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Author, date, and structure

SUMMARY

Genesis is the book of beginnings, and the name of the book reflects this. The foundation of all Christian doctrine is found here. So it's not surprising that this book is among the most attacked by anti-Christians.

The other books of the Bible—and Jesus Christ Himself—affirm that the first five books, the Torah or Pentateuch, were written by Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So this is clearly an important issue for Christians.

In authoring Genesis, Moses was probably the *editor* of far older documents. This produced the unity seen in repeated themes such as the number seven and large-scale structures such as chiasmus. However, we also see the different source documents in the 11 *toledot* statements: 'These are the generations of ...'. This means, 'What followed from ...', meaning that the *toledots* were *introductory* statements, not closing statements as per the popular Wiseman view.

In contrast with the true view of Mosaic editorship, the most popular secular view is the Documentary Hypothesis, asserting four different documents called 'J', 'E', 'D', and 'P'. These were allegedly written long after the time

of Moses. However, the internal evidence of the Pentateuch makes far more sense of the traditional date. Also, the main premises of the Documentary Hypothesis are false, based on ignorance of literary conventions of the Ancient Near East. For example, recapitulation is a common device in documents with a single author, so does not prove that Genesis was compiled from pre-existing sources. Also, it was common to have multiple names for a god. So the different names for the biblical God reflect not different authors but major on different attributes.

THE NAME 'GENESIS'

The name goes back to a few centuries before Christ, when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, to produce the Septuagint (LXX; see also 'Textual variants', Ch. 15).¹ They chose the book title *Genesis* (Greek Γένεσις), which means 'origin'. When the Bible was translated into Latin, the title was retained as a transliteration.

The Greek translators probably also related the title to a very important word that underlies the structure of the book: *geneseōs* (γενέσεως), usually translated 'generations' in English. This summarizes the point of the book: the origins of everything, including sin and death, and how all people came from the original human pair.

The Greek word in turn is a translation of the Hebrew word *tôl'dôt* (תולדות). But the Hebrews traditionally named a book by its first word. In Genesis, this is *b'rēshīt* (בראשית) meaning 'in the beginning'. This is also very appropriate—Genesis really *is* 'the book of beginnings'. It explains the origins of time, space, matter, the earth and indeed the entire universe, including life, man—and sin, death, and redemption. Indeed, all the foundational doctrines and morality of the Christian faith can be found in Genesis, at least in embryonic form.²

Indeed, these themes are found in the first 11 chapters of Genesis, one reason that this commentary concentrates on this early section. Perhaps the most

1. The name comes from the Latin *Septuaginta* (70), because according to legend, 72 rabbis (six from each of the twelve tribes) were responsible for the translation of the Torah in Alexandria in c. 250 BC (and a common abbreviation is LXX, which is 70 in Roman numerals). In reality, it was composed over decades, beginning in the 3rd century BC. The multiple translators mean that it is uneven in accuracy. The Pentateuch is considered to be reasonably reliable, while other sections are less accurate. The LXX was in widespread use by Jews outside Israel in New Testament [NT] times. This explains why it was commonly (but far from exclusively) cited in the NT—if not, then people like the noble Bereans of Acts 17:11 might have checked the Apostles' teachings by the OT and said, 'That's not how we find it in our Bible.' Interestingly, by inspiring the NT authors to use the LXX translation in the NT, God apparently inspired parts of the Greek translation that differ slightly from the Hebrew original.
2. Grigg, R. Genesis—the seedbed of all Christian doctrine, creation.com/seedbed, 26 April 2007.

important reason, though, is that Genesis 1–11 is the main focus of the undermining of biblical authority in our time, including within the church. Many who deny the straightforward historicity of the first 11 chapters are otherwise conservative evangelicals. They would have no difficulty affirming with us that the rest of the Bible’s first book, in particular the very important foundational material on the beginnings of the messianic nation of Abraham, must be taken and believed as straightforward history. However, as will be shown, Genesis 1–11 moves seamlessly into Genesis 12–50 without any change in genre. So it’s not surprising that some other passages of Scripture cite characters from both sections without any hint that the earlier ones are less historical (see ‘Other Bible writers treat Genesis as history’ in Ch. 2).

MOSES: AUTHOR OF THE PENTATEUCH

The first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—are known as the Torah, Law, or Pentateuch. The Torah has long been ascribed to Moses. Indeed, the internal evidence from the books points to Moses, because they claim his authorship, e.g. Exodus 17:14; 24:4–7; 34:27; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 31:9, 22, 24.

To support this, other Old Testament books affirm that Moses was the author, e.g. Joshua 1:7–8; 8:32–34; Judges 3:4; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 21:8; 2 Chronicles 25:4; Ezra 6:18; Nehemiah 8:1; 13:1; Daniel 9:11–13.

Continuing in the New Testament, its writers likewise affirmed that Moses was the author, e.g. John 1:17; Acts 6:14; 13:39; 15:5; 9:9; 2 Corinthians 3:15; Hebrews 10:28.

Finally, Jesus Himself cited Moses as the author. He frequently spoke of Moses’ writings or the Law of Moses, without any disclaimer, e.g. Matthew 8:4; 19:7–8; Mark 7:10; 12:26; Luke 24:27, 44; John 7:19. Indeed, Jesus stressed the seriousness of denying Moses several times.

Jesus warned the unbelieving Jewish leaders of His day:

If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say? (John 5:46–47).

Similarly today, liberal theologians who doubt Moses often doubt what Jesus said (unless of course a selective use of His words can somehow be twisted to support a politically correct cause they happen to agree with). Even more seriously, in the account of the rich man after death in Luke 16:31, Jesus relates how this man begged someone to return from the dead to warn his brothers. But as Jesus explains further:

He [Abraham] said to him [the rich man in Hell], “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

This is extremely serious: Jesus said that those who reject Moses would not be persuaded even by a resurrection. So it’s not surprising that those churches and seminaries which reject the historicity of Moses’ writings often also reject the literal bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, Jesus went further in Matthew 5:18 to affirm the absolute authority of Moses’ writings, the Law:

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.³

Jesus affirmed the inspiration of Scripture even down to the smallest letter—“jot” (Greek *iota* ι, the equivalent of the Hebrew *yod* י)—or part of a letter—“tittle” (e.g. the smallest stroke of a pen differentiating between *beit* ב and *kaph* כ, or *dalet* ד and *resh* ר).

DIVINE INSPIRATION

Jesus’ above affirmation of the authority of Scripture shows that it is divine as well as human. Similarly, Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine.⁴ Theologian Paul Enns (not to be confused with theistic evolutionist Peter Enns who believes that the NT writers erred when citing Genesis as history⁵) writes of the similarity between the two:

There is, in fact a correlation between the two aspects of special revelation: the Scripture may be termed the living, written Word (Hebrews 4:12), while Jesus Christ may be designated the living, incarnate Word (John 1:1, 14). In the case of Christ there was human [only maternal] parentage but the Holy Spirit overshadowed the event (Luke 1:35), ensuring a sinless Christ; in the case of the Scriptures there was human authorship but the Holy Spirit superintended the writers (2 Peter 1:21), ensuring an inerrant word. The Bible accurately presents the special revelation of Jesus Christ.⁶

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3. The *applicability* of the Mosaic Law for *today* is a different issue from its *inerrancy*, and its *authority to its intended audience*; and outside the scope of CMI. But see Cosner, L., *Is eating shellfish still an abomination?* creation.com/shellfish, 10 July 2010; Sarfati, J., *Are we allowed to eat all animals today?* creation.com/all-food-clean, 1 September 2012.
 4. Sarfati, J., *The Incarnation: Why did God become Man?* *Creation* 35(1):34–37, 2013.
 5. Documented in Cosner, L., *Evolutionary syncretism: a critique of Biologos*, creation.com/biologos, 7 September 2010.
 6. Enns, Paul, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 159, 1989. Ch. 18 has an excellent treatment of inspiration and inerrancy.

How did this happen? The Apostle Paul told Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:15), which logically includes Genesis. The chief Apostle, Peter, affirmed, “men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Actually the translation “moved” doesn’t convey the force of the Greek *pherō* (φέρω), meaning to bear along—Luke uses the same word to describe Paul’s ship “driven along” by a gale (Acts 27:15–17). Thus God moved the writers of Scripture so that they recorded exactly what He wanted. However, God did not usually dictate the words, but superintended the authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they recorded His revelation without error. How this occurred with Genesis will now be explained.

MOSES AS *EDITOR* OF GENESIS

While Genesis is part of the Torah, so is included as one of the ‘Books of Moses’, Genesis is a special case. While Moses was an eye-witness to the events of Exodus to Deuteronomy,⁷ the events of Genesis occurred long before his time. Moses is not actually named as author in the book. So the best explanation is that Moses was the *editor* of Genesis.

The internal evidence of this is the many editorial comments (e.g. Genesis 26:33, 32:32). Here, Moses explains some points for his Israelite readers living many years after the events. But to highlight that Genesis preserves events from long before Moses, sometimes the ancient sources were left alone. For example, Genesis 10:19 states:

The territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.

Note, “as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah”. Consider a tourist guide book to New York City, which provides directions, “as you go towards the Twin Towers”. What would you naturally conclude about the date of this guide book? Presumably that it was written when these great landmarks were still standing, i.e. before the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. So by the same token, the internal evidence of Genesis 10:19 points to its being written before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24). That is, at or even before the time of Abraham. By the time of Moses, these two wicked cities had been lost under the Dead Sea for centuries.

7. Admittedly, Deuteronomy includes an account of Moses’ death (Deuteronomy 34:1). But by the same token, my edition of Shakespeare’s plays mentions his death too. It’s likely that Joshua appended Moses’ death to close out the Books of Moses.

UNITY

The editor was more than just a copyist of documents. Rather, there are large-scale *artificial literary structures*, evidence of a unifying hand who painstakingly edited the sources into a whole.^{8,9} Victor Hamilton, who was professor of Bible and theology at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, for 39 years, states:

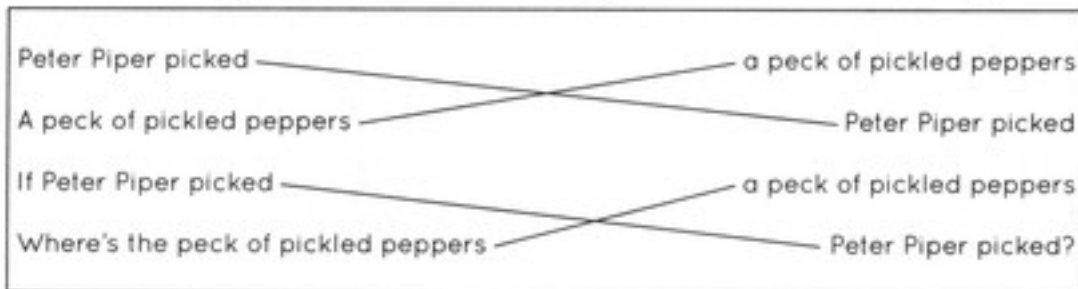
[T]he rhetorical features of Genesis 1–11 are so distinctly woven into one tapestry as to constitute an unassailable case for the unity of the section, and most likely composition by a single hand.¹⁰

Chiasmus

One of these is called a *chiasmus*, where “the same language and style elements are repeated in the second part in reverse order—last matching first and first matching last.”¹¹ In other words, “the narrator begins the tale a second time from the point where he ended the first telling ... repeat[ing] the last first and the first last.”¹² An example is the famous tongue-twister

A Peter Piper picked
 B a peck of pickled peppers.
 B' A peck of pickled peppers
 A' Peter Piper picked.
 C If Peter Piper picked
 D a peck of pickled peppers
 D' Where's the peck of pickled peppers
 C' that Peter Piper picked?

This can be diagrammed below, and we can note the crossing over or *chiasm*, from which this pattern derives its name (from the Greek letter chi χ).



For example, Genesis 9:6 is written as a short chiasmus:

8. Phelan, M.W.J., *The Inspiration of the Pentateuch*, 2005.
9. Holding, J.P., Debunking the Documentary Hypothesis, review of Phelan, M.W.J., *The Inspiration of the Pentateuch*, *J. Creation* 19(3):37–40, 2005.
10. Hamilton, V.P., *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, p. 29, 1990.
11. Avishur, Y., *Studies in Biblical Narrative: Style, Structure, and the Ancient Near Eastern Literary Background*, p. 15, 1999.
12. Avishur, Y., Ref. 11, p. 76.

THE GENESIS ACCOUNT

A theological, historical, and scientific
commentary on Genesis 1-11

Genesis, the book of beginnings, is foundational to Christianity. So when the western world is becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity, Genesis has been especially singled out for attack. With the rise of dogmatic materialistic philosophy disguised as science, Genesis has been both marginalized and ridiculed. Many in the church have surrendered much of the Bible to an anti-Christian agenda.

Hence there is a need for a commentary that explains what the text really says, and why it matters for the Christian, and is supported by *real* science. Genesis teaches *real history* about God's perfect creation, man's fall into sin, and the promise of a divine saviour, so its importance can't be overstated.



"This is a solid intellectual work and will be of real practical value to all who sincerely desire to properly understand the early chapters of Genesis. As an exegetical preacher, I appreciate how *The Genesis Account* affirms the texts as divinely inspired truth, confirming its role, not only in our wider Christian theology, but also in science and history. It unequivocally demonstrates that Genesis is absolutely foundational to the Gospel and much of our Christian doctrine. This book should be considered a must read for all serious students of the Bible."

Dr Johnny M. Hunt

Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia, USA
Former President of the Southern Baptist Convention

"While many Christian scholars have reinterpreted Genesis 1-11 in light of evolutionary-based science, Dr Sarfati works with the theological and historical meaning of the biblical text and then integrates science from a biblical perspective. Because of this, it is a privilege for me to commend Dr Sarfati's *The Genesis Account: A Theological, Historical, and Scientific Commentary on Genesis 1-11*. With his development of a thorough exposition of Genesis 1-11, Dr Sarfati also demonstrates that these eleven chapters are the basis of the most important Christian doctrines.

"In this commentary he takes seriously Jude's words in v. 3 'to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.' One of the great benefits of *The Genesis Account* is Dr Sarfati's capability as a scientist and logician to integrate genuine science with the biblical text. May the Lord use *The Genesis Account* to awaken God's people to a commitment to the foundational and inerrant truth found in Genesis 1-11."

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