

Genesis (January 4)

Reading Genesis

Bright orange, purple, and red fruit droop from branches like heavy drops of morning dew. The trees bow with the weight, welcoming the glorious face of the sun. Light glimmers through the branches stirring in the breeze, which rouses two figures: Adam and Eve. For our first parents, eating is as easy as reaching up. They simply take and eat the fruit given by the Lord, who sheds his love upon them and pours out his grace each day. The trees of Eden nourish Adam and Eve like sacraments of creation, mediating God's blessing, a never-ending feast for the first family.

However, the feast did end. After the fall into sin, the ground dried up. Thorns raked the brows and pierced the hands and feet of our first parents. Cherubim and a flaming sword blocked the way to the garden, lest they eat of the "tree of life" and live in this way forever. The family suffered lasting heartbreak as families have ever since. As you read Genesis – the book of generations – consider how it focuses on family life, the struggle for daily bread, and the hope of salvation. These are the very things that occupy our hearts and lives today.

Author and Date

Historically, Jews and Christians alike have held that Moses was the author/compiler of the first five books of the Old Testament. These books, also known as the Pentateuch, were referred to in Jewish tradition as the five fifths of the law. The Bible itself suggests Mosaic authorship of Genesis, since Acts 15:1 refers to circumcision as "the custom taught by Moses," an allusion to Genesis 17. However, a certain amount of later editorial updating does appear to be indicated.

Theme and Message

Genesis speaks of beginnings: of the heavens and the earth, of light and darkness, of seas and skies, of land and vegetation, of sun and moon and stars, of sea and air and land animals, of human beings, of sin and redemption, of blessing and cursing, of society and civilization, of marriage and family, of art and craft and industry. A key word in Genesis is "account," which also serves to divide the book into its ten major parts.

The book of Genesis is foundational to the understanding of the rest of the Bible. Its message is rich and complex, and listing its main elements gives a succinct outline of the biblical message as a whole. It is supremely a book of relationships, highlighting those between God and nature, God and man, and man and man. It introduces us to the way in which God initiates and makes covenants with his chosen people, pledging his love and faithfulness to them and calling them to promise theirs to him. It establishes sacrifice as the substitution of life for life. It gives us the first hint of God's provision for redemption from the forces of evil and contains the oldest and most profound definition of faith. More than half of Hebrews 11 – the New Testament roll call of the faithful – refers to characters in Genesis.

It is no coincidence that many of the subjects and themes of the first three chapters of Genesis are reflected in the last three chapters of Revelation. We can only marvel at the superintending influence of the Lord himself, who assures us that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Blessings for Readers

Genesis lays the foundations for all the events and doctrines of Holy Scripture. Studying its characters and events will prepare you for a much broader understanding of God's ways with humankind. Throughout Genesis, Moses emphasizes that these records apply not simply to Israel but to all nations and families of the earth. See in the patriarchs' weaknesses, struggles, and joys a mirror of families today. The Lord, through promises and faith, makes all the difference for the patriarchs, and he will likewise bless and lead you.