

Genesis

Introduction

Name is from LXX (2:4a). Thus, the word is related more to generations ("what came forth from" rather than "beginnings of"). But our usual meaning for "genesis" reflects the Hebrew name of the book taken from the opening words, "in the beginning."

The time frame is immensely long from the distant past of creation to Abraham and family. The movement or tempo of the story line begins deliberately with Genesis one, travels rapidly through millennia to Abraham then slows down (IOT 37) with regard to the main characters.

Genre: God is using human authors in particular times and places and thus within a literary tradition (which they may stretch but do not break, IOT 30) to record and interpret His intervention, His acts, in history. Actual history is being recounted in the literary art form of *theological narrative* to selectively convey a message from God.

1A. Structure

There are two basic ways to view the literary structure of the book.

1B. By content, we get a twofold structure in which each begins with creation (thus, two beginnings: of the world, 1-11; of Israel, 12-50).

2B. The toledoth formula (תולדות) gives 10 episodes. This is a reading cue or a "trigger to reading strategy" which signals to the reader as to how he should take the message (IOT 30-31).

2A. Main characters

The main characters are not those listed on the left below. The toledoth points to "what came forth from" the persons mentioned (and personified, as in the case of heaven & earth, 2.4).

<u>Generations of (Toledoth)</u>	<u>Content</u>
2.4 Heavens and earth	Adam and Eve, and the Fall
5.1 Adam	Descendents to Noah & Escalation of sin
6.9 Noah	Noah, the Flood judgment, and grace
10.1 Shem, Ham, Japeth	Descendents, distribution of the nations
11.10 Shem	Descendents to the birth of Abraham
11.27 Terah	Life of Abraham
25.12 Ishmael	Descendents
25.19 Isaac	Life of Jacob
36.1,9 Esau	Descendents
37.2 Jacob	Life of Joseph

3A. Theological themes (How do the characters and themes match?)

Per the main characters, the following themes emerge: the fall of man into sin, judgment, justification by faith, sovereign grace, and providence.

4A. What comes before the toledoths?

The prologue (1.1-2.3) comes before the ten episodes. It introduces the book of Genesis, the five books of Moses, and the entire history that promised a land, took Israel into the land, took her through exile back to the land. This is the entire OT history in a nutshell that paved the way for the NT. So the prologue is an introduction to the Bible, to the history recorded in it and thus to redemptive history. The importance of the prologue is outstanding.

5A. Theme (searching for a theme is good reading strategy)

It seems apropos to work on the theme from the writer's perspective revealed by the toledoth pattern in relation to the prologue.

1B. Theme of the prologue

God is the main figure in the prologue (1:1-2:3) with man in the background (nameless) being created and receiving his cultural provisions and mandate from God (1:26-30). The prologue gives a philosophy of history; it is God's creating action in the six and one pattern of work and rest that gives a pattern for man to image, and that promises weekly rest with God as a sign of rest with God at the end of history. The theme is God's promise of rest with Him throughout history and finally rest with Him at the end of history.

2B. Theme of the ten episodes (per the six main characters)

In broad overview, we have fall and redemption. The concentration is on initial acts of God in redeeming man from the effects of the fall. Thus we have redemption from the fall initiated in history and focused in the family of Abraham, who has in front of him a promised land though by the end of the book his descendents are living in Egypt. The key figures are introduced, come to center stage than fade into the background.

1C. Adam and Eve

The first episode of earth history tells us what came forth from the newly created heavens and earth: the fall of Adam by the assertion of autonomy (vs. submission to the authority of God). However, God promises to bring restoration from the effects of the fall through the seed of Eve (Gen. 3:15).

2C. Noah

The third main figure of the book is Noah who was delivered from an evil generation through the flood (cf. 1 Pet 3:20-21). This section reveals the sinfulness of man and it reveals the mercy of God who saves Noah through the waters of judgment and promises, with the beautiful symbol of the rainbow, to never flood the earth again. Note the commentary on fallen man: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood" (8:21). We also have the provision of grace (6:8) defined by human depravity (6:5). Noah as a "righteous man" (6:9) must be because of the grace that found him as a fallen sinner himself (6:8).

3C. Abraham (taken from paganism, Jos. 24:2)

Roughly 14 chapters treat the life of Abraham from his call to his death (11:27- 25:11). God called him and He obeyed by faith (Gen. 12:1-4; Heb. 11:8) receiving the promise of offspring (12:7, 2), a land (12:6-7; to your offspring, 15:18; to you and your descendants, 17:8), and a blessing (12:2-3).

How then does his life unfold? For a great portion of his life he is childless and he and Sarah wrestle with this fact that the promises of God appear to be slipping away without fulfillment. Yet Sarah is preserved from defilement in Egypt (12:10-20), the covenant is confirmed though Lot chooses the best portion of land (13:14-17), Abraham is blessed by God on the battlefield (14) and the covenant is again confirmed. Abraham tries to make Eliezer, his trusted servant, his heir (15), and Sarah tries to make Hagar the mother of the promised seed (16), but God again confirms the promise through the sign of circumcision (17) and through the laughter of Sarah (18:1-15).

In the background is Lot at Sodom. Abraham seeks to become a blessing to the nations, but of this comes incest and the Moabites and Ammorites who later plague his descendants (18:16-19-38). Has God's promise failed?

Finally, "the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised" (21:1). She named her son, Issac which means laughter because now her laughter of unbelief and deception has been graciously turned to the laughter of joy (21:6).

But the climax of the story of Abraham is found in Genesis 22 when Abraham is commanded by God to offer Isaac on the altar of sacrifice. Read out of context, this narrative could turn one's blood to ice and God will appear as a demi-gog commanding cold blooded murder of a teenager. But there is no question of justice or hesitation on Abraham's part! He obeys and would plunge the knife into the heart of his only beloved son except for the intervention of God and the provision of the ram.

There are two important points here. 1) First, we are told that this was a test or a proving of Abraham. His faith has been tried and honed over the years waiting for the promises of God while walking with God. Here the strength of the faith God has been developing in Abraham is manifested as a lesson for us all who follow in his footsteps. 2) Second, this was symbolic showing that the only beloved and true son of promise must but be sacrificed in order for the nations to be blessed. This is how the new humanity will be formed. It will be a redeemed race, washed in the blood of the sacrificed son of promise (cf. a bruised descendent, Gen. 3:15 to bless the nations, 12:3).

4C. Jacob

The generations of Isaac concentrate on the life of Jacob (25:19; as the generations of Jacob concentrate on Joseph, 37:2). The defining moment in Jacob's life takes place at Bethel. But this has a significant background. He was chosen of God before he was born (25:23). In spite of God's word, Isaac wanted God's blessing to fall on Esau and Rebekah schemed with Jacob to gain God's blessing by deceptive manipulation (cf. "by faith," Heb. 11:20?). It is God's will that is coming to pass overcoming disobedience and deception. God had chosen Jacob, the sinner (and in many ways less likeable than Esau).

At Bethel, God's purpose of election regarding Jacob was realized for there he made himself known to Jacob. Also, at Bethel God confirmed His covenant intentions; His purposes are being revealed to sinners in the form of promise. Fleeing Esau, Jacob is enroute to Haran and comes to a "certain place" to rest for the night (28:11), falls asleep on a warm stone, and dreams of a stairway from earth to heaven. Angels ascend and descend the stairway. Above it is God who identifies himself (13a), reiterates the Abrahamic covenant (13b, 14a, 14b), and reveals His good will toward Jacob (15).

The lessons are: 1) redemption comes to fleeing sinners; this place for Jacob was his "gateway to heaven," his entry into the house of God (Bethel). He says, "I didn't know that God dwells on earth with sinners." 2)

Covenant fulfillment involves a process on earth in history that gradually unfolds but all along the way there is covenant communion (v. 15, wherever you go, back and forth, in and out, here and there, I am with you and I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you).

Our Bethel is the Lord Jesus; he is the place of the presence of God; the house of God; the gate of heaven. Now the angels ascend and descend on Him for he is Jacob's ladder (Jn. 1:51); he is the bridge between earth and heaven restoring fellowship with the true and living God.

God's covenant is for sinners (by grace), it is unilateral (sovereign), progressive (historical-redemptive).

5C. Joseph

How God is working out his purposes in history through covenant promise and fulfillment is classically revealed in the Joseph narrative.

In this narrative we have some of the most touching scenes of human experience: drama, suspense, hatred, injustice, lust, deceit, wisdom, forgiveness and bursts of unparalleled passion.

In all that transpires, God is active behind the scenes. The text contains the history through which God is carrying out His covenant purposes (his purpose realized through covenant promise and fulfillment).

This account records God's control of every fact of existence, the reality of predestination, the mystery of providence, all of which gives perspective, hope and comfort.

Joseph is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Reuben wished to spare him but he took his \$40.00 and never pursued the caravan. In Egypt, Joseph has his ups and downs but finally becomes the chief ruler under the Pharaoh as a famine overtakes Egypt and Canaan. The ten brothers therefore come to Egypt to seek grain and come before Joseph who recognizes them but they do not recognize him. He speaks to them through an interpreter and probes their consciences regarding their brother "who is no more" (42:13).

God's control of even the evil acts of men in order to work out his purposes is pinpointed in two places: 1) when Joseph first reveals himself to his brothers (45:1-8) and 2) when Jacob died (50:19-20). Both are responses of Joseph to the fear of his brothers in which he roots his forgiveness and love in the providence of God, in God's sovereign purposes, in God's covenant fulfilling action.

3B. Theme of the book

How do we move from the prologue plus episodes to a theme statement of the entire book? We must try to umbrella from common elements. Yet they are distinct. The episodes begin with the fall and presuppose it. There is no fall but original design in the days of the creation account.

Genesis begins the realization of God's loving purpose for man, his image bearer, working on earth in history as God worked and moving weekly from work to rest ultimately to eternal sabbath rest with God. And this is in spite of man's fall and the escalation of sin. To get to the goal, man must be redeemed, which takes place selectively and like creation, involves stage like process over time. As it unfolds, God gives us glimpses into his purposes via promises. Thus, at the very time of the fall, the first promise of restoration to proper image bearing is given (3.15). But it is done progressively in daily stages; with promise; with sinners; through redemption that focuses in the seed of Eve (3.15) which will bring redemption by grace (Noah, Jacob) from the effects of the fall to Abraham's seed that must be sacrificed on the altar (Isaac, 22) betrayed by brothers but exalted as savior by God (Joseph, 13-50).

God will save a people and bring them one day into the promised land (12, 15, 17) and thus into what this land typifies, the new heaven and earth with God in eternal rest (prologue, 1.1-2.3).

The episodes give us first a fast paced look at early events in the distant past from what the heavens and the earth brought forth to the generations of Terah which deals with the life of Abraham. The fall and the need of restoration and God's purposes of restoration are quickly given. Then focus is on Abraham's posterity from Isaac to the 12 sons of Jacob (Israel) with highlights on Joseph. Adding the prologue, we have initiation of God's covenant purpose for man his image bearer on the earth, fallen, but destined for eternal sabbath rest with God.

Therefore, in a word, the theme of Genesis is God's promise of Sabbath rest to man, His image, accomplished providentially in history by redemptive grace because of the fall and realized in the seed of Eve, Noah, Abraham, and the twelve sons of Israel temporarily residing in Egypt. Grace is bestowed in a process that includes conflict (Gen 3.15), divine judgment (Gen 6-9), and warfare (Gen 14) [cf. God as warrior].