

GENESIS TIME LINE

CREATION–2100 BC

Creation/Fall

(Gen. 1–3)

Noah and the Flood

(Gen. 6–9)

Tower of Babel

(Gen. 11)

2200–2000 BC

2166 BC

Abram/Abraham born

2156 BC

Sarai/Sarah born

2091 BC

Abram moved to Canaan

2081 BC (?)

God's covenant with Abraham

2066 BC

Isaac born

2029 BC

Sarah died

2006 BC

Jacob and Esau born

2000–1800 BC

1991 BC

Abraham died

1915 BC

Joseph born

1903 BC (?)

Jacob wrestled with God

1886 BC

Isaac died

1876 BC

Jacob moved to Egypt

1859 BC

Jacob died

1805 BC

Joseph died

ITEM 7

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BACKGROUND OF GENESIS

PURPOSE: The Bible is fundamentally a book about God and the grand story He is composing through history. Through Genesis, we see people's hopes and heartaches, their failures as well as their faith, as they respond to God's revelation of Himself to them. The opening chapters relate to the earliest beginnings of the human race. Later chapters focus on the family of faith, Abram (Abraham) and his descendants—with particular emphasis on the formation of a covenant people who became Israel. Genesis reveals inspiring tales of valor and disappointing testimonies of failure. The writer's transparency about both sins and successes testify to the validity of Genesis.

WRITER AND DATE: Technically, Genesis is anonymous because no writer is identified in the text. However, other biblical evidence and tradition indicate that Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, also called the Pentateuch. Other biblical writers also referred to Moses as the writer of these five books (Judg. 3:4; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Chron. 35:12; Ezra 3:2; Neh. 8:1; 9:14; Ps. 103:7; Dan. 9:13; Mal. 4:4a). In the New Testament, Jesus attributed Old Testament writings to Moses (John 7:19-23) and consistently referred to laws given by Moses (Mark 12:26; Luke 2:22; 5:14). Paul also referred to Moses as a writer of Scripture (see 2 Cor. 3:14-15). In the early church, the Jewish leaders recognized Moses as the source of their traditions (Acts 6:11,14). Mosaic authorship would likely place the composition around 1445 BC, while the children of Israel were living in the wilderness.

ORGANIZATION: The book of Genesis features two major sections: chapters 1–11 and chapters 12–50. Bible scholars have often designated chapters 1–11 as primeval history and chapters 12–50 as patriarchal history. Chapters 1–11 recount God's creation of the world, humanity's fall into sin, Noah and the great flood, the spread of early human populations, and the rise and fall of the tower of Babel. The patriarchal history begins with God's call of Abram (Abraham) and His establishment of a covenant with Abram and his descendants. These chapters focus on four generations of Abram's family: Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons (particularly Joseph).

THEMES IN GENESIS

CREATION: From nothing, God created everything. Genesis 1:1–2:1 describes the panorama of the six days of creation. Each day built on the previous day, revealing God's ultimate purpose—to create an environment in which He could place human beings. The remainder of chapter 2 describes God's personal creation of and interaction with the first man and woman. They would bear His image and participate in His purpose, even after the fall.

SIN: Sin entered the world when Adam and Eve yielded to temptation, passing sin's guilt and a fallen nature to every generation of their descendants (Rom. 5:12). Wickedness grew to unimaginable levels in the time of Noah, prompting God's judgment by a worldwide flood. The citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah offended the Lord so greatly with their sin that He destroyed the cities with fire and sulfur (or brimstone). Later, sin damaged the relationships among Jacob's sons, resulting in Joseph's being sold as a slave into Egypt.

JUDGMENT AND GRACE: Humanity's disobedience multiplied through generations, growing darker and deeper. By the time of Noah (Gen. 6–9), God determined to judge humanity's sin with a flood; but He also showed grace by providing the ark for Noah, his family, and representatives of all living creatures. God's providence later protected Jacob in Aram and Joseph in the land of Egypt.

COVENANT: God spoke directly to Adam and Noah, promising one a Messiah (Gen. 3:15) and promising the other preservation (9:12-17). Later, Abram, who would become Abraham, obeyed God's call and received the promise that God would bless him—and every nation through him (12:1-3; 15:1-19). This Abrahamic covenant was reaffirmed with Isaac (26:2-4) and with Jacob (28:12-15).

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE: Genesis reveals the contours of a faith relationship with God. Faith is demonstrated through responding to God's call, following His leading, and obeying His commands. God tested Abram's faith (Gen. 22) and reaffirmed His covenant in a way that foreshadowed Christ as the substitutionary sacrifice for sin.

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