

Introducing
THE BOOK



OF

GENESIS

“Genesis” means “beginning” or “origin”.

The Book of Genesis falls naturally into two parts

(A) The foundational narratives –

- The creation texts (1.1-2.4a and 2.4b-25)
and the associated narrative (chapter 3)
- The narrative of Cain and Abel (chapter 4)
- The great flood narrative (6.5-9.17)
- The Tower of Babel (11.1-9)

(B) The narratives of the ancestors,
the origins of the community that became Israel –

- Abraham and Sarah (chapters 12-25)
- Isaac and Rebekah (chapters 24-27)
- Jacob and Rachel (chapters 25-36)
- Joseph and his brothers (chapters 37-50)

The foundational narratives

The people of Israel lived and interacted with other nations and tribes, who had their own gods and their own narratives explaining fundamental questions about the world and life in it : How did the world come into being? Why do crops grow? Why are there different seasons in each year – seedtime, harvest, summer, winter? How did there come to be two sexes? Why are people often so violent to each other, attacking and killing each other? Why are there so many different languages?

The writers of the opening chapters of the book of Genesis draw on some of these stories, and in works of great creative imagination use them to express their faith in the LORD, Yahweh, the God of Israel. He is the only God – unlike the religions of other nations which believe in many gods. He created the world. He was in charge of the process all the way. He is the Almighty. And the result was “goodvery good”.

The narratives are simple, almost child-like, but the meanings they contain are profound. Over the centuries different generations have drawn from them implications relating to their own situation and the issues they face, right up to the present day. They are used in reflecting on Christians attitudes to climate change, for example the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book for 2020, *Saying Yes to Life*.

The writings are complex. There are two creation narratives, Genesis 1.1-2.4a and 2.4b-25. They complement one another in interesting ways. There is no attempt to reconcile them or make them one story. They sit alongside each other, offering differing perspectives on the same process.

But there is a problem at the heart of the creation. The men and women the LORD has created ignore His guidance and go their own way. The destructive developing consequences of this are traced out – the narrative of Cain and Abel, the behaviour that leads up to the Flood. The rest of the Bible tells the story of how the LORD works to tackle this fundamental problem.

The narratives of the ancestors

The central theme of the rest of book of Genesis (chapters 12-50) is the promise the LORD has made to the ancestors of people of Israel, the promise of descendants who will become a great people and of a land for them to live in.

The opening verses in Genesis 12.1-3 summarise the promise. How it works is described in three great cycles of narratives :

Abraham , and his son Isaac, the fulfilment of the promise, who is born when Abraham's wife has passed the age of child-bearing

Jacob, Isaac's son, his conflict with his brother Esau, and how it is resolved, his new name Israel, and his twelve sons

Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, his conflict with his brothers, and its resolution, and the family's move to Egypt.

In the Abraham and Jacob cycles, the LORD is constantly active, calling, promising,, warning. In the Joseph cycle, He is less prominent, but there is a deep sense of his providential guiding of what happens to Joseph.

As Christians we accept the Book of Genesis as part of Scripture, an authoritative picture of the LORD, the God who creates, the God who calls, the God who judges, the God who rescues.