

GENESIS – LEVEL ONE

Overview of the biblical story

Before you begin reading Genesis, it will be helpful to read an overview of the 1,800 years of the biblical story—from the call of Abraham until the birth of Jesus. This overview can be found towards the end of *Article One* of our long version of Genesis.

The first book of the Bible begins with the words: “*In the beginning.*” Genesis is a book about beginnings—the beginning of the natural world, the beginning of humans and human culture, the beginning of sin and suffering and death, the beginning of Israel whose story dominates the rest of the Old Testament and, in a sense, the rest of the Bible.

Structure. Scholars divide Genesis into two parts: chapters 1-11 and 12-50. While the two parts seem to constitute a single, continuous story, they differ significantly in both subject matter and literature.

Genesis 1-11 is often called *primeval history* as events took place before *recorded* history. Genesis 12-50 deals with Israel’s “first family”—the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Israelite nation. It recounts the stories of Abraham (Gen 12-25), Isaac and Jacob (Gen 26-36), and Joseph (Gen 37-50).

Suggested Texts to Read

Commentary on each of the following chapters can be found in our long version of Genesis.

Chapters 1-2: Creation of the world. Basic message: *God created everything good.*

Chapter 3: The Fall. The first man and woman succumb to the devil’s temptation to turn away from God.

Chapters 4-11: Spread of sin. Brother kills brother. The Great Flood—God starts all over by cleansing the world of all the evil and sin. God makes a covenant with Noah.

The Abraham Story (Chapters 12-25)

Salvation history (God’s plan to save humanity) begins with the call of Abraham, who is considered the father of the Israelites. In Genesis 12:1-4, God makes three promises to Abraham: (a) he will be the father of a great *nation* with their own *land*; (b) their

land will be prosperous and abundantly blessed; and (c) they will be a *blessing* to all the other nations.

Covenant with Abraham: 15:1-21

Birth of Isaac: 21:1-21

Testing of Abraham: 22:1-19

The Isaac and Jacob Story (Chapters 25-36)

Isaac does not receive as much attention as his son, Jacob, who is a very colorful figure. He is a trickster who also gets tricked by his uncle, Laban. He cheats his twin brother, Esau, out of their father’s death-bed blessing, costing him many years of hard labor. He has twelve sons with his wives. Jacob’s story is a good example of God “writing straight with crooked lines.”

Isaac meets and marries Rebekah: Chapter 24

Birth of Esau and Jacob: 25:1-34

Jacob deceives Esau of his father’s death-bed blessing: Chapter 27

Jacob’s dream at Bethel: 28:10-22

Jacob marries Leah and Rachel: 29:15-30

Jacob struggles with an angel: 32:23-33

Jacob and Esau reconcile: 33:1-20

The Joseph Story (Chapters 37-50)

On one level, this is a rags-to-riches story. On a deeper level, it is a manifestation of God’s providential care for his people, and God turning the table on man’s evil intentions and bringing good out of them. As Genesis closes, Jacob and his twelve sons and their families have all migrated to Egypt and are treated very well by the Pharaoh. But Egypt is not the land that God has promised to Abraham.

Joseph is sold to Egypt: Chapter 37

Joseph’s temptations: Chapter 39

Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dream: Chapter 41

Joseph’s brother’s journey to Egypt: Chapter 42

The truth revealed: Chapter 45

Jacob (also called Israel) migrates to Egypt: 46:1-7

Plea for forgiveness: 50:15-23

If you have a question on a particular text, go to the commentary in the long version.