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Genesis: Book of Firsts

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BIBLE STUDY



by Harold L. Willmington

Genesis, Book of Firsts

If a twentieth-century advertiser wrote copy to introduce the Book of Genesis, he would probably write: "Your attention please! The infinite and holy Creator of this universe is now ready to begin His amazing story! Every single word is true. No names, dates, or locations have been changed to protect either the innocent or guilty. Here it is, the unabridged, unedited, original, factual, fast-moving account—explaining the who, why, where, when, and how of all things!"

Genesis is, by any conceivable standard, the most important book ever writ-

ten. It is the foundation to all human learning. Genesis is at once the introduction to and the explanation of all things. It clearly gives the origin and purpose of the universe, the world, life, and man himself. One cannot even remotely understand anthropology, geology, literature, philosophy, history, theology, or prophecy apart from this book.

Genesis traces to the beginnings of Israel, marriage, government, the problem of sin and evil, and the complexity of race and language. The future activities of both Satan the destroyer and Shiloh the Saviour are described (3:15; 49:10).

History's first recorded revival is also described in Genesis (chap. 35). Genesis is the fourth longest book in the Bible with 50 chapters, 1,533 verses, and 38,267 words. It is quoted or alluded to some 260 times in 21 New Testament books.

Genesis may be divided into two sections, chapters 1-11 and 12-50. During the first section God deals in general with the universe, nations, and great masses of people. But beginning with the second section in Genesis 12, He zeros in on one man, Abraham, and his descendants. The floodlight is now replaced by a spotlight. While Genesis spans a total time period of at least 2,200 years or more, 20 percent of the book (Gen. 1-11) describes the first 1,800 years. This covers Creation, the Fall, Flood, and Babel. Eighty percent of the book (Gen. 12-50) describes the final 400 years. Here we read of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Genesis 1-11 describes Creation, including everything from electrons to galaxies, from dinosaurs to dandelions, and from Adam to angels! It is the only passage that describes God as resting (2:2-3). It records the first human to be born (Cain), the first man to die (Abel), and the first man not to die (Enoch) (4:1; 4:8; 5:24).

Here we are introduced to a serpent, a raven, and a dove (3:1; 8:7-8). The glory

of God in Creation (1:1) and the grace of God in salvation (6:8) are both clearly seen. This book describes the world's earliest civilization (Cainite), the world's oldest citizen (Methuselah) (4:17; 5:27), the first marriage, the first murder, and the first promise of the Messiah (2:23-25; 4:8; 3:15).

It gives us the first illustration of human religion (the fig leaves) and the first example of divine redemption (the coats of skin) (3:7,21). In its pages sinners are drowned and a saint is drunken (7:21; 9:20-21). A ship settles on a mountain and a tower rises on a plain (8:4; 11:1-4).

In Genesis 12-50 we see a city destroyed on the plains (Sodom) and a boy spared on a mountain (Isaac) (chaps. 19,22). We read of a son (Jacob) deceiving his father (Isaac), who is later himself deceived by his sons (brothers of Joseph) (chaps. 27,37). Here we read of the first barren mother (Sarah) and the first dying mother (Rachel) (chaps. 16,35). Jerusalem (a type of the heavenly) and Egypt (a type of the worldly) are first mentioned in this stage (chaps. 13-14). Here we first learn of a king called Melchizedek and a cave named Machpelah (chaps. 14,25). The Abrahamic covenant, first of three great biblical covenants, is introduced (12:1-3). The birth of Isaac marks the first of five divinely aided conceptions in the Bible, excluding Christ's supernatural birth. The others are Samuel, Samson, the Shunammite's son, and John the Baptist. Bethlehem appears, where God's Lamb would someday be born (35:19), and Abraham climbs a mountain where God's Lamb would someday die (22:2). On this occasion Isaac asks his father, "Where is the lamb?" (22:7). His question would be answered some 20 centuries later by John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). □

Adapted from Willmington's Visualized Study Bible, Tyndale House.

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