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Written between 1491 and 1405 B.C. 50 Chapters is the first of 5 books of the law (the Pentateuch, also known as Torah)

It begins with the Creation story, ends with the decedents of Abraham in Egypt.

Original audience: Israel in the wilderness about to cross over into the Promised Land confronted with corrupt pagan myths and depraved morality of the Canaanites. The book is designed to under gird their faith from the constant threats of paganism and bring them under a covenant relationship with the One creator God. Ethical monotheism was unheard of in the Ancient Near East (ANE).¹

“In light of this historical context it becomes clearer what Genesis 1 undertakes and accomplishes: a radical and sweeping affirmation of monotheism vis-à-vis polytheism, syncretism, and idolatry. Each day of creation takes on two principal categories of divinity in the pantheons of the day, and declares that these are not gods at all, but creations – creation of the one true God who is the only one, without a second or third. Each day dismisses an additional cluster of deities, arranged in a cosmological and symmetrical order.”²

Agrarian society – superstitious people, attributed terrible/mighty acts of nature to gods. The two great forces of life: fertility and death. The most tangible symbol of fertility was water. Water was the difference between life and death. These people would do anything for water – to please their gods who controlled the source of all life.

Canaanite supreme deity: EL

Also the name by which God is called in the Old Testament: EL

Elohim – the God of Israel

El Elyon – the most high God

Hebrew poetry frequently refers to God as EL

El – generic name for “god” among the Semitic peoples.

Story of EL – had three wives who were sisters, readily stepped down to the world of men to participate in sordid escapades. El was a bloody tyrant, whose acts terrified all the other gods. He dethroned his own father, murder his favorite son, and decapitated his own daughter. The stories of El are among the most graphic in ANE literature. He was the father of both men and gods.

¹ Brian Morgan, Old Testament Survey Class Notes, Western Seminary Winter 2006

² Conrad Hyer, Biblical Literalism, Constricting the Cosmic Dance, 101, quoted by Walke, Gift of Creation, 2.

Baal – son of EL, and the reigning king of the gods. He was considered the “lord of heaven.” Alternatively he was also considered the god of rain and storm, his was the voice of the thunder. He was considered the giver of rain and fertility. His main antagonist was Mot (death), the god of adversity and drought. Mot kills Baal. The result is seven years of drought/death. The goddess Anath, the sister and lover of Baal recovers the body of Baal and kills Mot. Baal is resurrected to life and sits on Mot’s throne so that he insures the revival of vegetation for seven years.

Understanding this background helps illuminate many of the narratives in the Old Testament, including: the creation story, Elijah verses the prophets of Baal, etc..

Canaanites were set apart for destruction by God

Exodus 23:32-33 ³² "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. ³³ "They shall not live in your land, lest they make you sin against Me; for *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

Deuteronomy 20:15-18 ¹⁵ "Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby. ¹⁶ "Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. ¹⁷ "But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you, ¹⁸ in order that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God.

Canaanite culture: Lev. 18 e.g.

Leviticus 18:1-25 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am the LORD your God. ³ 'You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. ⁴ 'You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. ⁵ 'So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.

- Incest with their own mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts, uncles, daughter-in-laws, grandchildren
- Adultery with brother’s wife, with both a woman and her daughter, neighbor’s wife
- Child sacrifices to their gods
- Homosexuality
- Bestiality

²⁴ 'Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. ²⁵ **'For the land has become defiled, therefore I have visited its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.**

It is very important to note that the purpose of the Genesis account is religious, not scientific. It does not address the questions of “how” and “when,” but “who” and “why.” It teaches theology through the art of narrative and poetry, not scientific statements. It takes us to the primary source of creation, God through His word, and does not address secondary means of creation. The Psalms also follows this pattern.³

Outline of the book of Genesis: Ten sections separated by “This is the account of…”
(Literary markers)

Prologue: The creation of heaven and earth Gen:1:1 – 2:3 (1 chapter)

- 1) The account of the earth and heaven – Gen 2:4-4:26 (3 chapters)
- 2) This is the written account of Adam’s line – Gen 5:1-6:8 (1+ chapters)
- 3) This is the account of Noah – Gen 6:9-9:29 (3+ chapters)
- 4) This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth – Gen 10:1-11:9 (1+ chapters)
- 5) The account of Shem – Gen 11:10-26 (16 verses)
- 6) The account of Terah – Gen 11:27-25:11 (The line of Abraham – 15 chapters)
- 7) The account of Ishmael – Gen 25:12-18 (6 verses)
- 8) The account of Isaac – Gen 25:19-35:29 (10+ chapters)
- 9) The account of Esau – Gen 36:1-37:1 (1 Chapter)
- 10) The account of Jacob – Gen 37:2-50:26 (Israel - 14 chapters)

Ordered by length (importance)

- 1) Abraham story (15 chapters) & Jacob story (14 chapters)
- 2) Isaac story (11 chapters)
- 3) Account of heaven & earth (3 chapters) + Noah story (3 chapters)
- 4) Adam; Shem, Ham, and Japheth; Esau (1 chapter)
- 5) Shem (16 verses); Ishmael (6 verses)

Theme of Genesis

The Creator, the Heavenly King, obliges human beings to rule the earth as His vice-agents. This theme becomes more narrowly focused through the course of the book to the elect whom the Lord chooses for a covenant relationship with him.

- After humanity rebels against his rule, humanity is divided into two seeds: the elect with whom the Lord enters into covenant (i.e., the portion of humanity who accepts by faith his rule) and the non-elect who identify in their unbelief with the Serpent and so become his seed.
- After God preserves his original creation through the remnant of his covenant seed, Noah and his family, he makes a covenant with humanity on the basis of a sacrifice never to destroy the earth again with a flood in spite of human sinfulness.
- After humanity rebels in a titanic, societal revolt against his rule and is divided into nations, he elects the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and his twelve sons) to make their offspring into the nation which will bless the earth and rule it through Judah.⁴

³ Brian Morgan, Old Testament Survey Class Notes, Western Seminary Winter 2006

⁴ Bruce Waltke, Notes on Biblical Theology, BIBL 680, Regent College, 1997, (Gift of creation),1-2.

Chapter 1 Prologue - Creation

Paradise lost → Paradise made new, expanded, complete (Rev.) No more curse

Chapter 2-11 Creation of Man, the start of humanity

God's beautiful creation, Sin and death: More sin, resulting in more grace

Sin/Curse → No more curse (Rev. 22)

Man banned from the tree of life → Full access to the tree of life (Rev. 22)

Chapter 12-50 Patriarchal history - Isaiah 42:6 Israel to be a light to the gentiles

12-25 Abraham; Abrahamic Covenant (15)

21-27 Isaac (most passive)/Ishmael

25-50 Jacob/ Esau

Joseph and Judah

Theological Foundations: God the Father, Son, Holy Spirit (Trinity), man, sin, redemption, covenant, promise (Seed, Land, Blessings), Satan, angels, kingdom, revelation, Israel, judgment, blessing.

Assignment for next week:

- Write a prayer to God in your journal this week.
- Study Genesis 1-2.
- Write down as many observations as you can.
- What is included in the text vs. what is excluded?
- How is the chapter 1 account different from the chapter 2 account?
- List some characteristics of God based on the creation account.
- Contrast the creation of man vs. the rest of creation.
- What commands did God give to man?