

Genesis Notes (Defenders Study Bible by Henry Morris)

Introduction to Genesis

In a very real sense, the book of Genesis is the most important book in the world, for it is the foundation upon which all the other sixty-five books of God's written Word have been based. When Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, gave a key Bible study to His disciples on the way to Emmaus, He began with Genesis!

“Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). We would do well to follow His example. If we want to understand the New Testament, we first need to understand Genesis; the New Testament contains at least two hundred direct quotations or clear allusions to events described in Genesis—more than from any other book in the Old Testament.

All the great doctrines of Christianity—sin, atonement, grace, redemption, faith, justification, salvation, and many others—are first encountered in Genesis. The greatest doctrine of all—the special creation of all things by the eternal, self-existent God—is revealed in the very first chapter of Genesis, the foundation of all foundations.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the greatest attacks on the Bible have been directed against the integrity and authority of Genesis. Since the only alternative to creation is evolution, these attacks are all ultimately based on evolutionism, the assumption that this complex universe can somehow be explained apart from the infinite creative power of God.

The creation account in Genesis is supported by numerous other references throughout the Bible, and this is true for all the later events recorded in Genesis as well. To some degree, archaeological discoveries, as well as other ancient writings and traditions, also support these events, but the only infallibly correct record of creation and primeval history is the book of Genesis. Its importance cannot be over-estimated.

Authorship

Until about 200 years ago, practically all authorities accepted the fact that Moses wrote Genesis and all the rest of the Pentateuch as well. The first writer to question this seems to have been a French infidel physician, Jean Astruc, about the time of the French revolution. Astruc argued that two writers wrote the two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, on the basis of the different names for God used in the two chapters. Later writers during the 19th century, notably the German higher critic Julius Wellhausen, developed this idea into the elaborate documentary hypothesis of the origin of the Pentateuch.

According to this notion, the Pentateuch was written much later than the time of Moses, by at least four different writers or groups of writers, commonly identified now by J, E, D and P (standing for the Jehovist, Elohist, Deuteronomist and Priestly documents, respectively). Although some form of this theory is still being taught in most liberal seminaries and college departments of religion, it has been thoroughly discredited by conservative scholars. This is discussed further in the Introductions to Exodus and other books of the Pentateuch. In any case, there is no valid reason to question the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, except for Genesis itself.

For Genesis, however, there is real substance to the documentary idea, though certainly not in the Astruc/Wellhausen form. In fact, it seems very likely that Moses was the compiler and editor of a number of earlier documents, written by Adam and other ancient patriarchs, rather than being the actual writer himself. After all, the events of Genesis took place long before Moses was born, whereas he was a direct participant in the events recorded in the other four books of the Pentateuch.

It is reasonable that Adam and his descendants all knew how to write and, therefore, kept records of their own times (note the mention of “the book of the generations of Adam” in Genesis 5:1). These records (probably kept on stone or clay tablets) were possibly handed down from father to son in the line of the God-fearing patriarchs until they finally were acquired by Moses when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt. During the wilderness wanderings, Moses compiled them into the book of Genesis, adding his own explanatory editorial comments where needed. Genesis is still properly considered as one of the books of Moses, since its present form is due to him, but it really records the eye-witness records of these primeval histories, as written originally by Adam, Noah, Shem, Isaac, Jacob and other ancient patriarchs.

The respective divisions of Genesis can be recognized by the recurring phrase: “These are the generations of...” The archaeologist P. J. Wiseman has shown that these statements probably represent the “signatures,” so to speak, of the respective writers as they concluded their accounts of the events during their lifetimes.

The Hebrew word for “generations” (*toledoth*) was translated in the Septuagint Greek by the Greek word *genesis* (used in the New Testament only in Matthew 1:1, there translated “generation”). Thus these divisional notations have indirectly provided the very name for the book of Genesis, which means “beginnings.”

It is interesting to note, as an indirect confirmation of this concept of Genesis authorship, that while Genesis is cited at least 200 times in the New Testament, Moses himself is never noted as the *author* of any of these citations. On the other hand, he is listed at least 40 times in reference to citations from the other four books of the Pentateuch. There are also frequent references to Moses in the later books of the Old Testament, but never in relation to the book of Genesis.

In sum, we can be absolutely confident that the events described in Genesis are not merely ancient legends or religious allegories, but the actual eyewitness accounts of the places, events and people of those early days of earth history, written by men who were there, then transmitted down to Moses, who finally compiled and edited them into a permanent record of those ancient times.