



*The Bible for Home and School*

# THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Volume 1

JOHN PATERSON SMYTH

This edition published 2026  
by Living Book Press  
Copyright © Living Book Press, 2026

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any other form or means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner and the publisher or as provided by Australian law.



A catalogue record for this  
book is available from the  
National Library of Australia

# The Book of Genesis

*by*

JOHN PATERSON SMYTH





# Contents

	General Introduction	1
	Hints for Teaching	3
1.	The Creation Story	13
2.	The Story of the Fall	31
3.	Cain and Abel	46
4.	The Flood	52
5.	After the Flood	61
6.	The Call of Abraham	66
7.	Lot's Choice	73
8.	Encouragement for Abram	79
9.	The Covenant and Its Sign	87
10.	"Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do Right?"	91
11.	Ishmael Cast Out and Found	97
12.	The Sacrifice of Isaac	102
13.	The Wooing of Rebekah	109
14.	Jacob and Esau	115
15.	The Vision at Bethel	129
16.	A Critical Day	134
17.	Joseph—god's Leading	141
18.	Joseph in Prison	147
19.	From the Prison to the Steps of the Throne	152
20.	Joseph and His Brothers	159
21.	Joseph and His Father	169
22.	At Jacob's Death-bed	177
23.	The Death of Joseph	184
	Appendix	191



# General Introduction

## I

This series of books is intended for two classes of teachers:

### 1. For Teachers in Week Day and Sunday Schools.

For these, each book is divided into complete lessons. The lesson will demand preparation. Where feasible, there should be diligent use of commentaries and of any books indicated in the notes. As a *general rule*, I think the teacher should not bring the book at all to his class if he is capable of doing without it. He should make copious notes of the subject. The lesson should be thoroughly studied and digested beforehand, with all the additional aids at his disposal, and it should come forth at the class warm and fresh from his own heart and brain. But I would lay down no rigid rule about the use of the Lesson Book. To some it may be a burden to keep the details of a long lesson in the memory; and, provided the subject has been very carefully studied, the Lesson Book, with its salient points carefully marked in coloured pencil, may be a considerable help. Let each do what seems best in his particular case, only taking care to satisfy his conscience that it is not done through laziness, and that he can really do best for his class by the plan which he adopts.

### 2. For Parents

Who would use it in teaching their children at home. They need only small portions, brief little lessons of about ten minutes each night. For these, each chapter is divided into short sections. I should advise that on the first night only the Scripture indicated should be read, with some passing remarks and

questions to give a grip of the story. That is enough. Then night after night, go on with the teaching, taking as much or as little as one sees fit.

I have not written out the teaching in full as a series of readings which could be read over to the child without effort or thought. With this book in hand, a very little preparation and adaptation will enable one to make the lesson more interesting and more personal, and to hold the child's attention by questioning. Try to get his interest. Try to make him talk. Make the lesson conversational. Don't preach.

## II

# Hints for Teaching

An ancient Roman orator once laid down for his pupils the three-fold aim of a teacher:

**1. PLACERE (TO INTEREST)**

**2. DOCERE (TO TEACH)**

**3. MOVERE (TO MOVE)**

- 1. To interest the audience (in order to teach them).
- 2. To teach them (in order to move them).
- 3. To move them to action.

On these three words of his I hang a few suggestions on the teaching of this set of Lessons.

### 1. Placere (to interest)

I want especially to insist on attention to this rule. Some teachers seem to think that to interest the pupils is a minor matter. It is not a minor matter, and the pupils will very soon let you know it. Believe me, it is no waste of time to spend hours during the week in planning to excite their interest to the utmost. Most of the complaints of inattention would cease at once if the teacher would give more study to rousing their interest. After all, there is little use in knowing the facts of your subject, and being anxious about the souls of the pupils, if all the time that you are teaching, these pupils are yawning and taking no interest in what you say. I know some have more aptitude

for teaching than others. Yet, after considerable experience of teachers whose lesson was a weariness to the flesh, and of teachers who never lost attention for a moment, I am convinced, on the whole, that the power to interest largely depends on the previous preparation.

Therefore, do not content yourself with merely studying the teaching of this series. Read widely and freely. Read not only commentaries, but books that will give local interest and colour—books that will throw valuable sidelights on your sketch.

But more than reading is necessary. You know the meaning of the expression, "*Put yourself in his place.*" Practise that in every Bible story, using your imagination, living in the scene, experiencing, as far as you can, every feeling of the actors. To some this is no effort at all. They feel their cheeks flushing and their eyes growing moist as they project themselves involuntarily into the scene before them. But though it be easier to some than to others, it is in some degree possible to all, and the interest of the lesson largely depends on it. I have done my best in these books to help the teacher in this respect. But no man can help another much. Success will depend entirely on the effort to put yourself in his place.

In reading the Bible chapter corresponding to each lesson, I suggest that the teacher should read part of the chapter, rather than let the pupils tire themselves by "reading round." My experience is that this "reading round" is a fruitful source of listlessness. When his verse is read, the pupil can let his mind wander till his turn comes again, and so he loses all interest. I have tried, with success, varying the monotony. I would let them read the first round of verses in order; then I would make them read out of the regular order, as I called their names; and sometimes, if the lesson were long, I would again and again

interrupt by reading a group of verses myself, making remarks as I went on. To lose their interest is fatal.

I have indicated also in the lessons that you should not unnecessarily give information yourself. Try to question it *into* them. If you tell them facts which they have just read, they grow weary. If you ask a question, and then answer it yourself when they miss it, you cannot keep their attention. Send your questions around in every sort of order, or want of order. Try to puzzle them—try to surprise them. Vary the form of the question, if not answered, and always feel it to be a defeat if you ultimately fail in getting the answer you want.

## 2. Docere (to teach)

You interest the pupil in order that you may *teach*. Therefore, teach definitely the Lesson that is set you. Do not be content with interesting him. Do not be content either with drawing spiritual teaching. Teach the facts before you. Be sure that God has inspired the narration of them for some good purpose.

When you are dealing with Old Testament characters, do not try to shirk or to condone evil in them. They were not faultless saints. They were men like ourselves, whom God was helping and bearing with, as He helps and bears with us, and the interest of the story largely depends on the pupil realizing this.

In the Old Testament books of this series you will find very full chapters written on the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the election of Jacob, the Sun standing still, the slaughter of Canaanites, and other such subjects. In connection with these, I want to say something that especially concerns teachers. Your pupils, now or later, can hardly avoid coming in contact with the flip-pant scepticism so common nowadays, which makes jests at the story of the sun standing still, and talks of the folly of believing that all humanity was condemned because Eve ate an apple

thousands of years ago. This flippant tone is in the air. They will meet with it in their companions, in the novels of the day, in the popular magazine articles on their tables at home. You have, many of you, met with it yourselves; you know how disturbing it is; and you probably know, too, that much of its influence on people arises from the narrow and unwise teaching of the Bible in their youth. Now you have no right to ignore this in your teaching of the Bible. You need not talk of Bible difficulties and their answers. You need not refer to them at all. But teach the truth that will take the sting out of these difficulties when presented in after-life.

To do this requires trouble and thought. We have learned much in the last fifty years that has thrown new light for us on the meaning of some parts of the Bible; which has, at any rate, made doubtful some of our old interpretations of it. We must not ignore this. There are certain traditional theories which some of us still insist on teaching as God's infallible truth, whereas they are really only human opinions about it, which may possibly be mistaken. As long as they are taught as human opinions, even if we are wrong, the mistake will do no harm. But if things are taught as God's infallible truth, to be believed on peril of doubting God's Word, it may do grave mischief, if in after-life the pupil finds them seriously disputed, or perhaps false. A shallow, unthinking man, finding part of this teaching false, which has been associated in his mind with the most solemn sanctions of religion, is in danger of letting the whole go. Thus many of our young people drift into hazy doubt about the Bible. Then we get troubled about their beliefs, and give them books of Christian evidences to win them back by explaining that what was taught them in childhood was not *quite* correct, and needs now to be modified by a broader and slightly differ-

ent view. But we go on as before with the younger generation, and expose them in their turn to the same difficulties.

Does it not strike you that, instead of this continual planning to win men back from unbelief, it might be worthwhile to try the other method of not exposing them to unbelief? Give them the more careful and intelligent teaching at first, and so prepare them to meet the difficulties by-and-by.

I have no wish to advocate any so-called “advanced” teaching. Much of such teaching I gravely object to. But there are truths of which there is no question amongst thoughtful people, which somehow are very seldom taught to the young, though ignorance about them in after-life leads to grave doubt and misunderstanding. Take, for example, the gradual, progressive nature of God’s teaching in Scripture, which makes the Old Testament teaching as a whole lower than that of the New. This is certainly no doubtful question, and the knowledge of it is necessary for an intelligent study of Scripture. I have dealt with it where necessary in some of the books of this series.

I think, too, our teaching on what may seem to us doubtful questions should be more fearless and candid. If there are two different views each held by able and devout men, do not teach your own as the infallibly true one, and ignore or condemn the other. For example, do not insist that the order of creation must be accurately given in the first chapter of Genesis. You may think so; but many great scholars, with as deep a reverence for the Bible as you have, think that inspired writers were circumscribed by the science of their time.

Do not be too positive that the story of the Fall *must* be an exactly literal narrative of facts. If you believe that it is, I suppose you must tell your pupil so. But do not be afraid to tell him also that there are good and holy and scholarly men who think of it as a great old-world allegory, like the parable of the Prodigal

Son, to teach in easy popular form profound lessons about sin. Endeavour in your Bible teaching to be thoroughly truthful: to assert nothing as certain which is not certain, nothing as probable which is not probable, and nothing as more probable than it is. Let the pupil see that there are some things that we cannot be quite sure about, and let him gather insensibly from your teaching the conviction that truth, above all things, is to be loved and sought, and that religion has never anything to fear from discovering the truth. If we could but get this healthy, manly, common-sense attitude adopted now in teaching the Bible to young people, we should, with God's blessing, have in the new generation a stronger and more intelligent faith.

### 3. *Movere (to move)*

All your teaching is useless unless it have this object: to move the heart, to rouse the affections toward the love of God, and the will toward the effort after the blessed life. You interest in order to teach. You teach in order to move. *That* is the supreme object. Here the teacher must be left largely to his own resources. One suggestion I offer: don't preach. At any rate, don't preach much lest you lose grip of your pupils. You have their attention all right while their minds are occupied by a carefully prepared lesson; but wait till you close your Bible, and, assuming a long face, begin, "And now, boys," &c., and straightway they know what is coming, and you have lost them in a moment.

Do not change your tone at the application of your lesson. Try to keep the teaching still conversational. Try still in this more spiritual part of your teaching to question into them what you want them to learn. Appeal to the judgment and to the conscience. I can scarce give a better example than that of our Lord in teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan. He first interested His pupil by putting His lesson in an attractive

form, and then He did not append to it a long, tedious moral. He simply asked the man before Him, "Which of these three *thinkest thou?*"—i.e., "What do you think about it?" The interest was still kept up. The man, pleased at the appeal to his judgment, replied promptly, "He that showed mercy on him;" and on the instant came the quick rejoinder, "Go, and do thou likewise." Thus the lesson ends. Try to work on that model.

Now, while forbidding preaching to your pupils, may I be permitted a little preaching myself? This series of lessons is intended for Sunday schools as well as weekday schools. It is of Sunday-school teachers I am thinking in what I am now about to say. I cannot escape the solemn feeling of the responsibility of every teacher for the children in his care. Some of these children have little or no religious influence exerted on them for the whole week except in this one hour with you. Do not make light of this work. Do not get to think, with good-natured optimism, that all the nice, pleasant children in your class are pretty sure to be Christ's soldiers and servants by-and-by. Alas! for the crowds of these nice, pleasant children, who, in later life, wander away from Christ into the ranks of evil. Do not take this danger lightly. Be anxious; be prayerful; be terribly in earnest, that the one hour in the week given you to use be wisely and faithfully used.

But, on the other hand, be very hopeful too, because of the love of God. He will not judge you hardly. Remember that He will bless very feeble work, if it be your best. Remember that He cares infinitely more for the children's welfare than you do, and, therefore, by His grace, much of the teaching about which you are despondent may bring forth good fruit in the days to come. Do you know the lines about "The Noisy Seven"?—

“I wonder if he remembers—  
Our sainted teacher in heaven—  
The class in the old grey schoolhouse,  
Known as the ‘Noisy Seven’?”

“I wonder if he remembers  
How restless we used to be,  
Or thinks we forget the lesson  
Of Christ and Gethsemane?”

“I wish I could tell the story  
As he used to tell it then;  
I’m sure that, with Heaven’s blessing,  
It would reach the hearts of men.

“I often wish I could tell him,  
Though we caused him so much pain  
By our thoughtless, boyish frolic,  
His lessons were not in vain.

“I’d like to tell him how Willie,  
The merriest of us all,  
From the field of Balaclava  
Went home at the Master’s call.

“I’d like to tell him how Ronald,  
So brimming with mirth and fun,  
Now tells the heathen of India  
The tale of the Crucified One.

“I’d like to tell him how Robert,  
And Jamie, and George, and ‘Ray,’  
Are honoured in the Church of God—  
The foremost men of their day.

“I’d like, yes, I’d like to tell him  
What his lesson did for me:  
And how I am trying to follow  
The Christ of Gethsemane.

“Perhaps he knows it already,  
For Willie has told him, maybe,  
That we are all coming, coming  
Through Christ of Gethsemane.

“How many besides I know not  
Will gather at last in heaven,  
The fruit of that faithful sowing,  
But the sheaves are already seven.”



LESSON I  
The Creation Story

LECTURE TO THE TEACHER

I

I BEGIN with a quotation from a well-known English scientist (Sir William Henry Preece, K.C.B., F.R.S., etc.):

“In all the Literature of all the languages there is no poem so magnificent as the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. It dashes off with a master’s hand in a few bold words the history of a million years. The first fact chronicled is: ‘In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth,’ and the next: God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness.” We are not enlightened as to the tools or processes by which these things were fashioned, or to the period occupied in the operations. Creation may and probably is going on still, for new wonders are being discovered every day, and there is no sign of finality. Our range of observation is a mere dot in the vast expanse of space.

“It was the fashion in the days of my youth to regard Science and Religion as antagonistic. It is so no longer. I have known more religious men in the ranks of Science than in the Army of the Church. My two great Masters in Electricity were Faraday and Kelvin. They were eminently true religious men. The Facts of Science, when properly interpreted, invariably support the truths of Religion.”

Where did this wonderful Creation Story originate? We do not know. How old is it? We do not know. We know only that in its substance it is ages older than the Book of Genesis, where it finds its present place.

A most interesting fact brought out by thoughtful Bible study is that the Bible was not formed all at once but grew gradually. Long before our present Old Testament books, God was helping men by earlier fragmentary teaching, oral teaching, folklore told in tribal gatherings and around the ancient campfires; written teaching perhaps reaching back before Abraham, when writing was quite common in the early world. We can tell very little about it, but we have clear traces of its existence. Just as we know of the existence of long-lost primeval life-forms through fossils embedded in the rocks, so we know of the existence of this long-lost ancient literature through its traces embedded in the Bible.

The Old Testament writers, you will remember, keep repeatedly telling us of the old lost documents existing long before themselves. They tell us that they are quoting from, e.g., the Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numb. xxi. 4), the Book of Jasher (2 Sam. i. 18), Books of Gad and Nathan (1 Chron. xxix. 29, and 2 Chron. xii. 15); the Books of Shemaiah and Iddo (2 Chron. vii. 15); the Book of Jehu (2 Chron. XX. 34); &c., &c.

I want, in passing, to emphasize for you the fact stated by the inspired writers themselves that they wrote their histories of past ages much in the way that Mr. Green or Professor Gardiner or any other historian wrote his history. This is most important to remember in the scare about Higher Criticism which some of you know about. You would never think of doubting these historians' account of William the Conqueror merely because they wrote their histories 900 years after his death. Of course you

would believe that they studied the books of earlier historians and old letters and parchments and inscriptions and monuments. And if all the libraries and museums which contained these should be burned down to-morrow, you would surely think it unreasonable if people should say that we have no good grounds for believing that William the Conqueror ever lived.

Yet something of this kind is what makes people uneasy in the statements of what is called "Higher Criticism." Scholars express the opinion that the Pentateuch *in its present completed form* was written centuries later than Moses' day. Then somebody suggests that if that be so it cannot be trustworthy history, in fact that the writer must have been romancing a good deal. It is a steadying thought to keep in mind that the writers keep telling us that their histories were so much made up out of pre-existing documents. On reading Green's History of the English People you know that 300 years before him there were several less complete printed histories—and 300 years earlier still there were still less complete manuscript chronicles, and 300 years farther back there were separate uncollected annals, and state papers and letters and documents of various kinds. Thus gradually, by successive editing, English history grew. And thus also gradually Bible history grew, under the care of that inspired Church whose history it was.

No one can tell from what age of the world our Hebrew Creation Stories came into the Bible. We have two of them thus lifted side by side in Genesis. One of them is in the first chapter, the other in the second. They differ in the titles "God" and "Lord God" given to the Creator; they differ, too, in details, but they agree in the grand claim that in the beginning GOD (not a great crocodile, nor an elephant, nor a set of fighting deities), but GOD created the heavens and the earth.

What strange fancies this Creation Story sets stirring! How far back does it go? Did you ever wonder what the ancient world did for want of a Bible before the Bible was written? How did men during all these centuries learn anything about God? Had they this Creation Story in substance handed down, perhaps by word of mouth in the folklore of the early Hebrew race? Was it the first inspired Bible of the primitive world? Did Moses's mother teach it to her boy as she nursed him in the palace? Was it part of the religious knowledge which made Joseph such a hero? Did Abram receive it in Ur of the Chaldees? Had God already guided inspired men to teach the infant world The Creation, The Fall, The Story of the Flood, as a sort of Bible before the Bible—for those ancient days?

We cannot answer these questions. We find the story standing in the Book of Genesis. And we know that it came from far earlier sources. That is all we know.

## II

Now, we are to consider this old Creation Story.

I don't think any thoughtful reader can study it without being impressed with two things: its simplicity and its grandeur.

Its simplicity lies on the very surface. It evidently belongs in its simple form to simple people in the simple child-ages of the old world. There are no scientific statements. There are no learned descriptions. Just the simple story for simple people in the simple child-ages.

Its simplicity, I say, lies on the surface. But fully to realize its grandeur and sublimity, you must compare this Hebrew Creation Story with some of the Creation Stories of other races.

Some fifty years ago a sensation was created in the religious world by the discovery of a similar Creation Story and Deluge Story in Abraham's old home in Chaldea. It is written on clay

tablets, and in its origin goes back probably to Abraham's day. It was studied with deep interest both because it came from Abraham's country and because it resembled our Genesis account.

Both the Chaldean account and the Bible account agree in having the simplicity of an old world story for the child races of the world. But if you want to feel in full force the meaning of inspiration, you have only to compare the two stories, to compare the gross polytheism and superstition into which the poor stupid age naturally drifted—and the pure, dignified, sublime account given to teach a chosen race who should bear the torch of God's light for humanity.

Reading the two together, you feel at once how like they are and yet how unlike. You see that they are both simple stories in simple form for the child races of the world.

But one tells, in a simple childlike way, of many gods with evil human passions at the head of creation. The other tells, in the same simple childlike way, of one God, holy and just and good, who created everything in the heavens and the earth; who made the sun and the moon which the Chaldeans worshipped, and the great bulls to which the Egyptians prayed, and who, as the crown and summit of His whole creation, made MAN in His image, after His likeness, and gave him dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth. Some think that the Chaldean story is a corruption of a purer original. Others think that God's inspiration enabled the Chosen Race to purify an older story and to see, with the keen intuition derived from on high, that in the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth.

But, however this may have been, no one can compare this Hebrew statement with the Chaldean or Egyptian or any other in the world without a sense of the presence of God.

A deep sense of God's inspiration in the Old Testament comes from comparing it with the writings and thoughts of other nations around. When you read of the dark ages of Greece and Rome, the stories of their filthy gods and goddesses, and the deeds of their brave, cruel, boastful men—it never occurs to you to expect any trace of sorrow for sin or longing after holiness. Then turn to read the early prophets of Israel pleading only for righteousness, and the psalmists crying and longing after God and mourning in deep agony for their sins, and you feel at once this sense of God's presence, of God's inspiration, of God's great purpose to raise up one nation as the teachers and prophets of the world.

In deepest sincerity I am saying what I feel. No man can honestly place the writings of Scripture beside any other writings of their time without confessing that the best proof of the inspiration of the Bible is the Bible itself. Has any man ever found conviction of sin and conversion to God resulting from the study of Greek or Roman classics? We find it continually resulting from the study of the Hebrew classics. We believe that the Bible is inspired because it inspires.

### III

Many difficulties that have been found by superficial readers in the story of creation arise from misunderstandings which should have been corrected in us in our childhood and which it is our business to correct in the pupils of our day. I don't mean that we should necessarily speak to them of doubts and difficulties, but that we should avoid the teaching and correct the misapprehensions which lead to such doubts and difficulties.

Take, for instance, the vague impression in many minds that science demands a much greater antiquity for the world than

the Bible accounts would allow. This impression has been, I think, originated mainly by the statement in the margin of many old Bibles that Creation took place B.C. 4004. Of course, this marginal note is no part of the Bible. It is but a mere human conjecture inserted 300 years ago. But it has turned out to be a mischievous conjecture. Because it is on a page of the Bible, people have unconsciously accepted it as of some authority, and feel troubled when they read in authoritative scientific works that probably four million and four<sup>1</sup> would be nearer to the truth. Tell the pupils to draw a pencil mark through that 4004; and in future, when you read of the millions of years that go to make a limestone rock, and the millions or billions that may go to make a planet—when your mind almost reels at the stupendousness of the thought—remember that the Bible puts no difficulty in your path by setting limits to the time. This marvellous old Creation story simply says “*In the beginning,*” which may have been thousands, or millions, or billions of years ago. In the Beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

So far for statements that are clearly *not* in the Bible. Next comes a statement that is in the Bible: that Creation was finished in six days. I suppose nobody now believes, except the children, that the Creation was finished in six literal days of twenty-four hours each. The children believe it still; and one sometimes feels it a pity that we have to correct them. For this story, belonging to the child races of the primitive world, has

1 The 4 has an amusing appearance of exactness, as if there were really some good grounds for fixing a date. In this age it is a surprising and interesting study, that of the efforts made by the greatest minds in the Church for centuries to settle this question. The great majority, from Eusebius to Archbishop Ussher, agreed that the date must be B.C. 4004. They were not content even with fixing the year. In the seventeenth century Dr. John Lightfoot, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, one of the most eminent Hebraists of his time, declared, as the result of his careful calculations, that Creation took place and man was created by the Trinity on October 23rd, 4004 B.C., at nine o'clock in the morning!