

Genesis Unleashed

(Chapters 1-11)

Introduction: The book of Genesis is foundational to understanding the entire Bible. Without understanding what happened “in the beginning,” the Bible appears disjointed, foreign, and sometimes downright odd. But when one accepts Genesis at face value, the coherence of the entire Bible becomes apparent—and exciting. And, not only does Genesis provide a framework for understanding the entire Bible, but it also serves as an explanation for the times in which we live.

I. Presuppositions

- A. The book of Genesis was divinely inspired by God in such a way that every word in the Hebrew text was chosen specifically by God. Though penned by Moses, the words are God’s. In matters of meaning, appeal must be made to the Hebrew text.
- B. Genesis (as well as the rest of the Bible) should be interpreted literally. Literal interpretation involves the following considerations:
 1. Literal meaning—vocabulary and its meaning at the time Genesis was penned. This involves careful definitions of Hebrew words. It also involves investigating how key words were used throughout the Old Testament.
 2. Grammatical—Hebrew has a grammar, the patterns for word usage. Proper interpretation takes this into account. Proper grammar removes a lot of the “wobble room” in interpretation.
 3. Historical—Interpreting Genesis requires that we understand as much as we can regarding ancient history. For example, Genesis presents the story of a universal flood. This must be factored into our understanding of world history. Thankfully, other cultures record Noah’s flood in various forms, giving us a complete picture of the historical setting. (As we shall see, people differ as to the timing of the flood.)
 4. Cultural—Genesis was penned in the ancient near east for ancient near eastern readers. Idioms and assumptions of background knowledge abound in Genesis. Thankfully, archeology has shed a lot of light on the cultural context of the ancient near east. By understanding the cultural norm of that region, we can better understand things in Genesis that appear odd to us.
 - a. Understanding Jewish thought is critical to understanding the more difficult passages in Genesis. Things that seem odd to us do not seem odd to the Hebrew people familiar with their culture.
 - b. Accurate students of Scripture interpret the entire Bible in the light of Second Temple Judaism because that era coalesced ancient Jewish thought with that of the writers of the New Testament. (It is a grave error to interpret the Bible in the “light” of the Reformers who were 1,500 years late to the table!)

- c. It is an error to assume that because other cultures share similar stories and traditions to the Hebrews that Moses somehow “borrowed” material from them. Genesis is a corrective polemic against the erroneous traditions held by pagan peoples. It corrects the errors of their traditions; it sets the story straight.
- 5. Supernatural—Genesis (and the entire Bible) was written within the framework of a supernatural world view. When interpreters ignore and/or downplay the supernatural elements of Genesis, they miss the message of the book.
 - a. Assumption of God as creator—a Being outside of our material realm—is essential to understanding the message.
 - b. Explanation of “supernatural” beings other than God—Genesis provides material that assumes the existence of angels (created beings), the origin of demons, the existence of a hybrid race of giants (much more on that later), and the likelihood of interaction with a realm we do not usually see.
 - c. Do not be mentally misled by the word *supernatural* as commonly used in our culture. The unseen realm (Dr. Michael’s Heiser’s term) is a created world that is natural, but different from our own. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this series, we will use the word *supernatural* to describe that unseen world.
 - d. Adopting a supernatural interpretive framework means *nothing* is off the table. In other words, literal interpretations of words and meanings need not be changed or glossed over in deference to “science.”

II. Introductory Considerations (largely adapted from *The Book of Genesis* by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum)

A. The Title of the Book—Genesis

- 1. Hebrew: *Bereishit* meaning *in the beginning*. Hebrew names for Bible book are often derived from the first or second word of the book.
- 2. Greek: *Geneseos* meaning *origin* or *source*. The Greek name is found in the *Septuagint*, a second century B.C. translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. (Translations are important because their word choices help us to determine Hebrew meaning and cultural context.) The Greek word *geneseos* comes from the Hebrew term *toldot*, meaning “generations” and is frequently used in Genesis.
- 3. English: *Genesis*: Taken from the Greek title and, of course, means “The Book of Origins.”
- 4. The title emphasizes both the beginning of time in our created realm and the origin of our created realm. Genesis sets the record straight!

B. Human Penman—Moses

- 1. The Bible does not name Moses as the author of Genesis because he was obviously not an eyewitness to the events. The ultimate author is God

- Himself, but all believers see Moses as the human instrument, with the words inspired by God.
2. The Jews always regarded Moses as the penman and always included Genesis in the *Torah*, the 5 books of Moses. Both the Old and New Testaments affirm Moses as penman of the *Torah*.
- C. Theme of Genesis (Fruchtenbaum, pp. 2-3)
1. Though Genesis is the “book of beginnings” the larger and general theme is blessing and cursing. Genesis explains the beginning, but goes on to explain the basics of God’s dealing with mankind.
 2. Blessing includes selection of the Hebrew people who in turn would bless all the nations of the world. Blessing also includes the “seed” and land promises given to the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 3. Cursing includes God’s reaction to the world’s condition in Noah’s day (the flood judgment), His promised expulsion of Canaanites from what became the land of Israel, etc.
 4. In Genesis God blesses good actions and curses evil actions.
- D. Structure of Genesis—3 ways to view the literary work
1. 2 Division Structure
 - a. Genesis 1-11:9 mark the first portion and deals with the origin of the world, the human race, nations, etc. Scholars estimate their time period covered in this section to be about 2,000 years.
 - b. Genesis 11:10-50:26 focuses on the origin of one particular nation, the Hebrew nation—Israel. The focus is on four people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. This section addresses the beginning of the Jewish race. The time period covered in this section is only 193 Years.
 2. Toldot Structure
 - a. The Toldot structure emphasizes the 11 family histories given in Genesis. It begins in Genesis 2:4 and each section begins similarly with words such as “these are the generations of...”
 - b. Each of the 11 Toldots explains what became of the family line.
 - c. For a thorough explanation of the Toldot structure, see Fruchtenbaum, pp. 5-9).
 3. Geographical Structure
 - a. Babylonia (fertile crescent region)—Genesis 1-11
 - b. Canaan—Genesis 12-36
 - c. Egypt—Genesis 37-50
 4. The structural divisions demonstrate the planned unity of the entire book. Genesis is not random accounts; it is a carefully structured literary work.
 5. Viewing Genesis from the standpoint of all three structures is legitimate. The structures indicate the intentionality of the writing. Genesis is not a bunch of random stories cobbled together by an editor. Its structure demonstrates purposeful plan going from general to specific.

In The Beginning

Lesson 1

Introduction: Genesis is the foundation of all Scripture. Both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly affirm its veracity. The New Testament refers Genesis approximately 200 times, with 165 direct quotations and approximately 100 of these references are from Genesis 1-11. For excellent introductory information on Genesis, see *The Book of Genesis* by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum (available on Amazon.com). Dr. Fruchtenbaum's work will serve as a major source for these lessons, and page citations will reference his commentary on Genesis unless otherwise noted.

- I. The Creation—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).
 - A. The Bible begins with the assumption of God without any attempt to prove His existence.
 1. Believing in God is the beginning of faith: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).
 2. While intellectual arguments for the existence of God may be helpful to some skeptics, the Bible simply begins by assuming His existence. The Bible was written to God's people, not to skeptics.
 - B. "The beginning" is the beginning of time as opposed to eternity. Time began (from the human perspective) when creation began.
 - C. "Created"—The Hebrew word is *bara* and it is exclusively used of God. Never is man said to *bara*. (See Fruchtenbaum, p. 29)
 1. *Bara* can mean creation out of nothing (heavens, earth) or creation out of something (God's creating man of the dust of the ground) but it is always an act of God.
 2. When God creates, the act is always "new, fresh, and good" (p. 29). God's *bara* activity is always positive and commendable.
 3. *Bara* has the idea of shaping, forming, transforming.
 4. God created (*bara*) the heavens and the earth, animal life, and man.
 5. "What happens in Genesis 1:1 is that God called the universe into existence, and He created the universe *ex nihilo*, Latin for "out of nothing." (See Romans 4:17 and Hebrews 11:3.)
 - D. "The heavens" were created before the earth.
 1. This includes the entire universe—planets, suns, stars, galaxies, etc.
 2. Heavens is plural, referring to both the first heaven (the atmosphere) and second heaven (stars, planets, etc.).
 - E. "Earth"—As differentiated from the heavens, earth would eventually become the dwelling place of man (Ps. 115:16).
 - F. As we shall see, Genesis 1:1 is an introduction to the 6 days of creation. It is NOT part of the 6 days. This is a very important and controversial point! God did NOT create "the heavens and the earth" on the first day of creation.

- II. The Chaos—“And the earth was without form and void...” (Gen. 1:2)
- A. The Initial Chaos View
1. Some interpreters seek to make verse two describe the process of creation. God created the heavens and the earth, but they were “without form and void”—a mess. In other words, they contend that God made the heavens and earth in the rough and then fixed them up. This is known as the Initial Chaos View.
 2. However, Hebrew grammar indicates that verse two is not a result of verse 1. (For a complete discussion of the Hebrew grammar, see Fruchtenbaum, pp. 34-35.)
 3. “Genesis 1:2 describes the circumstances of the earth before 1:3 and not as a result of 1:1” (p. 34).
 4. The Initial Chaos View sees Genesis 1:1-3 as descriptive of the first day of creation, something the Bible never says. It is important to understand that to insert the creation of “the heavens and the earth” into the first day of creation (as defined in Gen. 1:3) is an assumption without *any* textual merit. It destroys the careful symmetry of the 6 day creation story.
 5. Although this view is popularly held by many Young Earth Creationists (Morris, Whitcomb, Ham, etc.) it is unnecessary to believing in a literal 6 day creation. The earth may be very old but creation as it pertains to the world as we know it today is very young. The concept of old earth/young creation is not contradictory, and it honors the Biblical text.
- B. The Gap Theory
1. Summarized:
 - a. Genesis 1:1 describes the initial creation—beautiful, appealing, good
 - b. Between Genesis 1:2 and 1:2 there is a gap of time of unknown duration. Somewhere in this gap, Satan fell—creating the chaos of verse 2.
 - c. The chaos on the earth was the result of divine judgment for Satan’s transgression (Ezek. 28:11-19).
 - d. Genesis 1:3 marks the beginning of creation—God’s recreating the beauty, perfections, and majesty of the earth. And ultimately God’s creating man and giving him (not Satan) dominion over the earth.
 2. Misrepresented:
 - a. Opponents of the Gap Theory view it as an “accommodation” to modern science, primarily geological science, which came to postulate an old earth.
 - b. Some opponents wrongly view the Gap Theory as a convenient way to dismiss dinosaurs and the entire fossil record. This, however, is not true. Old Earth/Young Creation believers have no problem with dinosaurs and the fossil record. Those are part of the creation and belong to the time period of Adam forward.
 3. Supported:
 - a. The Gap Theory was popularized in the notes of the C.I. Scofield Reference Bible and was welcomed by fundamentalists. Many

conservative Bible scholars hold to the Gap Theory. It is not a fundamental of the Christian faith and is a point about which good Christians may differ.

- b. The Bible affirms that the earth, as originally created, was NOT a wasteland: “For this saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it, he created it not in vain [not a waste], he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else” (Isa. 45:18).
- c. The words “without form and void” (Heb. *tohu, vohu*) are used together in only two other places in the Old Testament. Both times they refer to judgment (Isa 34:11 and Jer. 4:23). Their initial use together in Genesis set the stage for their use later referencing God’s judgment. Remember, the Gap Theory postulates that the earth became “without form and void” as a result of God’s judgment on Satan’s fall.

From *The Gap Is Not a Theory* by Jack W. Langford

1. Both the English translations and the Hebrew text present a formula defining the creative activities of God on the 6 days of creation. Each day begins with “and God said” and ends with “and the evening and the morning were the first (or second, third, etc.) day.” Verses 1 and 2 stand outside of the formula. It is an assumption unmerited by the text to include those verses in the first day. It simply doesn’t say that.
2. There can be no Hebrew “day” until light is created, marking the first day. Light alone was created on day 1. Prior to day one there was the universe, the earth, and darkness.
3. Each day of creation *begins* with the words “And God said...” Verses 1-2 do not have that wording, therefore, they are not part of the first day.
4. The Holy Spirit hovering over the face of the waters signals the beginning of the first day of creation. Note that the earth was already present.
5. The work God accomplished on each day is carefully defined for each day. Creation of the earth is NOT within the defined days.
6. The heavens and the earth were in existence prior to the 6 day creative activity of God. The initial creation was witnessed by the heavenly angelic host (Job 38:1-7). Note the fact that angels witnessed the initial creation of the earth assumes their creation prior to the universe.

The Angelic Connection

1. Angels were created by God prior to the creation of our universe and earth. Think of it as God having two families: The heavenly host (angels) and human beings—both made in His image. The heavenly host was created first; man was created later.
2. Satan had access to the initially created earth, and likely it was his special dwelling place (Ezek. 28:11-16). Fruchtenbaum comments: “...the created earth of Genesis 1:1 became the abode of Satan; and he was the guardian over the earth in its original form (p. 38).

