

The excitement of Genesis – by Rod Pierce

Mention the Bible and especially the Book of Genesis to many people in the street, and you'll get either a blank stare or a comment about how difficult it is to believe the creation story.

This is something that makes me sad, because to regard Genesis as history is hardly appropriate. Genesis isn't that at all. It's actually a well thought out theological account of relationships, between humankind and God and nature, right from the beginning of human existence, and contains some of the most evocative and colourful stories you'll find anywhere in the Bible.

Take the creation story. Is it really such a stumbling block?

Sadly, for many it is, but why? Surely it is far better to think of this as the result of careful thought and inspiration by wise and learned thinkers trying to answer questions such as:

Where do we come from?

How did we get here?

What is our relationship with God, and with the animal kingdom?

And more particularly, why does God allow sin and suffering?

Indeed, these are questions we still ask today, despite being in an age of modern "science".

If you look carefully there are even two different creation accounts, one where humans were created last (chapter 1), and another, probably written much earlier, which tells of humans being created before the trees and animals (chapter 2).

But Genesis is so much more than just creation: Adam and Eve and their fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, for instance. And the story of Cain and Abel show how it is that humans, though originally pure, could not help but turn to sinfulness.

In an era when most Middle Eastern peoples worshipped many gods, the Hebrews worshipped just one, and these religious stories involving personal intervention by God show they came to believe they had a special relationship with God, which continues throughout the Old Testament.

The story of Noah describes how God felt it was necessary to punish the people on earth for becoming so wicked, by wiping out the whole human race, but decided to save one family, who were told to rescue two of each type of living creature, and for the first time introduced a covenant – a promise between God and humankind.

As the story moves forward – Abraham, the leader of a family of nomadic shepherds with his son, Isaac, is rewarded for his faith in God with a further mighty covenant of everlasting protection, and being told that his offspring will be without number, a great people. In return, however, all family males are to be circumcised, as a permanent reminder of the promise made with and by God.

The saga continues with Jacob's dream, followed by that of Joseph and his coat of many colours. How Joseph became an important official in the Egyptian court after interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh and predicting seven years of plenty followed by seven of famine. Such a classic and much-loved account!

This then is an introduction, a prologue if you like, setting the scene, explaining the special relationship that the Jewish people feel they have with God, and not the Jews and Christians only, but Muslims' too. The three great monotheistic faiths all have their beginnings here – that's why it is so exciting!

Rod Pierce