

An Overview of Genesis

The book of Genesis is divided into 12 sections. These sections are each connected together by a hinge-like phrase, “these are the generations of” (*generations* could also be translated “story of the descendants”). Here is a simple outline of Genesis based on how the inspired author of Genesis seems to have arranged his stories.

Part I: The Creation of the World • Human Disobedience/Obedience & Divine Curse (Genesis 1:1-11:26)

1. Introduction: The Creation of Heaven and Earth (1:1—2:3)

“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created” (2:4)

2. The Story of the Earth's Descendants (2:4—4:26)

“This is the book of the generations of Adam” (5:1)

3. The Story of Adam's Descendants (5:1—6:8)

“These are the generations of Noah” (6:9)

4. The Story of Noah's Descendants (6:9—9:29)

“These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (10:1)

5. The Story of Shem, Ham, and Japheth's Descendants (10:1—11:9)

“These are the generations of Shem” (11:10)

6. The Story of Shem's Descendants (11:10—26)

Part II: The Creation of a Covenant People • Divine Blessing (Genesis 11:27-50:26)

“These are the generations of Terah” (11:27)

7. The Story of Terah's descendants: Abraham, also Isaac (11:27—25:11)

“These are the generations of Ishmael” (25:12)

8. The Story of Ishmael's Descendants (25:12-18)

“These are the generations of Isaac” (25:19)

9. The Story of Isaac's Descendants: Jacob (25:19—35:29)

“These are the generations of Esau” (36:1)

10. The Story of Esau's Descendants: His Family (36:1-8)

“These are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites” (36:9)

11. The Story of Esau's Descendants: His Nation (36:9—37:1)

“These are the generations of Jacob” (37:2)

12. The Story of Jacob's Descendants: Joseph, also Judah and all 12 Sons of Israel (37:2—50:26)

Some Themes of Genesis:

^ **Creation:** first of the heavens and earth, then of a covenant people, the family of Abraham.

^ **Human disobedience/obedience:** Adam disobeys God, as do his descendants, leading to the Flood; Noah as a “second Adam” obeys God and God “recreates” the earth; however, Noah's descendants again reject God. In the second half of Genesis, God sovereignly blesses his people despite times when they threaten that blessing through sinful choices. Faith in God (mentioned specifically only at 15:6) is counted as righteousness.

^ **Divine Curse:** After the Fall, God curses the serpent and the ground; Cain is cursed; the Flood is described as a curse; and Noah curses Canaan. In the second half, God promises to curse those who curse Abram, and Jacob worries about gaining a curse instead of a blessing while preparing to deceive Isaac. *Words translated “curse” occur 6 times in the first half, but only 7 times in the much longer second half, where the focus changes to divine blessing.*

^ **Divine Blessing:** God blesses all creation in chapter 1, and renews that universal blessing after the flood. *Hebrew words for “bless/blessing” occur 6 times in the first half of Genesis.* Then God promises a special blessing on the family of Abraham (including many descendants and land), promising to bless all peoples through them. The second half of Genesis is dominated by the question of who will receive the Abrahamic blessing. *Hebrew words for “bless/blessing” occur about 82 times in the second half of Genesis, including 40 times in part 9 alone, and 28 times just in the story of Jacob deceiving Esau (27:1—28:9)!*

^ **Election:** Genesis continually narrows down the list of who has been sovereignly chosen by God to be the channel through whom the promised seed (Gen 3: 15) would come. It usually lists the non-elect lineages first (Cain, Japheth/Ham/non-elect Shem, Ishmael, Esau) before describing the elect lineages (Seth, elect Shem, Isaac, Jacob). Younger sons are unexpectedly but continually chosen instead of older sons. The end of Genesis, adjusting the pattern, includes all sons of Israel in the blessing, but hints that the promised seed will come through Judah (49:8-12).