



Edited by J. Daniel Hays and J. Scott Duvall

THE BAKER
ILLUSTRATED
BIBLE
HANDBOOK

- Features over 500 Full-Color Illustrations, Maps, and Photos
- An Essential Companion for Enhancing Your Bible Reading
 - A Comprehensive, Book-by-Book Guide to the Bible



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HANDBOOK

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J. Daniel Hays and J. Scott Duvall



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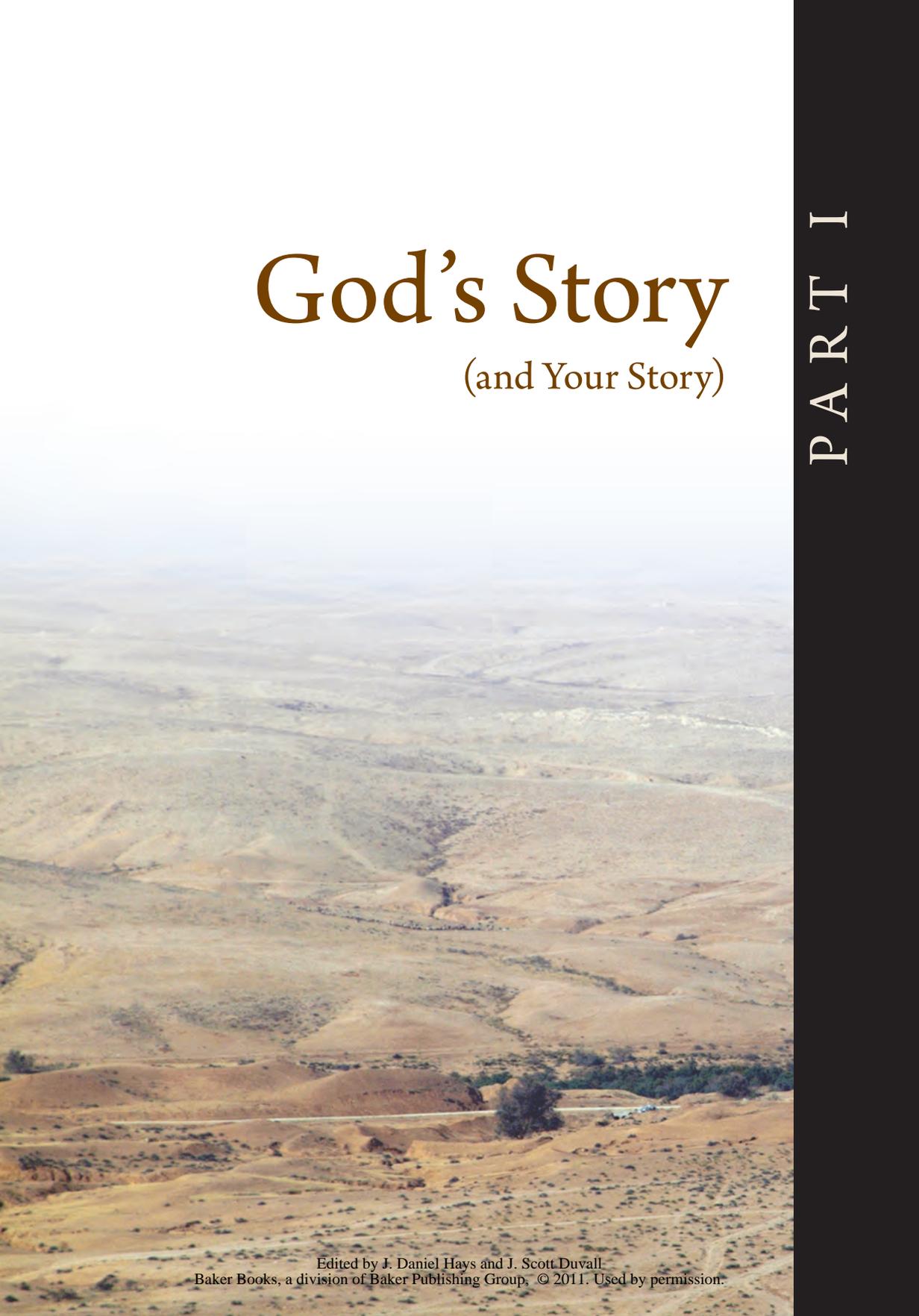


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God's Story

(and Your Story)

PART I

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The Grand Story of the Bible

Everyone has a story to live by. Questions we must ask ourselves include, “Which story tells the true story about God, our world, and life?” and “Does my story line up with the true story?” What constitutes a basic story line is much the same in novels, TV shows, movies, and plays. The story opens with things going well. The characters are introduced, and we get essential background information. Everything is good (or at least stable) to start with. Then a problem or crisis arises that threatens the characters and their future. Much of the story is taken up with solving this problem (i.e., conflict resolution). Usually during this period of resolution, there is a climax where the tension builds to a critical point. Here the heart of the problem is solved. Finally (and this may take a while), the resolution is worked out so that things are not just good but great. When there is no happy ending, we call this a tragedy. The phases of a grand story are summarized as follows:

- Opening—setting provided and characters introduced
- Problem—conflict threatens the well-being of the characters
- Resolution—solution to the problem
- Climax within resolution phase—most intense conflict followed by solution to heart of problem
- Closing—resolution worked out for the characters

The Bible claims to be God’s story for the whole world. In the Bible we find the one grand story (or metanarrative) that best explains reality. Here is how the Bible breaks down into a grand story:

- Opening—Genesis 1–2
- Problem—Genesis 3–11
- Resolution—Genesis 12–Revelation 18
- Climax within resolution phase—life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Closing—Revelation 19–22

To put the grand story of the Bible into a memorable format, consider the outline below that uses “c” sounds:

Creation—The story begins with the creation of the world and human beings.

Crisis—When tempted by Satan, humans choose to satisfy self and rebel (or sin) against God. They do this repeatedly. Sin brings disastrous and deadly consequences: pain, suffering, death, and separation from God.

Covenant—God begins to solve this problem of sin by choosing Abraham and establishing a covenant with him so that he might become the father of a people who will worship God. God wants to make Abraham into a great nation and to give him a land along with many descendants and blessings. Then God wants to bless all the nations of the world through Abraham, and to use this one nation to bring the rest of the world into a relationship with himself.

Calling Out—Genesis tells the story of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph. Through a series of events they move to Egypt where this small group grows into a nation and experiences slavery. God uses Moses to deliver his people from slavery through the exodus event. God’s miraculous deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt becomes a pattern that foreshadows God’s ultimate deliverance of his people from spiritual slavery.

Commandments—After God rescues his people, he enters into a covenant with them (the Mosaic covenant). He gives them the law (summed up in the Ten Commandments) and calls his people to holiness. God’s expectations for his covenant people are spelled out in the book of Deuteronomy.

Conquest—God uses Joshua to help his people take the Promised Land (Canaan).

Kingdom—God’s people acquire a king. Samuel becomes the link between the judges and the kings of Israel: Saul (the first king), David, Solomon.

Kingdom Divided—After Solomon there is a civil war that leads to the division of the kingdom: Israel = northern kingdom, Judah = southern kingdom. There are many kings, some good but most bad.

Captivity—Because God’s people have failed to worship him alone, they face terrible judgments, including the loss of the Promised Land. Their enemies take them captive. Israel is conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, while Judah is conquered and taken captive by the Babylonians in about 586 BC.

Coming Home—The people finally return from exile under Ezra and Nehemiah.

Christ (Climax to the Story)—About four hundred years later God sends his Son, Jesus the Christ, to save his people from their sins. Jesus announces the coming of God’s kingdom through his teachings and miracles. His death and resurrection forms the climax to the biblical story.

Church—Those who accept Jesus become part of the church—the people of God—comprising both Jews and gentiles. God continues to use his people to extend his offer of salvation to a sinful world.

Consummation—God closes history with a final victory over evil. Those who have rejected God will suffer judgment, while those who have accepted him will live with him in a new heaven and new earth. God’s promises are now fulfilled (see Rev. 21:1–4).

Because it is true, the grand story of the Bible provides the best answers to the basic questions of life:*

1. Where are we? What kind of world do we live in? The grand story of Scripture says we are in a world created and sustained by God. There is more to this world than science or technology or progress or our own imaginations.
2. Who are we? What does it mean to be a human being? The Bible says that we are human beings created in God’s image for the purpose of being in a loving relationship with God and with other human beings. We are not just autonomous selves in control of our own destiny or multiple selves depending on our environment.
3. What’s wrong? What is the essential problem with us and the world? Scripture says that the problem is sin. We have chosen to rebel against

* See Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984); N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); and Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

our Creator, and sin has damaged our relationships. We can't just blame outside circumstances.

4. What's the solution? What can fix the problem? The Bible says that only God can fix the problem. We do need saving and we can't save ourselves, but God has come to our rescue in Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection provides a way to God.
5. Where are we in the story? Where do we belong and how does the story affect our lives right now? What role do we play in the story? Each of us must answer these questions personally.

As you read and study specific sections of Scripture, keep in mind the larger picture. The Bible is a collection (a minilibrary) of sixty-six books, but it also functions as a single book. The grand story of the Bible answers the basic questions of life better than any other story. It's true. You can count on it. When people come to faith in Christ, they are basically saying, "I want God's story to become my story." That's what conversion is—embracing the grand story of Scripture as our personal story to make sense of life.

How Is the Bible Organized?

The English word “Bible” comes from the Greek word for books or scrolls: *biblia* (plural). In 2 Timothy 4:13, Paul asks Timothy to bring his “books” (*biblia*) when he comes to visit him in prison. Our word “Bible” is singular because it refers to the entire collection of sixty-six books: thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles contain a few extra books in the Old Testament.)

Pentateuch	Historical Books	Psalms	Wisdom Books	The Prophets
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms	Job	Major Prophets:
Exodus	Judges		Proverbs	Isaiah
Leviticus	Ruth		Ecclesiastes	Jeremiah
Numbers	1–2 Samuel		Song of Songs	Lamentations
Deuteronomy	1–2 Kings			Ezekiel
	1–2 Chronicles			Daniel
	Ezra			Minor Prophets:
	Nehemiah			Hosea
	Esther			Joel
				Amos
				Obadiah
				Jonah
				Micah
				Nahum
				Habakkuk
				Zephaniah
				Haggai
				Zechariah
				Malachi

Gospels	Acts	Letters of Paul	General Letters	Revelation
Matthew	Acts	Romans	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark		1–2 Corinthians	James	
Luke		Galatians	1–2 Peter	
John		Ephesians	1–3 John	
		Philippians	Jude	
		Colossians		
		1–2 Thessalonians		
		1–2 Timothy		
		Titus		
		Philemon		

The word “testament” comes from the word *testamentum*, the Latin translation of the Hebrew and Greek words for “covenant.” The English word “testament” refers to a covenant. Christians accept both the Old Testament and the New Testament, while Jews reject the new covenant that confesses Jesus as the Messiah. In the biblical sense, a covenant refers to what God has done to establish a relationship with human beings. Over time, the term “testament” came to refer to the writings that describe the covenant.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew (with a small portion in Aramaic), the language used by the Jewish people. The Old Testament is divided into five parts: the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, the Psalms, the Wisdom Books, and the Prophets.

The Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) are often referred to as the “Pentateuch” (the “five scrolls” or “five-scroll collection”). In the Hebrew Scriptures, these books are referred to as the “Torah,” meaning the “teaching” or “instruction.” These books tell the story of God’s creation of the world, of human sin and rebellion against God, of God’s covenant with Abraham, of God’s deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt, of God’s covenant with Moses, of God’s laws for his people, and of their journey to the Promised Land. The last book, Deuteronomy, spells out the blessings and penalties for keeping or rejecting the Mosaic covenant.

The Historical Books

The Old Testament books from Joshua to Esther are known as the “Historical Books.” The first group of books (Joshua through 2 Kings) is closely connected to the book of Deuteronomy, and it continues the story of the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy closes with the important question, “Will Israel be faithful to the Lord and his laws [the Mosaic covenant]?” The tragic answer is, “No, they will not remain faithful,” and 2 Kings ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Israel from the Promised Land. The second group of historical books (1 Chronicles through Esther) is written from a different perspective. These books focus on those who have returned to the Promised Land after the exile, encouraging them to remain faithful to the Lord.

The Psalms

The book of Psalms is unique and cannot be placed in any of the other Old Testament categories. It stands alone as a book of praises, testimonies, and laments. The Psalms were to be used both in public worship and private meditation.

The Wisdom Books

The Wisdom Books (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs) remind God’s people of the importance of listening, thinking, considering, and reflecting. Their purpose is to encourage the development of godly character and the ability to make wise decisions in a variety of circumstances. Proverbs presents basic principles of life, things that are normally or usually true, while the three other books treat exceptions to these rules: Job (when the righteous suffer), Ecclesiastes (when the rational approach to life doesn’t have all the answers), and Song of Songs (the “irrationality” of romantic love).

The Prophets

After entering the Promised Land, Israel turns a deaf ear to God’s instructions and follows other gods. As the nation spirals downward, God sends the prophets with a final message for his people: (1) you have broken the Mosaic covenant through idolatry, social injustice, and religious ritualism, and you need to turn back to a true worship of God; (2) if you fail to repent, then you will face judgment; and (3) there is still hope beyond judgment for a glorious, future restoration for God’s people and

for the nations. The people continue to rebel and face judgment, which comes in the form of two invasions: the Assyrians in 722 BC to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel, and the Babylonians in 587/586 BC to destroy the southern kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. The prophets also promise a time of future restoration that includes a new covenant, involving all the nations of the world. This fulfills God's original promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3.

The New Testament

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, the common language of much of the Roman Empire during the first century AD. The main topic of the New Testament is the covenant established by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the people who embrace that covenant, the church. The entire New Testament period covers less than one hundred years. The New Testament includes the Gospels, the book of Acts, the Letters of Paul, the General Letters, and the book of Revelation.

The Four Gospels

The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—tell the story of Jesus Christ. The English word “gospel” comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which means “good news.” These four books tell the good news of salvation God has provided in Jesus Christ through his powerful ministry, his atoning death, and his miraculous resurrection. While the term “gospel” refers to the message about Jesus, it came to be used of the written accounts of this message—the four “Gospels.” The first three Gospels are known as the “Synoptic” Gospels because they can be placed side by side and “seen together” (syn-optic), while John follows a slightly different chronology and style in presenting the story of Jesus.

The Book of Acts

We have four versions of the life of Jesus (the Gospels), but only one account of the life of the early church—the book of Acts. The term “Acts” refers to the book as “The Acts of the Apostles,” but is perhaps more accurately described as “The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles and other Christians.” The book of Acts tells the story of the birth and growth of the early church from about AD 30 to the early 60s.

The Letters of Paul

Traditionally, the apostle Paul is credited with writing thirteen letters that are included in the Bible. Those letters may be organized into four groups: early (Galatians, 1–2 Thessalonians), major (Romans, 1–2 Corinthians), prison (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon), and pastoral (1–2 Timothy, Titus). In the Bible, Paul’s letters are arranged according to length, from the longest (Romans) to the shortest (Philemon).

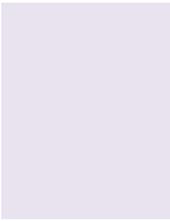
The General Letters

James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude (and sometimes Hebrews) are often called the “General” or “Catholic” Letters (meaning “universal”) for one simple reason: they take their title not from the people receiving the letter but from the author. In contrast to Paul’s letters, which are addressed to more specific groups (e.g., to the Philippians or to the Colossians), the General Letters are addressed to more general audiences. Often 1–3 John are referred to as the Johannine Letters.

Because Hebrews does take its name from the audience rather than the author (like Paul’s letters), some do not include Hebrews with the General Letters.

Revelation

The final book of the New Testament depicts God’s ultimate victory over the forces of evil. The title “Revelation” comes from the Greek word *apocalypsis*, meaning “revelation” or “unveiling.” The book is a “revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1), suggesting the book reveals something about Jesus, or Jesus reveals something about God’s plan, or perhaps both. Revelation differs from the other New Testament books in that it integrates three different literary types: letter, prophecy, and apocalyptic literature.


BC

2100–1800 +/-	Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and Joseph
1446 or 1270	Moses and the exodus
1000–962	Reign of David
962–922	Reign of Solomon and construction of temple
722	Israel (northern kingdom) and the city of Samaria destroyed by Assyrians
586	Judah (southern kingdom) and city of Jerusalem destroyed by Babylonians; people go into exile
538–445	People return from exile; reconstruction of Jerusalem and temple
6–4	Jesus born

AD

5–10	Paul born
28	Jesus's public ministry begins Jesus's death and resurrection, and Pentecost Paul converted Jerusalem Council Paul martyred
70	Jerusalem destroyed by Romans

The Beginning and the End

The final chapter in the grand story of Scripture (Revelation 19–22) offers a beautiful picture of how God will reverse the curse of sin and restore his creation in a way that even surpasses Genesis 1–2. If the opening chapters of Genesis could be described as “good,” the closing chapters of Revelation should be characterized as “great.” Believers who become familiar with the beginning and the end of the biblical story can expect encouragement, perspective, and hope as a reward for their labor.

The introduction to the book of Revelation (1:4–8) concludes with a bold pronouncement that God is “the Alpha and the Omega.” In the Greek alphabet, the first letter is *alpha* and the last letter is *omega*. In Revelation, the “Alpha and Omega” (and similar designations) are used for both God and Christ:

- God—“I am the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8)
- Christ—“I am the First and the Last” (1:17)
- Christ—“the First and the Last” (2:8)
- God—“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (21:6)
- Christ—“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (22:13)

Along with affirming the deity of Christ and his oneness with the Father, these descriptions also assert the Triune God’s complete control of history. He is the origin and goal of history, the first and last word. As the Sovereign

Lord of all creation, God plans to bring his story to a victorious and beautiful conclusion.

Our place in the story is between the climax of Jesus's death and resurrection and the final outworking of God's perfect plan. God has won the ultimate war, but we still struggle with sin and Satan in a fallen world. In the final chapters of Revelation we see how things will ultimately work out in the future as sin's curse is reversed and God's new creation is ushered in. All this is consistent with God's character as the Alpha and the Omega.

Perhaps the best way to see the depth and richness of the victorious conclusion to the story of Scripture is to set the beginning elements in Genesis side by side with the concluding elements in Revelation. In this way we see that Genesis 1–11 and Revelation 19–22 serve as bookends to the entire biblical library.

The Beginning	Genesis	The End	Revelation
"In the beginning, God . . ."	1:1	"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End"	21:6
God creates the first heaven and earth, eventually cursed by sin	1:1	God creates a new heaven and earth where sin is nowhere to be found	21:1
Water symbolizes unordered chaos	1:2	There is no longer any sea	21:1
God creates light and separates it from darkness	1:3–5	No more night or natural light; God himself is the source of light	21:23; 22:5
God gives humans dominion over the earth	1:26–30	God's people will reign with him forever	20:4, 6; 22:5
"Marriage" of Adam and Eve	1:27–28; 2:7, 18–25	Marriage of Last Adam and his bride, the church	19:7; 21:2, 9
Satan introduces sin into world	3:1–7	Satan and sin are judged	19:11–21; 20:7–10
The serpent deceives humanity	3:1–7, 13–15	The ancient serpent is bound "to keep him from deceiving the nations"	20:2–3
Death enters the world	3:3; 4:6–8; 6:3	Death is put to death	20:14; 21:4
Sin enters the world	3:6	Sin is banished from God's city	21:8, 27; 22:15
Sinful people refuse to serve/obey God	3:6–7; 4:6–8; 6:5	God's people serve him	22:3
Community forfeited	3:8; 4:8	Genuine community experienced	21:3, 7
God abandoned by sinful people	3:8–10; 6:5	God's people (New Jerusalem, bride of Christ) made ready for God; marriage of Lamb	19:7–8; 21:2, 9–21
Sinful people ashamed in God's presence	3:8–11	God's people will "see his face"	22:4
People rebel against the true God, resulting in physical and spiritual death	3:8–19	God's people risk death to worship the true God and thus experience life	20:4–6

The Beginning	Genesis	The End	Revelation
Sin brings pain and tears	3:16–17; 6:5–6	God comforts his people and removes crying and pain	21:4
Sinful people cursed	3:16–19	The curse removed from redeemed humanity and they become a blessing	22:3
Sinful people forbidden to eat from tree of life	3:22–24	God's people may eat freely from the tree of life	22:2, 14
Sinful people sent away from life	3:22–24	God's people are given life and have their names written in the book of life	20:4–6, 15; 21:6, 27
Exclusion from bounty of Eden	3:23	Invitation to marriage supper of Lamb	19:9
Sinful humanity separated from presence of holy God	3:23–24	God's people experience God's holiness (cubed city = holy of holies)	21:15–21
Sinful people sent away from garden	3:23–24	New heaven/earth includes a garden	22:2
Sinful people are banished from presence of God	3:24	God lives among his people	21:3, 7, 22; 22:4
Sinful humanity cursed with wandering (exile)	4:10–14	God's people given a permanent home	21:3
Sinful humanity suffers a wandering exile in the land	4:11–14	God gives his children an inheritance	21:7
Creation begins to grow old and die	5:6, 8, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31; 6:3	All things are made new	21:5
Sin results in spiritual sickness	6:5	God heals the nations	22:2
Water used to destroy wicked humanity	6:1–7:24	God quenches thirst with water from spring of life	21:6; 22:1
Sinful people scattered	11:3–9	God's people unite to sing his praises	19:6–7
Languages of sinful humanity confused	11:8–9	God's people are a multicultural people	21:24, 26; 22:2

We certainly anticipate many things that God will do at the end of the story, such as destroying his enemies—Satan, sin, demons, and death. We also expect him to reverse many of the effects of sin and the fall, such as taking away pain and suffering. We can easily imagine getting rid of many of the horrible things people experience now. Perhaps we can even envision some of the good things we experience now being made perfect (e.g., serving God or experiencing a true multicultural community or receiving a lasting inheritance). What is harder to imagine is the sheer magnitude of the beauty and goodness of the new creation, where the physical creation functions in perfect harmony with the Lord and his people. What may be most difficult of all to grasp is the level of intimacy we will experience with the Lord himself. We were made for God. We are his bride. We will see his glorious face. He will wipe away all our tears. We will experience his perfect

holiness and his complete love. We will reign with him and sing praises to him alongside the angels. And best of all, he will live with us forever.

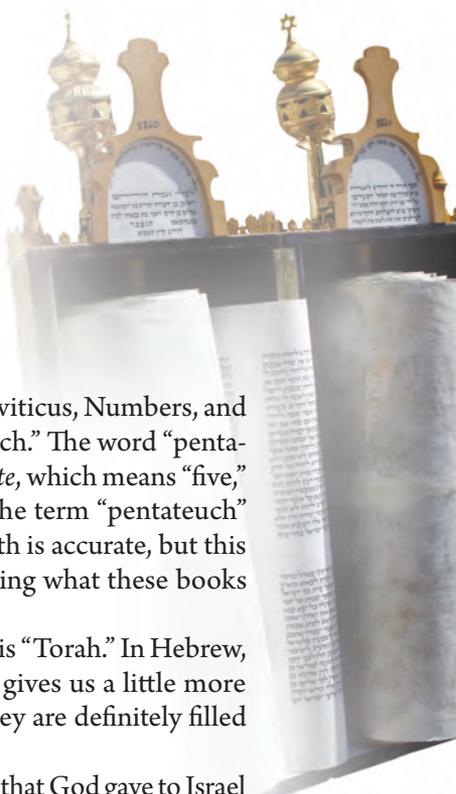
For Christians, there is more to the story than just being saved and going to heaven when we die. We often underestimate the end of the story because we forget that God is both the Alpha (Genesis 1–2) and the Omega (Revelation 19–22). His very character assures us that he will finish what he began, with more beauty, goodness, holiness, glory, and love than we can possibly imagine.

The Old Testament



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The Pentateuch



What Is the Pentateuch About?

The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) are often referred to as the “Pentateuch.” The word “pentateuch” comes from combining two Greek words, *pente*, which means “five,” and *teuchos*, which means “scroll” or “book.” Thus the term “pentateuch” refers to a five-scroll or five-book collection. The math is accurate, but this title doesn’t really give us much information regarding what these books are about.

The term for these five books in the Hebrew Bible is “Torah.” In Hebrew, Torah means “teaching” or “instruction.” This title gives us a little more insight into the content of the first five books, for they are definitely filled with divine teaching and instruction.

Also, within the Pentateuch/Torah we find the laws that God gave to Israel as part of the covenant he mediated through Moses (the Mosaic covenant). Portions of Exodus and Numbers, as well as practically all of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, are filled with the laws that, taken together, define the Mosaic covenant. Because of the many laws in the Pentateuch, these first five books have also been called “the Law,” “the Books of the Law,” “the Book of the Law,” or “the Law of Moses.”

Yet these first five books of the Bible also present a story. It is the unfolding of this story that ties the books of the Pentateuch together, and it is the story that connects the books of the Pentateuch to the rest of the Bible. The laws in the Pentateuch did not just randomly drop down out of heaven; God gave them to Israel at a particular point in the story for a particular purpose. That is, the laws in the Pentateuch are embedded into the narrative story that flows throughout these first five books and into the books that follow.

So to understand each of the five books in the Pentateuch, we need always to be aware of the overarching story that ties them together. Likewise, our best approach to understanding the laws in the Pentateuch is to study them as they function within the story, striving to grasp the “teaching” or “instruction” that comes from the interaction between story and law.

Genesis 1–2 starts the story off with God’s creation. He creates a wonderful garden and places humankind into the garden where they can have close fellowship with him. How do humans react to this wonderful blessing? Genesis 3–11 narrates a series of tragic events illustrating how people sin repeatedly and rebel continuously against God. This separates them from God and ultimately results in death. By Genesis 11 the situation of the world is grim. What will happen? How will humankind ever be saved and restored again to close fellowship with God?

Genesis 12 introduces the answer and begins the exciting story of redemption and salvation. A continuous story runs from Genesis 12 all the way to 2 Kings 25, tying the Pentateuch very closely to the historical books that follow (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings; we call these books the Deuteronomy-based history). In Genesis 12–17 God makes a one-sided covenant with Abraham. This covenant drives much of the biblical story throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament. The promises of this covenant are passed down throughout the rest of Genesis from Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob. Yet Genesis closes with Jacob and his twelve sons residing in Egypt, with most of the Abrahamic promises still unfulfilled.

Exodus comes next, picking up the story in Egypt with Abraham’s descendants and moving it forward in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. In the first part of Exodus, God delivers Israel (Abraham’s descendants) from Egyptian oppression and leads them to Mount Sinai. There God makes a covenant with them (the Mosaic covenant). A central part of that covenant is a promise that God will actually dwell among the people of Israel. If he is to dwell among them, he will need an appropriate place to stay, so the second half of Exodus describes the construction of the tabernacle, God’s new dwelling place.

Leviticus picks up right here, for if the holy, awesome God is going to dwell right in their midst, then all aspects of life for the Israelites will change. Their entire worldview will now need to revolve around the concepts of holiness and what is clean and unclean. They will also need to know how to approach God and how to serve him. Thus Leviticus deals with how the Israelites were to live with the holy and awesome God dwelling right there among them.

In Numbers the Israelites continue on their journey to the Promised Land that they began back in Exodus. The land was part of God’s promise to Abraham. Unbelievably, when the Israelites get there they reject the

Promised Land! So God sends that generation back into the wilderness to wander around until they all die off.

Then God takes the next generation back to the Promised Land. When they get close, right before they enter the land, God restates the terms of the Mosaic covenant to them. He presents Israel with the terms by which they can live in the Promised Land with God in their midst and enjoy wonderful blessings. This is the book of Deuteronomy. It delineates both the blessings and the penalties that will result based on whether Israel keeps the terms of Deuteronomy (the Mosaic covenant). In the next book (Joshua), Israel indeed enters the land. The question that now drives the story from Joshua all the way to 2 Kings 25 is, “Will Israel obey the book of Deuteronomy?”

The authorship of the five books of the Pentateuch has traditionally been attributed to Moses. It is possible, however, that God used a few other divinely inspired writers to put the final touches and flourishes on the “Books of Moses.” The description of Moses’s death, for example, was probably written by another inspired author (Deut. 34:1–12). Likewise some of the geographical names in the Pentateuch appear to have been updated with the terms used by later generations of Israelites (see, e.g., Gen. 14:14).



Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

Joshua

Judges

Ruth

1 Samuel

2 Samuel

1 Kings

2 Kings

1 Chronicles

2 Chronicles

Ezra

Nehemiah

Esther

Job

Psalms

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

Song of Songs

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Lamentations

Ezekiel

Daniel

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi



Genesis

Creation, Sin, and Covenant

God brings you and me into existence, blessing us with life itself, and then doubly blessing us by giving us a great world to live in and a chance to know him personally. But we mess it all up, sinning against God and doing stupid, selfish things—in essence rejecting him and his blessings. This action of ours separates us from God and ultimately results in death. God, however, takes a special initiative and provides a way of salvation, a way to regain our relationship with him and receive life. This is the story of Genesis, and indeed, the story of the Bible. It is also your story and my story.

What Is the Setting for Genesis?

In the Hebrew Bible, each of the first five books (the Torah) takes its name from the opening lines of the book. Thus the first book of the Hebrew Bible is titled “in the beginning.” When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (the Septuagint), the translators titled this book “Genesis,” which in Greek means “beginnings.” Our English Bibles derive the title we are familiar with (Genesis) from the Septuagint.

In this case, the title does reflect the setting of the book, for Genesis starts out “in the beginning.” Genesis 1–2 deals with the creation of the world, and Genesis 3–11 covers what is called “primeval history.” It is difficult to determine the actual dates for this period. Genesis 12 (the promise to Abraham) begins a story that runs chronologically and sequentially all the way to 2 Kings 25. Suggested dates for Abraham vary from about 2100 BC to about 1800 BC.

Quite a bit of geographical movement takes place in Genesis. After God creates the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1), the setting tends to move eastward. God plants “a garden in the east” (2:8); he apparently banishes Adam and Eve to the east, leaving cherubim to guard the gate to the garden on the east side (3:23–24); the murderer Cain is driven away, to the east (4:16); and people migrate “eastward” (or perhaps “from the east,” 11:2).

When the story of Abraham begins (Genesis 12), he is in Mesopotamia, which is in the east. Abraham, however, obeys the Lord and migrates west to Canaan. He has a short stay down in Egypt (12:10–20), which does not go well, and then Abraham returns to the land of Canaan. Abraham’s grandson Jacob will travel back to Mesopotamia and live there for a while, before returning to Canaan. Jacob’s family will then move to Egypt, and Genesis ends with the family of Jacob (Abraham’s descendants) all living in Egypt.

Traditionally, Christians have taken clues from the rest of the Bible and concluded that Moses wrote the book of Genesis. This would place the initial setting for the composition of the book during the exodus, as Israel entered into covenant relationship with God and moved toward the Promised Land (like the garden in Genesis 2). Keep in mind that these people are fairly new in their relationship with God. All the people around them worship pagan gods. Most of these religions had creation stories, and most of these gods were connected in some way to agricultural cycles and seasons. This cultural milieu would have had a very strong influence on the thinking of the Israelites regarding what God is like. Genesis 1 is underscoring that the Lord God of Israel is quite different from the pagan gods of Israel’s neighbors. He did not struggle and fight to bring the world into ordered being as the pagan gods did; he just spoke and it was so. The agricultural cycles and seasons are not connected to the death and rebirth of pagan gods (as the Canaanites maintained, for example); they were determined by God’s decree at creation. Furthermore, the creation of people is at the climax of the story, and God creates the man and woman in the image of God, giving a special and wonderful status to all people, a concept quite foreign to the pagan religions of the ancient world.

What Is at the Heart of Genesis?

Genesis plays an introductory role for the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), for the entire Old Testament, and for the entire Bible. The story of Genesis is paradigmatic (representative) for the story of Israel, as well as for the grand story of human existence. God creates a good place for people to live where they can have a close relationship with him. This is a fantastic blessing (Genesis 1–2). These human creatures (and we need to see ourselves here as well) repeatedly rebel and sin against God, resulting in separation and death (Genesis 3–11). This is the story of humanity. In God’s great mercy he provides a way of salvation, and this salvation story starts in Genesis 12 with Abraham and culminates in the New Testament Gospels with Jesus Christ, reaching its final consummation in Revelation 21–22 with the re-creation of the new heavens and earth.

Genesis 1–11 is a cosmic story, dealing with all people of the earth. The initial blessings of God and the rebellion, sin, and rejection of God by humankind portrayed in Genesis 3–11 are universal and include all people of all nations. As the story of salvation begins in Genesis 12, however, the focus is on Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel. But Genesis 12:3 sets the ultimate universal agenda: “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” God is going to work through the descendants of Abraham to provide a way of salvation for all who will accept it.

God makes a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17. It is this Abrahamic covenant that will provide the framework for God’s unfolding plan of salvation for everyone in the world who will believe. It is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant that drives the story throughout the Old Testament and even into the New Testament. It is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant that reunites the story of Israel (Genesis 12–2 Kings 25) with the story of humanity as declared in the Prophets and consummated in Jesus Christ.

Michelangelo's depiction of God creating Adam. *Creation of Adam*, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City.

The story in Genesis can be outlined as follows:

- Creation of the World, People, and the Garden (1:1–2:25)
- Paradise Lost: Sin, Death, and Separation from God (3:1–11:32)
 - Sin #1: Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and are banished from the garden (3:1–24)
 - Sin #2: Cain kills his brother, Abel, and is driven away (4:1–26)
 - Sin #3 (and then some): Worldwide wickedness brings on the flood (5:1–9:29)
 - Sin #4: The tower of Babel results in scattering (10:1–11:32)
- God's Response to Human Sin: Deliverance through the Abrahamic Covenant (12:1–50:26)
 - Abraham: The promise and the obedience of faith (12:1–23:20)
 - Isaac: Continuing the patriarchal promise (24:1–25:18)
 - Jacob: Struggle and the beginning of the twelve tribes of Israel (25:19–36:43)
 - Joseph: Faithfulness and God's sovereign deliverance (37:1–50:26)



What Makes Genesis Interesting and Unique?

- Genesis answers the big questions of life: Why am I here? Who has brought me into being? What is life all about?
- Genesis tells the story of creation.
- God creates man and woman, and institutes marriage.
- A serpent talks to Eve and convinces the couple to disobey God.
- Genesis contains the fascinating stories of the flood and the tower of Babel.
- Genesis has a universal focus (1–11) and an Israelite focus (12–50).
- The phrase “these are the generations of” (KJV, or “this is the account of,” NIV) occurs repeatedly throughout the book (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2).
- Abraham is a remarkable man of faith (most of the time).
- God makes a covenant with Abraham that impacts the rest of the Bible and all of human history.
- God destroys the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah after arguing with Abraham about it.
- God tests Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac, but provides a substitute just in time.
- Jacob tricks his father, Isaac, in order to get his blessing.
- Jacob wrestles with God.
- Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers but rises to the second most powerful position in the world, just in time to save his family.
- Joseph forgives his brothers who sold him into slavery.

What Is the Message of Genesis?

Creation of the World, People, and the Garden (1:1–2:25)

Genesis 1:1 is a summary statement for the entire process of creation. This single introductory verse also has profound implications for us. If we accept the truth of Genesis 1:1, then we can easily accept the many miraculous works of God throughout the Bible. Likewise, if we acknowledge Genesis 1:1, our basic relationship to God is defined: he is the creator and we are the created beings. Thus he has the right (and the power) to determine what life for us is all about.

Genesis 1:2 is a background statement. The story of creation in the Bible does not start with “nothingness.” That God creates matter out of nothing is implied, but the story in Genesis actually starts with a chaotic watery world. Thus the Genesis 1 creation account is not so much an account of creation out of nothing as it is an account of bringing order out of chaos, and life out of nonlife. Genesis 1:2 also mentions the “Spirit of God” hovering over the waters, underscoring the close connection between God’s Spirit and creative power, a theme that will continue throughout the Old Testament.

The creation account in Genesis 1 is fascinating, for it is presented not mechanically or in a boring way, but colorfully, even poetically. It has structure and symmetry. Numerous things are repeated: “and God said,” “evening and morning,” “it was good,” and so on. God is not following a step-by-step instruction manual. He is more like an artist creating a masterpiece, who can paint outside the lines if he wants to.

In addition, the account is not strictly linear, but is presented in two interrelated cycles. On days 1–3 God creates domains or regions. On days 4–6 he creates the inhabitants or occupants of those regions or domains.

Day 1 (vv. 3–5) Separates light from dark	Day 4 (vv. 14–19) Creates sun, moon, and stars
Day 2 (vv. 6–8) Separates the sea from the sky	Day 5 (vv. 20–23) Creates fish and birds
Day 3 (vv. 9–13) Separates water, dry ground, creates vegetation	Day 6 (vv. 24–31) Creates livestock, crawling things, wild animals, humankind

Throughout this creation account, God is not only bringing things into being, but he is also assigning functions to each thing and thus bringing order and purpose to the creation.

As the climax of creation, God creates man and woman in the image of God. The overview of this is presented in 1:26–31, and the details are presented in 2:4–25. God makes people “in the image of God,” thus giving them a very special status. Furthermore, note that Adam and Eve are not associated with any tribe or race (they are not called Hebrews, for example). This implies that all people of all races and socioeconomic levels have this special status and value; they are created in the image of God. Although scholars are divided over the exact meaning of “the image of God,” it probably includes several things: we are similar to God in several aspects (spiritual, emotional, relational) and we have been appointed as God’s representatives to administer his creation.

Genesis 1 is an overview of the entire creation process, while Genesis 2 “windows in” on the specific details involved in the creation of the man and the woman. The entire creation story concludes with the man and the woman brought together in the institution of marriage (2:18–25).

Paradise Lost: Sin, Death, and Separation from God (3:1–11:32)

Genesis 3–11 chronicles the sad story of how humans respond to God’s gracious blessings given to them in creation. Four sinful episodes are listed in a row; the human race is not off to a good start!

Sin #1: Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and are banished from the garden (3:1–24)

We believe this to be a historical story, but it is also one that typifies human behavior and gives an accurate pessimistic foreshadowing of how people in general will stubbornly refuse to obey God, allowing temptation to lead them astray. Adam and Eve, tempted by the lies and half-truths of the serpent (i.e., Satan), eat from the one tree that God told them not to eat from, and then they each try to blame someone else. The consequences are serious. Sin disqualifies them from living the good life in the garden in close fellowship with God. Death will now be a reality for them (3:19), and immortality will come only through childbirth, accompanied by great pain. Since he rejected the rules of the good garden, the man is now destined to hard, hot, sweaty work in the fields. Finally, God banishes them from the garden.

Sin #2: Cain kills his brother, Abel, and is driven away (4:1–26)

Outside the garden, the human race does not behave any better. With only two brothers on the earth, it is rather ironic (and disturbing) that one would kill the other. This also is a sad picture of human behavior, for we are still killing one another with some regularity. Just read any newspaper headlines or listen to the evening news.

God, however, continues to work in the background, and this action quietly suggests hope for the future. Seth replaces the slain Abel and begins to call on the name of the Lord (4:26).



Cain and Abel by Titian.

Sin #3 (and then some): Worldwide wickedness brings on the flood (5:1–9:29)

Time passes and generations go by. There are now lots of people in the world (5:1–32). As the population grows and spreads, sin seems to keep pace, as Genesis 6:5 declares, “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of his heart was only evil all the time.” Fortunately, there are exceptions to this indictment, and a man named Noah finds grace in God’s eyes.

The wickedness is so bad that God decides to destroy the creation and start over. Genesis 6–9 describes the flood that God sends on the earth. In general, the description of the flood uses the same terminology as was used of the creation in Genesis 1–2, only in reverse. In Genesis 1, “God saw that it was good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Now in 6:5, “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become.” Likewise, the separation of the waters above and the waters below (1:6–7) collapses into a great flood (7:11). Just as God commanded the dry ground to appear (1:9), now it all disappears back under the waters (7:17–20), destroying all life outside the ark, both humans and animals, created back in Genesis 1.

In essence, God does start over, and just as the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters in 1:2, so now God sends a wind (the Hebrew words for “spirit” and “wind” are the same) over the earth, and the “re-creation” begins as the waters recede and the animals emerge out of the ark (8:1–22).

In Genesis 9, God makes a covenant not to destroy the world again this way. He also makes a strong prohibition against murder. Noah’s story ends rather curiously, however. His son Ham does something quite offensive (the text is not clear to us), and Noah then pronounces a curse on Ham’s son

Canaan (9:18–27), from whom the Canaanite people will develop. Apparently Noah looks beyond his sons and grandsons to see the people who will develop from them. Thus he pronounces a fitting curse on Canaan. The Canaanites will become the prototypical “bad guys” in the Old Testament, worshiping Baal and causing all kinds of theological and moral problems for Israel in the future. None of the son’s names (Ham, Shem, and Japheth) have anything to do with racial classifications, and the so-called curse of Ham has absolutely nothing to do with ethnicities.

Sin #4: The tower of Babel results in scattering (10:1–11:32)

The genealogy in Genesis 10 presents some challenging interpretive difficulties, for the list contains names of individuals, peoples, tribes, countries, and cities. The basis for the

The cuneiform tablet containing the flood account in the Epic of Gilgamesh.



✦ Several of the four terms *clans*, *languages*, *territories*, and *nations* used to define the scattering in Genesis 10 (vv. 5, 20, 31) reappear in other passages that reverse the scattering situation, particularly in Genesis 11:1–9. See Daniel Hays and Scott Davall, *Baker Book*

Other Flood Accounts in the Ancient Near East

John H. Walton

The Israelites lived in an ancient world in which there was a common currency of ideas, traditions, customs, perceptions, and stories. As with any culture, they had their own versions of each of these that were tailored to suit their individual beliefs and culture. Unlike the rest of the ancient world, they received revelation from their God that, at critical points, drew them out of their cultural surrounding and endowed them with a distinct understanding. In most other ways they remained very similar to their cultural neighbors.

Given the nature of the tradition found commonly in the ancient Near East, that there was a flood of immense scope that virtually wiped out the ancient world, it is no surprise that accounts of this flood survive both in the Bible and in the larger culture. Even as the accounts mirror the culture in which they are found, they also reflect common elements that tie them to a central event that they record. The biblical account naturally understands the event as an act of judgment by a single, righteous deity who was disappointed with the sin of his creatures, but saved one righteous family from worldwide devastation. The picture of God and humanity is consistent with the biblical ideals.

In the ancient Near Eastern versions found in Sumerian texts, in the Atrahasis Epic, and in the Gilgamesh Epic, we likewise find accounts consistent with the ideas they had about the gods and humanity. Consequently we see a Divine Council that decides to send the flood with the intention that all humanity be destroyed. It is only by breach of the trust of the Council that one god arranges for a few humans to escape the judgment. The reasons for the action of the Council are rooted in views of deity current in Mesopotamia. There the gods could be viewed as petty or selfish, and they are understood to have needs that humans meet. In these ancient Near Eastern accounts, the humans that are spared offer a sacrifice to the gods to appease them, and the gods come to recognize their need of humanity.

Numerous other differences could be identified, and none of them is surprising. The similarities attest that a common world binds these people together. The distinctions testify to the basic differences in theology and the impact of revelation on the Israelites. There is no need to discuss the question of who borrowed from whom, for there was no need to borrow what was already ingrained in ancient memory. Of greater significance is the recognition that Israelites had been given a different form of the tradition that coincided with how God was known to them.





The partially restored Ager Quf Ziggurat. Numerous temple-towers like this were built as worship sites throughout Mesopotamia. The tower of Babel was perhaps a forerunner of these ziggurats.

groupings and classifications in this chapter is not ethnicity, but a combination of anthropological, linguistic, political, and geographical elements, with perhaps the political (i.e., alliances and influences) and geographical associations dominating. An important feature to note is the repetition of the four terms “clans,” “languages,” “territories,” and “nations” (10:5, 20, 31). In addition, the scattering of peoples across the world into clans, languages, territories, and nations is the result of the tower of Babel episode in Genesis 11. So it appears that the event of Genesis 11 actually takes place first and then leads to the situation described in Genesis 10.

In Genesis 11 people gather in Babel and attempt to build a tower up to the heavens so that they can make a name for themselves. God, however, does not approve, and he confuses their language and scatters them across the land. A fun wordplay drives this story. Babel is the word from which Babylon comes, and to the Babylonians, the word Babel means “gate of the gods.”

In Hebrew, however, the word Babel sounds a lot like a Hebrew word meaning “to confuse.” So the wordplay implies that this is not the “gate of the gods,” but rather the place and the cause of confusion (and scattering). This story represents prideful and pretentious humanism. It reflects humanity’s attempt to gain security and meaning apart from God through city-building. Throughout the Bible, the city of Babylon becomes the prototype of all prideful nations, cities, and empires that raise themselves against God (e.g., note the use of Babylon in Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2). Note that Genesis 9:25–27 pronounces a curse on Canaan while Genesis 11:1–9 implies judgment on Babylon. In the Old Testament, the Canaanites and the Babylonians are the major enemies of Israel, the Canaanites at the beginning during the conquest and the Babylonians at the end during the exile.

God’s Response to Human Sin: Deliverance through the Abrahamic Covenant (12:1–50:26)

Abraham: The promise and the obedience of faith (12:1–23:20)

In Genesis 3–11 the human race has demonstrated its propensity to rebel against God and sin repeatedly. God’s response to human sin is to provide a way of salvation. This story—the story of salvation—begins in Genesis 12 with God’s covenant promises to Abraham, and culminates with the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus God’s covenant with Abraham plays a critical role in tying the entire biblical story together.

God calls Abraham while he is still in Mesopotamia (11:27–12:1), instructing him to leave his country and his people (i.e., a separation for service to God, a common theme in the Pentateuch) and to go to the land God will show him. In 12:2–7 God promises Abraham several things. He will make Abraham into a great nation; he will bless Abraham and make his name great; he will bless all peoples on earth through Abraham; and he will give Abraham’s descendants the land of Canaan. This is a big agenda, and fulfilling it will drive the rest of the biblical story.

In 12:10–20 Abraham makes some poor decisions, ending up in Egypt and almost losing his wife, Sarah. God, however, works behind the scenes to straighten things out and blesses Abraham anyway, demonstrating the tight connection between God’s grace and the Abrahamic promises. In 13:1–14:24 God continues to bless Abraham, and these blessings spill over onto those who are associated with Abraham as well.

In Genesis 15 and 17 God appears to Abraham and formalizes his promises to Abraham into a covenant. Abraham is worried because he has no apparent heirs, but God tells him that he will have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky (15:5). Abraham believes in God’s promise, and God “credited it to him as righteousness” (15:6). Then God and Abraham participate in a formal covenant-making ceremony. Abraham cuts several animals in half. Normally in a covenant ceremony both parties would pass between the cut halves, signifying what would happen to each of them if they broke the covenant. Amazingly, in this ceremony

The Negev, one of the regions in which Abraham lived and traveled.



The travels of Abraham



only God passes between the cut animals. That is, God apparently pledges himself unilaterally to keep the Abrahamic covenant. This is what grace is about.

In Genesis 17 God expands the covenant, promising Abraham (and Sarah) that many nations and many kings will come from their descendants. God tells Abraham that circumcision will be the sign for Abraham and his descendants to indicate they are under this great covenant. In

reference to Abraham's descendants, God also declares, "I will be their God" (17:8). Throughout the Old Testament God will define his relationship to his people with a three-part formula statement: I will be your God; you will be my people; I will dwell in your midst (or "I will be with you"). The relationship is introduced as part of the Abrahamic covenant.

Genesis 18–19 describes the destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Remarkably, Abraham argues with God over this judgment, and God apparently listens patiently to Abraham's arguments (18:16–33). But Abraham cannot come up with even ten righteous people in these cities, and God destroys them. Only Abraham's nephew, Lot, and his daughters survive.

At long last, in their old age and just as God had promised back in 18:1–15, Abraham and Sarah have a son, Isaac (21:1–21). Their happiness, however, is rattled severely in Genesis 22 when God tells Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice (22:1–2)! How can this be? Abraham painfully complies, but just before he actually kills Isaac, the Lord stops him and provides a substitute ram for the sacrifice (22:3–14). The Lord commends the strong, unquestioning faith of Abraham and then restates his covenant promises (22:15–19). Many people have been troubled by this passage. What kind of God would do this? The answer perhaps lies in observing the many (sometimes very specific) similarities between this event and the crucifixion of Christ. The

The Covenants of the Bible

A covenant is a binding, formal agreement made between two parties. Covenants play a very important role in the Bible because God is often one of the parties involved in the covenant. In fact, God is the one who usually initiates the covenant, thus binding himself to an agreement or to a set of promises.

God makes several covenants in the Old Testament. In Genesis 9 God makes a covenant with Noah (along with his descendants and all living animals) that he will never destroy all life on the earth again with a flood. God makes a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17, promising several things: God will make Abraham into a great nation; he will bless Abraham and make his name great; he will bless all peoples on earth through Abraham; and he will give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan. An important feature of the Abrahamic covenant is that God appears to bind himself to this covenant unilaterally. That is, the Abrahamic covenant is a one-sided or "divine commitment" covenant. God puts stipulations on himself, but not on Abraham and his descendants. Thus in the New Testament Paul will associate the Abrahamic covenant with the concept of "grace." The Mosaic covenant, by contrast, is quite different, for it emphasized human obligation ("keeping the law"). The Mosaic covenant is defined by the laws of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This covenant defined the terms by which Israel could live in the Promised Land with God in their midst and receive spectacular blessings. In the New Testament Paul will associate the Mosaic covenant with "law." In 2 Samuel 7 God makes a covenant with David, promising to establish a Davidic dynasty ("house") that will last forever.

This covenant also appears to be one-sided, with God being the primary party that takes on obligations. Finally, in Jeremiah 31 God promises that in the future he will make a new covenant. This covenant will be very different from the old covenant (i.e., the Mosaic covenant), for in the new covenant God's laws will be written on people's hearts instead of on stone. This covenant will be characterized by forgiveness of sins and a much greater knowledge and understanding of God. Like the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, the new covenant is a one-sided, divine-commitment type of covenant. In the New Testament Jesus establishes this covenant at the Last Supper when he declares, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).

The Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants play a critical role in the Old Testament story and in connecting the Old Testament to the New Testament. God's fulfillment of these covenants drives the story throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament. Israel will fail miserably at keeping the terms of the Mosaic covenant, and thus they will experience the judgment promised in Deuteronomy (the exile). God, however, in his grace, continues to be faithful to his unilateral promises in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, so even as Israel shatters the Mosaic covenant, there is still hope for a future. The Old Testament prophets will proclaim judgment on Israel because they broke the Mosaic covenant, but the prophets will proclaim hope for a glorious future, based on God's promises in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, promises that find ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ as he inaugurates the promised new covenant.

events take place at very nearly the same location. In each, a father has to sacrifice his son. There is a hill, a donkey, and wood carried by the innocent son. The big difference is that Abraham does not have to go through with

the sacrifice, while God the Father does. We suspect that Genesis 22 is a prophetic typology of the cross, showing the pain and difficulty of the crucifixion from the Father's perspective. Is this a horrible and painful story? "Absolutely!" God answers. This story drags you and me up that hill and forces us to try to come to grips with having to sacrifice one's son, something that our heavenly Father had to do.

Isaac: Continuing the patriarchal promise (24:1–25:18)

Abraham and Sarah eventually die, and the story moves to their son, Isaac. In general, Isaac plays a passive role in most of the episodes he is in (with his father, Abraham, or his sons, Jacob and Esau). He is important, however, for God does restate the covenant promises to him (26:1–5), and he is the link that passes the covenant from Abraham to Jacob and then to the twelve tribes.

Jacob: Struggle and the beginning of the twelve tribes of Israel (25:19–36:43)

In contrast to his father, Isaac, who is passive in the story, Jacob connives, struggles, and fights for his inheritance and the promises that go with it, not always recognizing that the covenant promises were a gift of grace. Jacob (whose name figuratively means "the deceiver") tricks his blind father, Isaac, into giving the family blessing (the inheritance) to him instead of his twin brother, Esau, who was a few moments older than he (27:1–40). The enraged Esau threatens to kill his deceiving brother, so Jacob flees to Paddan Aram, back in Mesopotamia, where the distant relatives of his mother, Rebekah, live. Jacob works for a relative named Laban, who tricks Jacob (who is the deceiver,

The Jabbok River. Jacob wrestles God near this river in Gen. 32:22–37.



remember) into marrying both of his daughters instead of just the younger and more beautiful, Rachel (29:1–30). These two wives, along with their maidservants (who become like concubines or secondary wives to Jacob), bear twelve sons to Jacob. From these twelve sons develop the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob then returns to Canaan and makes amends with his brother, Esau. Along the way, he encounters and “wrestles” with God, who then renames him “Israel.”

Thus Jacob’s story is foundational for the formation of the nation Israel. Jacob takes on the name Israel and fathers the twelve sons that later develop into the twelve tribes (actually there are thirteen tribes, for Jacob’s son Joseph produces two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim). In accordance with the Abrahamic covenant, God blesses this family, even though they do not always behave properly, foreshadowing perhaps the later problems that the nation Israel will have.



The Sacrifice of Isaac by Rembrandt.

Joseph: Faithfulness and God’s sovereign deliverance (37:1–50:26)

Joseph is one of the few in this family who seem to trust in God and live a righteous life. His brothers are jealous of the young Joseph, so they sell him into slavery (37:1–36). Joseph ends up in Egypt, where he continues to trust God and to behave virtuously, in contrast to his brothers back at home (38:1–39:23). God blesses Joseph and empowers him to interpret dreams, leading to his promotion to the second-highest position in Egypt. Joseph actually implements a program that saves Egypt from an upcoming

Sold into slavery, Joseph is taken to Egypt.



famine (40:1–41:57). This famine affects Canaan too, and eventually Joseph’s family comes to Egypt for food. Instead of punishing his brothers for their treachery, Joseph forgives them and cares for his entire family in Egypt (42:1–47:31). Joseph’s father, Jacob, grows old, but pronounces blessings on Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (48:1–22), as well as on his own eleven other sons (49:1–28). Joseph’s family prospers in Egypt, but as he dies, he reminds the family that God promised their forefather Abraham a land and that God would one day take them to that land (50:1–26). So as the book of Genesis ends, the descendants of Abraham are in Egypt, waiting for God to fulfill his promise to their forefather. This fulfillment will be the story of Exodus.

So What? Applying Genesis to Our Lives Today

One of the most important lessons we can learn in life is that God is the creator and we are the created ones. This pretty well delineates our relationship with him and clarifies who has the authority to make the rules. We immediately get into trouble when we forget this order and try to act as though we were the ones who created the universe and thus have the right to determine right and wrong, true worship and false, and so on.



*Joseph Escaping from
Potiphar's Wife* by
Raphael.

The story of Abraham teaches us about God's continuing grace. There is a straight line of grace that connects the creation to the Abrahamic covenant to Jesus Christ. Likewise, as the apostle Paul repeatedly points out, from Abraham we also learn the importance of faith. It is through faith and faith alone that righteousness is received.

Our Favorite Verse in Genesis

I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. (17:1)