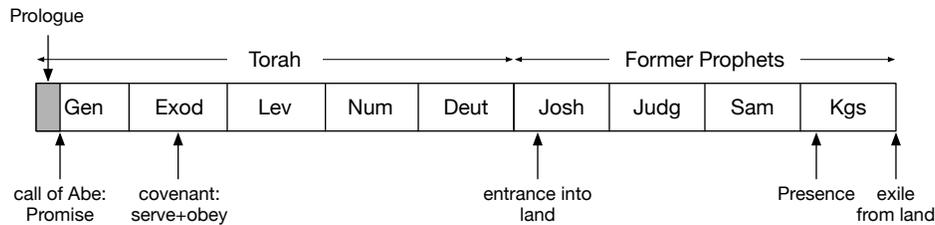


Genesis 1–11

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Genesis 1–11 was not written as a science text for the 21st century. It was written as the Prologue to Israel’s history, contained in the Primary History, a continuous sequence of 9 books: Genesis–Kings.



The key elements of this history are:

- the call of Abraham: God calls Abraham to leave Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, to become the progenitor of a new nation, a new humanity, who will live in the Promised Land.
- covenant: at Sinai God enters into covenant with this now-numerous people, promising his Presence: “I will be your God, you will be my people, and I will dwell with you.” Israel is to serve him and keep his commandments.
- Israel enters the land (Joshua): God had brought them out of slavery in Egypt and gave them rest in the land.
- Presence: the high-point is reached when God puts his Presence in the midst of his people in a permanent dwelling place, the Temple (1 Kgs 8).
- Exile: God expels Israel from the land because they served other gods and broke his commandments.

Genesis 1–11 provides the back-story. It is Israel’s story of origins.

Genesis

Genesis is into ten accounts, each with the heading “These are the generations (*toledot*) of...” (ESV):

Primeval History		Patriarchal History	
	the generations of...		the generations of...
2:4–4:26	the heavens and the earth when they were created	11:27–25:11	Terah
5:1–6:8	Adam	25:12–18	Ishmael
6:9–9:29	Noah	25:19–35:29	Isaac
10:1–11:9	the sons of Noah	36:1–37:1	Esau
11:10–26	Shem	37:2–50:26	Jacob

Each account gives a family history. The *toledot* of X tells the story of X’s descendents, not of X himself; e.g. the *toledot* of Adam gives the story of what came forth from Adam, his descendants.

1:1–2:3 stands outside this structure as a prologue.

Prologue: Creation (1:1–2:3)

This is not a science text and should not be read as such to support either a young earth or an old earth; nor does it have anything to say about evolution. This is a cosmology similar to other ANE cosmologies but with some profound differences. It addresses two big questions about three big topics: the origins and nature of God, the world, and humans.

	<i>origins</i>	<i>nature</i>
God	theogony	theology
world	cosmogony	cosmology
humans	anthropogony	anthropology

A. Stage-setting (1:1-2)

1. The beginning: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
2. Initial state (1:2): non-order.
 - a. The earth was without form and void: uninhabitable and uninhabited. Non-order.
 - b. Darkness was over the face of the deep: the only things present are darkness and the deep, both non-things, representative of a lack of formation and function, i.e. absence rather than presence.
 - c. the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water: God’s agency is ready to act.

B. The Six Days of Creation (1:3-31)

Highly structured account:

1:3-31 is highly structured. It is narrative not poetry, but it is rhythmic: each day follows a pattern.

	Phrase	Day						Σ
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Word:	“And God said”	1	1	2	1	1	4	10
Creative act:		1	1	2	1	1	2	8
Fulfillment:	“And it was so”	1	1	2	1	—	2	7
Naming:	“And God called”	1	1	1	—	—	—	3
Evaluation:	“And God saw that it was good”	1	—	2	1	1	2	7
Conclusion	“And there was evening and there was morning, day <i>n</i> ”	1	1	1	1	1	1	6

- God’s speech: “And God said” 10×. Things happened by divine fiat: God commanded: יְהִי אֹרֶךְ “let there be light” (Lat. *fiat lux*), and it was וַיְהִי אֹרֶךְ “and there was light”; thereafter וַיְהִי כֵן “and it was so” 6×.
- Creative acts: God makes the cosmos functional, ordered. The special verb *bara* (create) is used for the heavens+earth (1:1), first living creatures (1:21), humans (3× in 1:27).
- Naming: assigns function. God names on days 1-3, delegates to humans for days 5-6. The heavenly lights are not named on day 4 lest they be equated with the sun and moon gods.
- Evaluation: “Good” (*tov*) is a recognition that something is what it is supposed to be, it is functional.
- Evening and morning: it became evening (no work is done at night); it became morning (ready for work to continue).

Two triads of days

- Days 1-3: forming. God rectifies the formless, uninhabitable condition, making it functional. This includes vegetation (food).
- Days 4-6: filling. God rectifies the empty condition by filling the realms formed on days 1-3, adding functionaries.

Humans (1:26-30)

By Day 6a there have been 7 creative acts. The cosmos is fully formed and filled. A total of 7 categories (2× vegetation, fish, birds, 3× land animals), each according to its kind 10×. Parallels with other ANE cosmologies suggest the building of a temple. It is now ready to receive its image.

The image that God places in this temple is the human, who is to represent God on earth. Humanity in general, not just the king, represents God,

The Seventh Day

God takes his rest, not in space (where the human represents God), but in time. This establishes an implicit eschatology: will God extend this state of rest to all time?

Summary: non-order→order.

The Garden of Eden (Gen 2–3)

The birds, the fish and the animals live in their respective realms (Gen 1), but where are the humans to live?

The Garden of Eden is God's garden, planted by him. It is his sanctuary, sacred space. He forms the human from the dust of the earth, as a potter fashions a pot, as one forming an image. God breathed into it the breath of life, quickening it into a living creature.

God deposits the human in the garden, in sacred space, and gives a two-fold task, which has been understood two different ways:

- to work and keep the garden: leads to a provide and protect ideology.
- to serve (the Lord) and keep (his commandment, which is given in vv 16-17): this makes much better sense:
 - near context: God has done all the work, planting the garden, making the trees fruit; the human is to keep God's word
 - far context: Israel is given these same two tasks: serve the Lord and keep his commandments.

The Fall

The woman and man listen to other voices rather than the Lord's. They break his commandment. The result is shame, guilt and fear. God imposes judgment:

- Serpent: curses
- Humans: expelled from the garden. They must now try and bring their own order to the world away from God's presence. Later, Israel will follow the same trajectory.

A note about women

Gen 1: "God created man (*ha-adam*) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male (*zakar*) and female (*neqebah*) he created them" (1:27).

ha-adam (the human) is generic. *Zakar*, *neqebah* are physiological terms. This physiological differentiation is required to fulfill the subsequent command, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth" (1:28)

Gen 2: God forms, deposits and commands the man (*ha-adam*); this, too, is the generic human, not the specific male. To solve the human's aloneness, God cuts the human in half, taking not "one of his ribs" but "one of his (two) sides" (2:21). The human is now differentiated into equal halves, man (*ish*) and woman (*ishah*), who are put back together again in a social unit to form family. The man (*ha-adam*) is now the male half. He does not name the woman, but states what society will call her: the female counterpart of him: Man–Woman, *ish-ishah*.

Gen 3: something goes wrong in the relationship between man and woman (3:16b). This half-verse is a battlefield in conservative evangelical circles, reflected in recent translations:

- "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (NIV 1984, TNIV, NIV 2011)
- "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (ESV 2001)
- "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you" (ESV 2016)

- “Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will dominate you” (HCSB)
- “Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you.” (CSB)

Close parallel to 4:7, Yhwh to Cain: “Its [sin’s] desire is for (ESV2001)/contrary to (ESV2016) you, but you must rule over it.”

Civilization (Gen 4)

Background: Mesopotamia as the cradle of civilization.

Development of civilization: herdsman (Abel), farmer (Cain), city-builder (Cain), pastoral nomad (Jabal), musician (Jubal), metal-worker (Tubal-cain). Mesopotamian society viewed these as gifts of the gods. Gen 4 views them as the human achievement living away from God’s presence.

Cain & Abel: the story of conflict between farmers and herdsmen (domestication of plants and animals c. 10,000 BC) is recast as a conflict between two ways of seeking God’s presence.

City-building (c. 3000 BC): not by semi-divine kings, but humanity living in self-imposed exile from God.

Metallurgy, poetry etc.: can be used for ill (Lamech) or for good.

The Flood (Gen 6–9)

Humanity has ruined itself and the world (6:11-13). Both has descended into disorder.

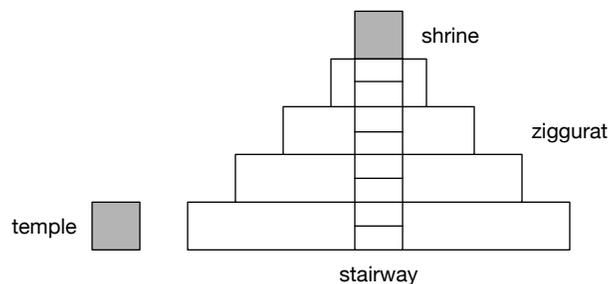
God wipes the earth clean, reverting it to a state of non-order (water covers the earth), then brings new order.

The focus is not on building the ark but on entrance into the vessel in which life will be preserved through this re-ordering process.

God places his bow in the sky as a guarantee that he will not do this a second time; i.e. if the world descends into disorder again, he will seek a different method to restore order.

The Tower of Babel (11:1-9)

Post-Flood humanity, still seeking God’s presence, gathers to build a tower in Babel. Every major Mesopotamian city had at its center a temple and a ziggurat (tower), the axis between heaven and earth. The god descended to a small shrine atop the ziggurat, then down the staircase to fill its image in the temple so worship ceremonies could happen.



This is not how divine presence will be restored to earth.

The Call of Abraham (12:1-3)

The seed of Abraham will be the new humanity, called to walk before God and be blameless (17:1). God will take Israel from Egypt and deposit them in Canaan, the Promised Land, the new Eden, to serve him and keep his commandments.

Israel will fail in this and be exiled from the land, i.e. repeating the first human’s journey.

There will thus be a need for a faithful Israelite and a faithful human who will do what both Adam and Israel have failed to do: serve the Lord and keep his commandments.