.

(3-4): Abram agrees with Sarai's suggestion: The long waiting for the promise discouraged them, tested their faith, and made them vulnerable to acting in the flesh. Sarai takes matters into her own hands by giving Hagar to Abram. Out of this lack of faith came a series of consequences and issues, some present 4,000 years later!!

Sometimes we must simply wait and trust God's timetable. When we ask God for something and have to wait, we can be tempted to take matters into our own hands and interfere with God's plans.

(5-6a): Sarai is angry at Hagar: Hagar's contempt for Sarai started the problem. Hagar couldn't resist displaying an inappropriate haughtiness, thinking her pregnancy somehow showed her to be better than Sarai. Like most wives, Sarai blamed Abram, who should have acted as the spiritual leader and told his wife God was able to perform what He promised, and they didn't need to intervene.

These terribly complicated and difficult situations often arise out of our sin. All in all, it is much easier to live life trusting in the Lord (Proverbs 3:5-6). God wants to spare us from these difficulties so we can live an abundant life.

(6b-9): The Angel of the Lord appears to Hagar and instructs her: As Hagar escaped this difficult situation, the Angel of the Lord (i.e., pre-incarnate presence of Jesus Christ) met her by a spring of water in the wilderness. God tells Hagar to do something very difficult and go back to her terrible situation and submit herself to Sarai.

(10-12): The promise of the Angel of the Lord to Hagar: God has great plans for Hagar's child. He will become a great nation. Ishmael did become the father of all the Arabic peoples him.

Today's battle between Jew and Arab is four millennia in length. Both Jews and Arabs descended from Abram by two half-brothers: Ishmael and Isaac. The entire conflict, which still exists today, can be traced back to Abram's decision to "help God out" in the flesh, both when he agreed to inseminate Hagar, and when he went to Egypt to begin with. The effects of our sin may reach far beyond what we ever imagined.

(13-16): God's blessing and protection of Hagar and Ishmael: Hagar did return with a submitted heart and told the whole story to Abram and Sarai. Abram named the child Ishmael.

SIGNIFYING THE COVENANT (17:1-14)

In Genesis 17, God begins to define some of the specific terms of the covenant including the rite of circumcision. He also changes Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah.

(1-2): God appears to Abram when he is 99 years old: Another appearance of God in the person of Jesus, El Shaddai, revealing His Person and character to Abram. Then God told Abram what His expectations was, which was to walk before Him and be blameless. God also reminded Abram He has not forgotten the covenant although it had been some 25 years since the promise was first made.

The Lord told Abram that He was El Shaddai, God Almighty, and to serve Him and live a blameless life. Jesus Christ has the same message for us today. We are to obey the Lord in every respect because He is God, the only one with the power and resources to meet every one of your needs.

(3-8): God refers to specific terms of the covenant He has not forgotten: To encourage Abram's faith in the promise of descendants, God changed Abram's name from Abram (i.e., father of many) to Abraham (i.e., father of many nations).

There are many wonderful name changes in the Bible (i.e., God changed Jacob's name to Israel (Genesis 32:28); Simon's name to Peter (Mark 3:16). Moreover, God promises a wonderful new name to every overcomer in Him (Revelation 2:17).

(9-14): God institutes a sign of the covenant for Abraham and his descendants: For the first time, God told them to take upon themselves a sign of the covenant, showing they received the covenant by faith (i.e., circumcision). It represented a cutting away of the flesh and a sign of the covenant for those **who should put no trust in the flesh.**

"He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised": God probably commanded the circumcision of children to take place on the eighth day because this is the day when an infant's immune system is at the optimum level for such a procedure. Newborn children have a peculiar susceptibility to bleeding between the second and fifth days of life. It seems an important blood-clotting agent, Vitamin K, is not formed in the normal amount until the fifth to seventh day of life. Another blood clotting agent, prothrombin, is at its highest levels in infants on precisely the eighth day of life, making the eighth day the safest, as well as earliest, day to circumcise an infant.

CONFIRMING THE COVENANT (17:15-27)

(15-16): The promise is stated: a son will come through Sarah, whose name is changed from Sarai: God made it plain that this son will not come about by another surrogate-mother situation (e.g., Hagar and Ishmael). Sarah herself will give birth even though she was post-menopausal and 90 years old at this time.

(17-18): Abraham's response to the promise: Abraham laughed and rejoiced in the miracle God was to perform. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform (**Romans 4:17-21**).

(19-22): God repeats the promise and names the child who will come forth from Abraham and Sarah: The son will be named Isaac (i.e., laughter) because he will be such a joy to his parents, but also to always remind Abraham he laughed at God's promise to give him a son through Sarah at this late age. Isaac would be the heir to the covenant promises.

(23-27): Abraham carries out God's command of circumcision: Abraham's obedience was complete and he circumcised every male among his house that very same day.