

Beginnings: A Walk Through Genesis

Taught by: Greg Dietrich | greg@gadietrich.com

Additional Course Material Available at <http://gd25.us/zDRQ5d>

The Purpose of Genesis

Most people do not write simply for the sake of writing. Most people write with some purpose and an audience in mind. This is no different with the book of Genesis. Genesis was compiled and written for a purpose and it will be our job to unfold that in the time we have together today.

Before we can nail down the purpose question we first need to frame in our discussion around when was the book written?

I. Date of Genesis

A. Dating the book of Genesis is not easy. As you'll recall from our discussion last week we talked about how Genesis is a compilation of sources that were compiled by Moses. The sources were written from a pretty wide time span, however, we might be able to look at when Moses might of done his compiling.

B. The best research shows that Moses likely lived in the 1500's or 1300's. So the book of Genesis likely finds its compilation origins in these times.

II. Purpose of Genesis

A. Like its authorship and date, the purpose of Genesis cannot be considered apart from its place within the Pentateuch as a whole. The Pentateuch is a unique combination of history and law, a history that explains the origins of its laws. For example, the narratives in Genesis explain the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14), the prohibition against eating the sciatic tendon (Gen. 32:32), and Sabbath observance (Gen. 2:2, 3). More importantly, its narrative recounts God's election of Israel to a unique covenant relationship with Him, in order to bless a fallen world. That covenant relationship consists of God's commitment to the patriarchs to make of their

elect offspring a great nation and the chosen nation's commitment to obey Him and so to become a light to the Gentiles. Genesis recounts the origins of this redemptive nation, reaching back to the beginnings of mankind and the world and of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan in which the nation was to play a crucial role.

B. At the heart of Genesis we need to see the book of Genesis primarily a book of theology. Genesis is about God and it is about God in the way it describes origins, Israel, and redemption. That being said, it is a reminder that the purpose of Genesis is not to teach us that the earth was created in X amount of days or to prove that Adam is X years old. We very well might derive those details from the text, however, the text itself is concerned with theology, concerned with telling a story about God.

C. ANE Accounts

1. There are a variety of ancient near eastern documents which seem to have striking parallel to some of the accounts we find in Genesis. As you read in *How to Read Genesis* you'll read more about these.
2. It is not uncommon for people to say that Genesis reflects these same mythological characteristics that the early Babylonian literature contains. Some people use this as an occasion to show how Genesis cannot be taken as literal narrative.
3. If you take this line of thought, which some good Bible scholars do, then you do not need to believe that people named Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, or Shem ever really existed.
4. Enuma Elish & Epic of Gilgamesh are the two most popular that contains creation stories and stories of a flood. Details of these can be found in Longman on pages 71-98.
5. So the thought goes like this; since it is widely acknowledged that the function of Gen 1-11 in Israel is very similar to the function of myth in ANE: it embodies the thoughts of how the world originated and operates.
6. Most people though fail when they over emphasize the similarities and don't stop to consider the vast omissions and differences.

D. Conclusion

1. At the end of the day we cannot ignore the ANE material and the accounts we find in them. There is too much at stake to simply ignore them. Rather, we should look at the ANE accounts and try to answer some questions.
 - a) Would Moses have had access and knowledge of these ANE documents?
Yes, I think he would of.
 - b) Were these ANE accounts widely regarded as “the” account of beginnings to the early people? Yes, I think it might of.
2. Drawing on these conclusions it seems quite possible to me that the reason Genesis parallels the Enuma Elish, Epic of Gilgamesh, and the Atra-Hasis epic is because these early parts of Genesis were written to correct the false thinking about God. They are indeed parallel because they are trying to set the record straight.
3. See the chart on the “Summary of Differences Between ANE Cosmologies & the Genesis Creation Account.” This should help you see how Genesis sets the record straight on some of these issues.
4. At the end of the day I agree with Longman when he says: “It is certain that the biblical account of creation was not written to counter Charles Darwin or Stephen Hawking, but it was written in the light of rival descriptions of creation.”

Life Study Assignment

1. Wherever you are in your Genesis reading, try to get up through chapter 11. Try to read through chapters 1-11 in a single sitting if you can. This will be helpful to you as you will likely put some pieces together.
2. In *How to Read Genesis* read 41-67. These pages will go back and give you more of what we have talked about in previous weeks. If you want to read ahead, please feel free to do so.
3. If you would like to do some advanced reading I have uploaded a file to an article called “Contemporary Hermeneutical Approaches to Genesis 1-11” from a book called *Coming to Grips with Genesis*. It is more advanced, but very helpful. You can download it at: <http://gd25.us/ydTsd1>.

Summary of Differences Between ANE Cosmologies & the Genesis Creation Account

1

Ancient Near East

- Polytheistic
- Continuous with the world he/they created
- Very interested with the origins of God
- Very sexual being
- Devalued history

Genesis

- Monotheistic
- God is transcendent
- Israel is totally disinterested in the origins of God
- Nonsexual being (without physical ancestry)
- Elevated history: attaching importance to the beginning of time and space and the beginning of the nation Israel

“The result is that while the ANE cultures expressed their theology in the form of myths and legends, Israel was primarily interested in the writing of history.”