

The Book of Genesis

The book of Genesis covers a span of approximately 2,450 years. The word “Genesis” means “origin” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary pp. 211). Genesis gives the origin of creation, sin, and death in the first three chapters. A history of mankind is examined in the book with great emphasis being placed upon future redemption of man through Jesus and the development of various characters.

Redemption in Genesis

Genesis records sin entering into the world and the subsequent dilemma of man (cf. Gen. 3:1ff). Man died spiritually that day and was in need of reconciliation with God. God’s plan, even before the foundation of the world, was to redeem man of his sins (I Pet. 1:20) and give him a chance for eternal life (Heb. 9:12). We first run into the word redemption in the book of Genesis in chapter 48:16. The apostle Paul defines the word redemption as receiving the forgiveness of one’s sins (cf. Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). The first hint of man having the opportunity to receive the forgiveness of sins is found in Genesis 3:15 and confirmed in Genesis 12:2-3 when God said to Abraham, “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curses thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” The apostle Paul tells us that God was preaching the gospel to Abraham on this occasion (Gal. 3:8) and then explains that Jesus would be this seed promise (Gal. 3:16). Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, knew of the coming blessings offered by God through the seed of Abraham. Jacob’s dying words concerning Judah illustrated his great faith in the promises of God to forgive man of sin (Gen. 49:10). There are grand themes in Genesis; however, the theme of man’s redemption is one that we must not overlook if we want to make it to heaven.

The Development of Various Characters

The apostle Paul said, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Today when Christians study the lives of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, etc., they are left with a sense of hope. They read of real live people living in difficult days, forced to make difficult decisions, and suffering great emotional pains in this life yet remaining faithful. Genesis focuses on four primary characters: Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph.

Noah was a man that found favor in God’s eyes because he was a righteous man (Gen. 6:8-9). Noah lived in trying days when all those around him were wicked (Gen. 6:5). Noah followed God’s instructions to build an ark and was saved by water when God destroyed all the wicked by flood. Noah was not without sin, yet he found favor with God due to his humility and obedient life (cf. Gen. 9:20ff).

Abraham was a man that obeyed God’s commands (cf. Gen. 15:6; 18:19; 22:17-18; Acts 7:2-3) yet he too was not without sin. Abraham believed in the reality of Jehovah God and built altars to Him and worshipped (Gen. 12:7 [Shechem]; 12:8; 13:3-4 [Bethel]; 13:18 [Hebron]). Abraham is used often in the NT as an example of one who was a recipient of God’s promises because he faithfully obeyed God’s commands (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; Heb. 11:8ff; James 2:21-26).

Jacob is revealed in the scriptures to be a spiritually minded man, whereas his brother Esau was carnally minded (cf. Gen. 25:33-34; Heb. 12:16). Although he was spiritually minded, Jacob did sin. Jacob’s life was one filled with sorrows and vexation of spirit. His brother Esau hated him. He had to work twenty years for the love of his life (Rachel), and then he watched her die. He was told that his beloved son Joseph had been killed by wild beast, and he had to suffer through a daughter (Dinah)

being raped. When advance in years, Pharaoh of Egypt asked Jacob of his age and the patriarch states, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years: few and evil have been the days of the years of my life..." (Gen. 47:9). Jacob, like his fathers before him, was a man of worship (Gen. 28:18; 31:45; 35:14, 20). The faith of Jacob continues to stand as an example for all today who would live lives of sorrow and vexation.

Joseph, Jacob's beloved son from Rachel, is another example of one who lived in trying circumstances yet his faith saw him through to the end. Joseph was sold by his own brothers into Egypt, falsely accused of sexual misconduct by Potiphar's wife, thrown into prison and forgotten. Joseph's faith never wavered. Whatever circumstance he found himself in, he continued to work hard.

Concluding Thoughts

Whether one turns to Genesis to find the facts revolving around the origin of creation, to trace the beginnings of God's plan to save man from the consequences of their sins, or to look to Godly characters to influence them to live faithfully come what may in this life; one will certainly be enriched in their study. Let us never neglect a study of Genesis nor, for that matter, any of God's word.