

**A most important book****• About Origins**

Some books of the Bible seem to be more important than others. I do not say they are more inspired by God, but they seem to be more important. Genesis is surely one of the most important books within the pages of Scripture. It is often called 'the book of beginnings' because it tells us of the origin of so many matters which are of importance to us. We read of the origin of the world, the origin of marriage, the origin of sin, of the beginnings of society and of language. Chapters 12 to 50 tell us of the beginnings of the people of God.

To understand anything it is helpful to know its background and its origin. When there is some crisis in some part of the world we ask the questions 'How did that happen? How did that situation arise?' If one of our children gets into difficulty at school, we ask 'What happened? How did this problem originate?' Whether it be a wife, a car, an international crisis, or a fight, we want to know the answer to the question 'How did it begin?' We ask 'Where does this person, event, machine – or whatever – come from? What was its story before it reached me?' We do not feel we understand something until we know the background and the origin.

**• Addresses some big questions**

Genesis asks these questions in the most sweeping way. It addresses questions like 'Where does the universe come from?' 'Where does the human race come from?' 'What is the origin of marriage?' 'Why are there nations?' It is rightly called the book of origins.

**History Writing in Genesis****Chapters 1-3 in the style of a parable**

**Genesis 1–11 is history written in a child-like parabolic style** (or in the style of a parable). The first three chapters are like stories which we read to children. We read of events that no-one could have witnessed, beginning with the creation of the universe and of the sun and the moon and the stars. We read of the creation of the seas and of animals and of the first man. Startling events are told without the slightest suggestion of anything odd. God works for six days and then takes a day's holiday to enjoy what He has done. A woman is made out of a bone, a snake talks, a tree determines the destiny of the human race, God walks in a garden, another tree can keep humankind alive forever. It is all strikingly unusual history to say the least!

**• Chapter 4 history closer to our own experience**

In Genesis 4 the style of history-writing changes slightly and becomes a little more ordinary. We are approaching more 'normal' history. We read of things like murder and polygamy and jealousy between brothers. We have glimpses of farming and metal-work, music and poetry. This is getting closer to the world we live in. Talking snakes are beyond our experience, but we know about fighting brothers, and men who want more than one woman!

• **Some amazing events**

Yet there are still some striking and amazing events. Women start marrying fiendish angels and it leads to such wickedness that God decides to drown the people descending from Cain and Seth and start the human race again. Noah rescues his family by building a boat shaped like a coffin. Animals join him in the boat and so Noah's line is saved, plus its animals. It all seems to be a bit of children's fiction! When the new humanity gets going they all speak the same language, and they decide to build a tower to get to God who apparently lives high up in the sky. God comes down to take a look at what is happening, discovers that the new human race is getting too ambitious and gets them all speaking different languages. It was a good way of bringing an end to their project.

What sort of history-writing is this?

• **Chapter 12 onwards more straight forward history**

When we get to the end of Genesis 11 the style changes yet more and we are at last into the world that we know about. From Genesis 12 onwards the story is a fairly straightforward narrative of one family which God chose and used to bring the promise of salvation to Israel and to the world. There are still miracles like Isaac being born when his mother is in her nineties, and the dream of the angels who visited Jacob by coming down a staircase, but they are just 'ordinary' miracles compared to Genesis 1–11! Ordinary miracles we can cope with, but Genesis 1–11 definitely has a style of its own!

**Genesis 1-11**

• **It is history**

So I say Genesis 1–11 is history written in a child-like parabolic style. I emphasize both parts of the sentence.

(i) It is history. The rest of the Bible treats the characters in Genesis 1–11 as historical. Mesopotamian stories are like this. They tell extravagant tales and yet the characters are undoubtedly historical! The same is true of Genesis 1–11, which uses a style of writing well-known in ancient Mesopotamia. The story-telling has a parabolic style, but the characters are historical. God's inspired word used a Mesopotamian style of history-writing.

• **Mesopotamian style of writing**

• **Child-like parabolic style**

(ii) I must emphasize the second half of my sentence above. It is history **written in a child-like parabolic style**. Snakes don't talk, and we know from the New Testament that the snake of Genesis 3 is parabolic. In the book of Revelation the snake is Satan! Yet Satan is not mentioned directly in the book of Genesis. Genesis 3:1 quite clearly talks of the snake being one of the '*animals of the countryside*'.

• **Creation, sin and its outworking**

So the first eleven chapters deal with: creation <sup>☐1</sup> and the original perfection of the human race <sup>☐2</sup>. Then we have the story of the fall into sin <sup>☐3</sup> and the immediate death that came upon the human race <sup>☐4</sup>. The story then shows us the wider consequences of human sin. Wickedness spread very rapidly. Society was ruined <sup>☐5</sup>; death ruled everywhere <sup>☐6</sup>. The human race became subject to demonic powers <sup>☐7</sup> and soon had deteriorated so much that God decided to destroy the offspring of Cain and Seth and start again under different conditions. The flood reduced the people to a remnant <sup>☐8</sup>. Then

• **The flood**

- ☐1 1:1–2:3
- ☐2 2:4–25
- ☐3 3:1–6
- ☐4 3:7–24
- ☐5 chapter 4
- ☐6 chapter 5
- ☐7 6:1–8

- *Many languages*

## Genesis 12 onwards

- *Abraham and his descendants – towards a Saviour*

- *Israel, Egypt and the need of salvation by the blood of a lamb*

- *God's world*

God brought into being a new world out of the waters of the flood <sup>¶9</sup>, swore that He would never destroy the world in that way again and restarted the world under different conditions <sup>¶10</sup>. Sin and death soon appeared again <sup>¶11</sup>, but God spread the nations throughout the ancient world <sup>¶12</sup> and divided their speech into many languages <sup>¶13</sup>. The end of Genesis 11 <sup>¶14</sup> shows us the background to the story of Abraham. At the end of chapter 11 we are ready to be introduced to Abraham who will be the model of salvation.

From that point on instead of focusing on the outworking of sin, the story focuses on the one through whom there will come a Saviour, the Seed of Abraham. The remainder of the book shows us how faith works by exhibiting the life of faith in the stories of Abraham <sup>¶1</sup>, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau <sup>¶2</sup>, and then in the story of Joseph which is given special attention <sup>¶3</sup>. Joseph's story shows us how the life of faith works out in one more of Abraham's descendants, but at the same time explains how Israel came to be in Egypt and so in need of salvation by the blood of a lamb.

The start of everything is the fact that God is the Lord of the entire cosmos. It is His world. He made it. He tells us how it works. He claims the right to say how we should live. And He alone can put the race right when it goes astray. Creation is the start of everything. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

¶8	6:9–7:24
¶9	8:1–19
¶10	8:20– 9:17
¶11	9:18–29
¶12	chapter 10
¶13	11:1–9
¶14	11:10 –26

¶1	11:27-25:11
¶2	25:12- 36:43
¶3	chapters 37 - 50

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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