

TYNDALE



CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Genesis

Allen Ross

Exodus

John N. Oswalt

GENERAL EDITOR

Philip W. Comfort



New Living
Translation

CORNERSTONE
B I B L I C A L
COMMENTARY

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featuring the text of the
NEW LIVING TRANSLATION



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Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 1

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2007). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God's inspired word and have a desire to make God's word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful. The NLT attempts to communicate God's inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and laypeople understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called "Notes," wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The "Notes" are followed by the "Commentary," wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ's church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God's word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: "Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you." May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you "grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

PHILIP W. COMFORT
GENERAL EDITOR

ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

b.	Babylonian Gemara	Heb.	Hebrew	NT	New Testament
bar.	baraita	ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	OL	Old Latin
c.	<i>circa</i> , around, approximately	i.e.	<i>id est</i> , the same	OS	Old Syriac
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	in loc.	<i>in loco</i> , in the place cited	OT	Old Testament
ch, chs	chapter, chapters	lit.	literally	p., pp.	page, pages
contra	in contrast to	LXX	Septuagint	pl.	plural
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls	ℳ	Majority Text	Q	Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source)
ed.	edition, editor	m.	Mishnah	rev.	revision
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	masc.	masculine	sg.	singular
et al.	<i>et alli</i> , and others	mg	margin	t.	Tosefta
fem.	feminine	ms	manuscript	TR	Textus Receptus
ff	following (verses, pages)	mss	manuscripts	v., vv.	verse, verses
fl.	flourished	MT	Masoretic Text	vid.	<i>videur</i> , it seems
Gr.	Greek	n.d.	no date	viz.	<i>videlicet</i> , namely
		neut.	neuter	vol.	volume
		no.	number	γ.	Jerusalem Gemara

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version	NCV	New Century Version	NKJV	New King James Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version	NEB	New English Bible	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
ESV	English Standard Version	NET	The NET Bible	NLT	New Living Translation
GW	God's Word	NIV	New International Version	REB	Revised English Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NIRV	New International Reader's Version	RSV	Revised Standard Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible	NJB	New Jerusalem Bible	TEV	Today's English Version
KJV	King James Version	NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation	TLB	The Living Bible
NAB	New American Bible				
NASB	New American Standard Bible				

ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]	BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]	BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> (Pritchard) [1965]	BDAG	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]	BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Pritchard) [1969]				

- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]
- CAD *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [1956]
- COS *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols., Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]
- DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]
- DBT *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd ed., Leon-Dufour) [1972]
- DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (5 vols., D. Clines) [2000]
- DJD *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* [1955–]
- DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]
- DOTP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (T. Alexander, D.W. Baker) [2003]
- DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]
- EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols., H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET) [1990–1993]
- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. Stamm; trans. M. Richardson) [1994–1999]
- IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]
- IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]
- ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Bromiley) [1979–1988]
- KBL *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- L&N *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida) [1989]
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed., Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]
- MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]
- NA²⁶ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1979]
- NA²⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1993]
- NBD *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed., Douglas, Hillyer) [1982]
- NIDB *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]
- NIDBA *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Blaiklock and Harrison) [1983]
- NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 vols., C. Brown) [1975–1985]
- NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols., W. A. VanGemeren) [1997]
- PGM *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. (Preisendanz) [1928]
- PG *Patrologia Graecae* (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]
- TBD *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Kittel, Friedrich; trans. Bromiley) [1964–1976]
- TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (8 vols., Botterweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]
- TLNT *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (3 vols., C. Spicq) [1994]
- TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]
- TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]
- UBS³ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (3rd ed., Metzger et al.) [1975]
- UBS⁴ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed., Metzger et al.) [1993]
- WH *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	1 Sam	1 Samuel	Esth	Esther
Exod	Exodus	2 Sam	2 Samuel	Job	Job
Lev	Leviticus	1 Kgs	1 Kings	Ps, Pss	Psalms, Psalms
Num	Numbers	2 Kgs	2 Kings	Prov	Proverbs
Deut	Deuteronomy	1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Ecll	Ecclesiastes
Josh	Joshua	2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Song	Song of Songs
Judg	Judges	Ezra	Ezra	Isa	Isaiah
Ruth	Ruth	Neh	Nehemiah	Jer	Jeremiah

Lam	Lamentations	Amos	Amos	Hab	Habakkuk
Ezek	Ezekiel	Obad	Obadiah	Zeph	Zephaniah
Dan	Daniel	Jonah	Jonah	Hag	Haggai
Hos	Hosea	Mic	Micah	Zech	Zechariah
Joel	Joel	Nah	Nahum	Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians	Heb	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil	Philippians	Jas	James
Luke	Luke	Col	Colossians	1 Pet	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom	Romans	1 Tim	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Tim	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal	Galatians	Phlm	Philemon	Rev	Revelation

Deuterocanonical

Bar	Baruch	1–2 Esdr	1–2 Esdras	Pr Man	Prayer of Manasseh
Add Dan	Additions to Daniel	Add Esth	Additions to Esther	Ps 151	Psalms 151
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah	Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah	Sir	Sirach
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Jdt	Judith	Tob	Tobit
Sg Three	Song of the Three Children	1–2 Macc	1–2 Maccabees	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sus	Susanna	3–4 Macc	3–4 Maccabees		

MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by "Q" indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the *Rule of the Community*; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

CD	Cairo Geniza copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>	1QIsa ^b	Isaiah copy ^b	4QLam ^a	Lamentations
		1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>	11QPs ^a	Psalms
1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>	1QpHab	<i>Pesher Habakkuk</i>	11QTemple ^{a,b}	<i>Temple Scroll</i>
1QIsa ^a	Isaiah copy ^a	1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>	11Qtglob	<i>Targum of Job</i>

IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

Significant Papyri (P = Papyrus)

P1 Matt 1; early 3rd	P20 James 2-3; 3rd	P39 John 8; first half of 3rd
P4+P64+P67 Matt 3, 5, 26; Luke 1-6; late 2nd	P22 John 15-16; mid 3rd	P40 Rom 1-4, 6, 9; 3rd
P5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd	P23 James 1; c. 200	P45 Gospels and Acts; early 3rd
P13 Heb 2-5, 10-12; early 3rd	P27 Rom 8-9; 3rd	P46 Paul's Major Epistles (less Pastorals); late 2nd
P15+P16 (probably part of same codex) 1 Cor 7-8, Phil 3-4; late 3rd	P30 1 Thess 4-5; 2 Thess 1; early 3rd	P47 Rev 9-17; 3rd
	P32 Titus 1-2; late 2nd	
	P37 Matt 26; late 3rd	

- P49+P65 Eph 4-5; 1 Thess 1-2; 3rd
 P52 John 18; c. 125
 P53 Matt 26, Acts 9-10; middle 3rd
 P66 John; late 2nd
 P70 Matt 2-3, 11-12, 24; 3rd
 P72 1-2 Peter, Jude; c. 300
 P74 Acts, General Epistles; 7th
 P75 Luke and John; c. 200
 P77+P103 (probably part of same codex) Matt 13-14, 23; late 2nd
 P87 Phlm; late 2nd
 P90 John 18-19; late 2nd
 P91 Acts 2-3; 3rd
 P92 Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300
 P98 Rev 1:13-20; late 2nd
 P100 James 3-5; c. 300
 P101 Matt 3-4; 3rd
 P104 Matt 21; 2nd
 P106 John 1; 3rd
 P115 Rev 2-3, 5-6, 8-15; 3rd

Significant Uncials

- Ⲙ (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th
 A (Alexandrinus) most of NT; 5th
 B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th
 C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) most of NT with many lacunae; 5th
 D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th
 D (Claromontanus), Paul's Epistles; 6th (different MS than Bezae)
 E (Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th
 F (Augensis) Paul's Epistles; 9th
 G (Boernerianus) Paul's Epistles; 9th
 H (Coislinianus) Paul's Epistles; 6th
 I (Freerianus or Washington) Paul's Epistles; 5th
 L (Regius) Gospels; 8th
 Q (Guelferbytanus B) Luke, John; 5th
 P (Porphyrrianus) Acts—Revelation; 9th
 T (Borgianus) Luke, John; 5th
 W (Washingtonianus or the Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th
 Z (Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th
 037 (Δ; Sangallensis) Gospels; 9th
 038 (Θ; Koridethi) Gospels; 9th
 040 (Ξ; Zacynthius) Luke; 6th
 043 (Φ; Beratinus) Matt, Mark; 6th
 044 (Ψ; Athous Laurae) Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 9th
 048 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 5th
 0171 Matt 10, Luke 22; c. 300
 0189 Acts 5; c. 200

Significant Minuscules

- 1 Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 12th
 33 All NT except Rev; 9th
 81 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 1044
 565 Gospels; 9th
 700 Gospels; 11th
 1424 (or Family 1424—a group of 29 manuscripts sharing nearly the same text) most of NT; 9th-10th
 1739 Acts, Paul's Epistles; 10th
 2053 Rev; 13th
 2344 Rev; 11th
 f¹ (a family of manuscripts including 1, 118, 131, 209) Gospels; 12th-14th
 f¹³ (a family of manuscripts including 13, 69, 124, 174, 230, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, 1709—known as the Ferrar group) Gospels; 11th-15th

Significant Ancient Versions

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p> SYRIAC (SYR)
 syr^c (Syriac Curetonian) Gospels; 5th
 syr^s (Syriac Sinaiticus) Gospels; 4th
 syr^h (Syriac Harklensis) Entire NT; 616 </p> | <p> OLD LATIN (IT)
 it^a (Vercellenis) Gospels; 4th
 it^b (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th
 it^d (Cantabrigiensis—the Latin text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts, 3 John; 5th
 it^e (Palantinus) Gospels; 5th
 it^k (Bobiensis) Matthew, Mark; c. 400 </p> | <p> COPTIC (COP)
 cop^{bo} (Boharic—north Egypt)
 cop^{fav} (Fayyumic—central Egypt)
 cop^{sa} (Sahidic—southern Egypt)
 OTHER VERSIONS
 arm (Armenian)
 eth (Ethiopic)
 geo (Georgian) </p> |
|---|---|--|

TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

Note: For words and roots from non-biblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

HEBREW/ARAMAIC

Consonants

א	<i>aleph</i>	= '		מ, ם	<i>mem</i>	= m
ב, ן	<i>beth</i>	= b		נ, ן	<i>nun</i>	= n
ג, ן	<i>gimel</i>	= g		ס	<i>samekh</i>	= s
ד, ך	<i>daleth</i>	= d		ע	<i>ayin</i>	= '
ה	<i>he</i>	= h		פ, ן, ף	<i>pe</i>	= p
ו	<i>waw</i>	= w		צ, ץ	<i>tsadhe</i>	= ts
ז	<i>zayin</i>	= z		ק	<i>qoph</i>	= q
ח	<i>heth</i>	= kh		ר	<i>resh</i>	= r
ט	<i>teth</i>	= t		ש	<i>shin</i>	= sh
י	<i>yodh</i>	= y		שׁ	<i>sin</i>	= s
כ, ן, ך	<i>kaph</i>	= k		ת, ך	<i>taw</i>	= t, th (spirant)
ל	<i>lamedh</i>	= l				

Vowels

-	<i>patakh</i>	= a		ֿ	<i>qamets khatuf</i>	= o
׀	<i>furtive patakh</i>	= a		ֿ	<i>holem</i>	= o
ֿ	<i>qamets</i>	= a		ֿ	<i>full holem</i>	= o
ֿֿ	<i>final qamets he</i>	= ah		ֿ	<i>short qibbutz</i>	= u
ֿ	<i>segol</i>	= e		ֿ	<i>long qibbutz</i>	= u
ֿֿ	<i>tsere</i>	= e		ֿ	<i>shureq</i>	= u
ֿֿֿ	<i>tsere yod</i>	= e		ֿֿ	<i>khatuf patakh</i>	= a
ֿֿֿ	<i>short hireq</i>	= i		ֿֿֿ	<i>khatuf qamets</i>	= o
ֿֿֿֿ	<i>long hireq</i>	= i		ֿֿֿֿ	<i>vocalic shewa</i>	= e
ֿֿֿֿֿ	<i>hireq yod</i>	= i		ֿֿֿֿֿ	<i>patakh yodh</i>	= a

GREEK

α	<i>alpha</i>	= a		ε	<i>epsilon</i>	= e
β	<i>beta</i>	= b		ζ	<i>zeta</i>	= z
γ	<i>gamma</i>	= g, n (before γ, κ, ξ, χ)		η	<i>eta</i>	= ē
δ	<i>delta</i>	= d		θ	<i>theta</i>	= th
				ι	<i>iota</i>	= i

κ	<i>kappa</i>	= k	τ	<i>tau</i>	= t
λ	<i>lamda</i>	= l	υ	<i>upsilon</i>	= u
μ	<i>mu</i>	= m	φ	<i>phi</i>	= ph
ν	<i>nu</i>	= n	χ	<i>chi</i>	= ch
ξ	<i>ksi</i>	= x	ψ	<i>psi</i>	= ps
ο	<i>omicron</i>	= o	ω	<i>omega</i>	= ō
π	<i>pi</i>	= p	·	<i>rough</i>	= h (with
ρ	<i>rho</i>	= r (ῥ = rh)		<i>breathing</i>	vowel or
σ, ς	<i>sigma</i>	= s		<i>mark</i>	diphthong)

THE TYNDALE-STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.¹

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

TG	Tyndale-Strong's Greek number	ZH	Zondervan Hebrew number
ZG	Zondervan Greek number	TA	Tyndale-Strong's Aramaic number
TH	Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number	ZA	Zondervan Aramaic number

So in the example, "love" *agapē* [T626, Z627], the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

1. Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by a capital letter (e.g., T61692A), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., T62013.1), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of use for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.



Genesis

ALLEN ROSS

INTRODUCTION TO *Genesis*

THE TITLE “GENESIS” comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint), which uses the Greek word *geneseōs* [TG1078, ZG1161] to render the key Hebrew word in the book, *toledoth* [TH8435, ZH9352] (“generations” in KJV; “account” in NLT). The Hebrew title of the book is the first word of the book, *bereshith* [TH871.2/7225, ZH928/8040] (in the beginning).

Genesis is the book of beginnings, the beginning of mankind and his universe, the beginning of sin in the world and its catastrophic effects on the race, and the beginning of God’s plan to restore blessing to the world through his chosen people. God’s plan begins with the call of Abraham and the granting of a covenant to him. From this beginning of God’s covenant program, the book of Genesis traces the promise of the blessings from generation to generation, up to the eve of the great redemption from Egypt.

Because Genesis lays the foundation for all of God’s subsequent revelation and not just the law, it is no surprise that most of the other books of the Bible draw on the content of Genesis in one way or another. But beyond that, the subject matter of Genesis and the unembellished way in which it is written have captivated the minds of scholars and readers of the Bible for ages. As with all biblical truth in general, this book has been a stumbling block for those who approach it with biases that do not allow for the supernatural or for special revelation. But to those who accept that Genesis is part of the divinely inspired Word of God, the book is a source of comfort and edification.

As might be expected, different readers approach the questions and difficulties in Genesis differently. An overly skeptical approach to the material will exploit the difficulties and seek to explain them according to modern presuppositions that destroy the unity and integrity of the text; whereas an approach that accepts the integrity of the text, at the very least as good literature, will look for resolutions to the difficulties in a way that harmonizes the Scriptures. Along the way, there will be many questions that Genesis will simply leave unanswered. The believer must accept that and rather than spending the majority of his or her time trying to search those matters out, should spend the time trying to understand what God wants people to know. After all, the revelation did not come by the will of man—if it had, it would have been written very differently; it came by the will of God.

AUTHOR AND SOURCES

Given the fact that Genesis stands before us as a unified, fully developed theological treatise based on selected events and records (see discussion below), it is natural to ask, "Who wrote it?" The Bible does not say, other than to include it in the general description of "the law of Moses," which would cover the five books of the Pentateuch, or Torah. Both Scripture and tradition attribute the Pentateuch to Moses. This was sufficient to convince the vast majority of biblical scholars and readers down through the ages that Genesis, the first book of the Pentateuch, could safely be ascribed to Moses, allowing for minor additions and clarifications by later writers.

For those who accept that there was a Moses who received the law at Sinai, there is no one better qualified to have written this book. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22) so his literary skills would have enabled him to collect and edit Israel's traditions and records and to compose this theological treatise. His communion with God at Sinai and throughout his life would have given him the spiritual illumination and understanding that was needed to guide him into all truth—what we call inspiration. And the historical circumstances of the Israelites' bondage in Egypt, along with the task of delivering them and establishing a new nation in accordance with the promises made to the ancestors, provided a strong motivation to write this book: to establish the theological and historical foundation for the Exodus and the covenant at Sinai (Moberly 1992; Sailhamer 1992).

Most critical scholarship, however, does not accept the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and some do not accept the historicity of Moses or the Exodus. Doubts about Mosaic authorship are not necessarily recent. Early in the Christian era, theologians wondered if the work was written by Moses or Ezra. But the modern view that the Pentateuch was compiled from sources written by different groups of people over time seems to have developed as the product of rationalistic skepticism. Soon after the Reformation, writers like Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) were attributing the work to Ezra, who he said utilized a mass of traditions (including some by Moses). But the first attempt to arrange a documentary theory came about a century later: Jean Astruc (1684–1766) in 1753 proposed that Moses compiled Genesis using two major and several minor documents. Over the next 124 years scholars debated and developed the idea and its component features until Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), a historian, restated the theory boldly and with exacting detail in 1877.

Wellhausen's theory, along with its development and application, has been well documented and analyzed in commentaries on Genesis and introductions to the Old Testament. There is neither the need nor the space to review it at length. S. R. Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* provides a formal presentation of the theory. The commentary by J. Skinner is a prime example of how it is worked out chapter by chapter. R. K. Harrison's *Introduction to the Old Testament* is a particularly thorough interaction with the theory from the conservative point of view. Umberto Cassuto's *Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* also gives it a critical review. And Herman Wouk's *This Is My God* has a classic essay from a literary point of view.

Essentially the Documentary Hypothesis states that the Pentateuch was assembled from four literary sources, represented by four letters, J, E, D, and P. Passages classified as J material were supposedly from a source written or compiled in the southern kingdom of Judah about 850 BC (so named because of the constant use of the holy name “Yahweh,” or “Jehovah”). This source was personal, biographical, and anthropomorphic. It included prophet-like ethics and theological reflection. The E material was supposed to have been written or compiled in the northern kingdom of Israel about 750 BC (so named because of its preference for calling God “Elohim” rather than “Yahweh”). In these passages the material is more objective, less concerned with ethical and theological reflection, and given more to concrete particulars. After these two documents were combined by an editor around 650 BC (forming what is called JE), the source called D (essentially the book of Deuteronomy) was added around 621 BC—during the reforms of Josiah (2 Kgs 22–23). The authors of this material, known as the Deuteronomistic school, were responsible also for reworking the material that became the books of Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings. Finally, the P source was added by later priests (hence, P); it came from the time of Ezra, or at least the Babylonian exile, and included a section of material focusing on holiness, called H. This material is dated anywhere between 570 and 445 BC. It is concerned with the origins and institutions of the theocracy, genealogies, and sacrifices.

What brought about this detailed approach and reconstructive theory was the realization that there are texts in the Pentateuch that differ greatly. The scholars observed changes in the divine name from passage to passage, parallel stories that seemed very similar (such as the three “sister” stories in chs 12, 20, and 26), different names and descriptions of the same things (like both Horeb and Sinai being used), and a number of diverse theological emphases that seemed to harmonize with these other observations. With the development of Wellhausen’s theory, the task of the critical scholars was to analyze the text with these observations in mind and assign the passages, verses, or even the words as being specific to one of the sources. Two immediate difficulties with the theory surfaced: first, there was no complete agreement on which passages belonged to which sources, and second, additional sources were invented to cover passages that could not be placed into one of the major sources. Wellhausen worked it out in such detail that very few biblical scholars today would take the time to study each bit of evidence that he covered, let alone read the work.

This theory of the sources of the Pentateuch, meticulously developed and seemingly plausible, has captured the imagination of the scholarly world ever since. The modern critic might not speak of the sources as literary documents, but the same basic theory remains behind most source criticism today.¹

The evaluation of this theory and of subsequent theories of source criticism by traditional scholars has been thorough and critical but often ignored. The major criticisms of the theory include its supposition that the book of Genesis cannot be treated any differently than any other literature from the ancient Near East, that it is

merely a human book and therefore unreliable. The formulation of the approach came to be influenced strongly by anthropomorphic and evolutionary ideas, leaving little room for the supernatural and certainly no room for divine inspiration. For example, it is suggested that the monotheism found in the texts was of human origin and gradually evolved over the centuries until it was settled upon during the Babylonian exile under a number of external influences. Proponents of the theory were satisfied to say that the development of such ideas was due to the creative genius of the writers who carefully borrowed from incompatible predecessors material that they could harmonize with their faith. The difficulty here is that in the biblical history, every time the Israelites borrowed from their neighbors it was away from monotheism toward polytheism and idolatry. The critics were convinced, however, that the teachings evolved until they reached their final form. But the Pentateuch, they explain, preserves all the materials from along the way and weaves them together into a composite text.

Conservatives have used archaeological discoveries to show that many of the criteria used in the theory should be called into question. Indeed, the early proponents of the theory did not make any use of archaeology, although it was available, and yet it was called a literary and analytical approach to Scripture. From the documents of the ancient world there is evidence of such things as the use of multiple names, the early use of cultic terms that were thought to be late (as in the notion of P), the use of rare words that earlier had been called late Aramaisms (i.e., stemming from the Persian period), and the constant use of repetition in the literary style. These have been recorded and explained in the main Introductions to the Old Testament, and need not be referenced here. Not only do these discoveries argue against the criteria used in the theory, they actually give background and local color to the texts. When the traditions of the patriarchs, for example, are set against the background of the Hurrian customs found in texts from Nuzi and Mari (second millennium BC), there is a remarkable connection. The stories about the patriarchs fit that culture and would be out of place in the first millennium BC.

Of course, the findings of archaeology do not prove the existence of the patriarchs, or the early date of the narratives (for cautions, see Thompson 1974 and Coote and Ord 1989). But they do fit rather well with the material and the manner in which the narratives are presented in Genesis. With the ever-increasing finds, there is less and less reason to date the material or the compiling of it to the later periods, certainly not as late as the Babylonian exile.

Out of these considerations a number of scholars turned their attention to the form of the narratives. The pioneer of form criticism, Hermann Gunkel, recognized the antiquity of the traditions (e.g., that Gen 1–11 had to be compared to the Akkadian and Sumerian accounts and would be strangely out of place against an Assyrian background in the first millennium). Form criticism sought to determine the genre, the structure, the setting, and the intention of the literary unit that was behind the extant text. The purpose was to reconstruct the original material and trace the development of it as it related to the history of the faith. The method isolates the

literary units, often following the division of the old sources (J, E, D, and P), identifies the literary forms by comparing common vocabulary, motifs, and structures, and then tries to identify the original setting for the material in the life of Israel. There is much in this approach that is helpful; but the identification of an original setting for the story behind the present form of the text is both unnecessary and generally impossible. It is unnecessary because the final form of the text is the holy Scripture that we study and live by; it is impossible because we do not have the evidence to confirm the preliterate stages, especially when they are determined by removing parts of the text thought to have been added later (such as supernatural motifs). But on the whole, form criticism takes a more cautious view of the text and recognizes the antiquity of the material in the ancient world. Moreover, its emphasis on literary types and ancient oral tradition points out Israel's ancient literary heritage.

However, form criticism scholarship is often plagued with the same weaknesses of the Documentary Hypothesis. The supposition that the literature developed naturally rather than supernaturally leads to very different interpretations: Monotheism developed out of polytheism, old pagan stories were borrowed and demythologized to be applied to the patriarchs, miracles were later explanations of early events, and the records do not give us real history. Not all who follow this method would agree with these ideas, but by and large they apply to the procedure.

The idea that there were oral traditions, called "sagas" by some, that existed before the written text and were collected and compiled later may be correct in some cases, but it is difficult to prove. It is possible that family stories and genealogies could have been handed down orally and then written down. But that idea does not tell us anything about the date of the literary composition, and it unnecessarily complicates the idea by suggesting that in the process of telling and writing, the material was edited and embellished a good deal. Too often, critical interpretation considers this embellishing to be an extensive reshaping and reinterpreting of the tradition. Consequently, many scholars spend their time trying to reconstruct the original tradition, an endeavor which is usually subjective and often impossible. Granted, there was editing of the material and a certain amount of interpretation to apply it to the Israelite experience, but it is not on the scale that modern critical scholarship proposes.

The emphasis on literary forms and structure, and the setting in life and in text is very helpful for biblical exegesis (see, e.g., McCarter 1988). Exegesis, however, is concerned with the interpretation of the final form of the text, not with supposed pre-literary stages of the tradition. If there is evidence that allows the exegete to see how the material was composed, then that can be very helpful (for example, ancient treaties, law codes, laments, and the like; see also Walton 1989; Carr 2005). But where the biblical text differs from similar genres of the ancient texts, it should be explained on the basis of the exegesis of the text, that is, understanding the purpose of the writer under the inspiration of God.

Out of a greater interest in the literary features of the text and comparative literature there emerged traditio-historical criticism. Some scholars who have followed

this approach have criticized the old literary analytical approach (JEDP) from various perspectives. They believe that a complete analytical approach is needed—one that takes into account oral tradition, comparative mythology, and Hebrew psychology—for the purpose of discovering the formation and transmission of Israelite tradition in its preliterate stage.

Though the subjectivity involved in such an approach has led to great diversity among the proponents of the method, the essential elements in the theory are as follows: The story of Genesis was transmitted from memory; it was accompanied by an interpretation; it was reformulated in accordance with various forces (perhaps a redemptive motif in the historical period); and it finally found its fixed form in the text. Then similar stories were collected and redacted into literary units by a creative editor. These cycles of tradition then became normative for faith in the postexilic period. The two long-developing, contemporaneous tradition collections were the P and D collections. The former is largely Genesis through Numbers, and the latter is Deuteronomy through Kings. So even though the old documentary theory was rejected, a similar theory of sources was put in its place.

This approach puts too much emphasis on the oral tradition behind the texts and the development of the material from that tradition. No doubt there was oral tradition, but as Kitchen (1966:136) notes, for anything truly important in ancient cultures, written documents were used from the earliest ages. The emphasis on comparative mythology can be helpful, but if it is studied with the presupposition that Israel's faith was quite comparable to that of the pagans and was not a unique, revealed faith, then the conclusions will undermine the whole message of the Bible. Following such an approach leaves one without an explanation of the origin of the Hebrews' unique faith and without a meaningful understanding of its truth.

Finally, concentration on the supposed reforming of the traditions lacks any scientific controls, a fact evidenced by the lack of agreement among the critics. The reconstructions are often the product of the critic's presuppositions. And one is right to ask why those should be believed rather than what the Bible actually says. Even if one could find the sources and reconstruct their history with certainty, one would still be left with the question as to why the material was recorded in its current form.²

DATE OF WRITING

Today the study of the Pentateuch is even more complicated because most modern critics recognize the excesses and extremes in earlier approaches. But still, for them there is no going back to what is called a "precritical" view of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. They still will work with sources and dates in an effort to work through the difficulties in the text, some even allowing that some of the traditions go back to Sinai. But the Pentateuch is still seen as a complex compilation of different sources, most of which were added much, much later than the time of Moses.

More emphasis is put on the final fixed form of the text today than ever before among critical scholars. Repetition, diversity of style, variation in vocabulary, and the like are often considered part of the unity of the text (as opposed to their being

make them a holy nation. Numbers records the census of the tribes in the wilderness, their military and religious arrangements, and how the Lord preserved his people from threats to the promised blessing from without and within. Finally, Deuteronomy records the renewal of the covenant in prophetic form, focusing on the great king of the theocracy and the covenant he made with the people.

In the unfolding of this grand program of God to establish his theocracy, Genesis also lays down the initial and necessary revelation of God's sovereignty. He is the Lord of the universe who will move heaven and earth to bring about his plan. He desires to bless people, but he will not tolerate rebellion and unbelief. According to Genesis, the promises of God are great, and the power of God is fully able to bring them to fruition. But participation in God's program required faith, as it always does, for without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6).

OUTLINE

- I. The Primeval Universal Events (1:1–11:26)
 - A. The Creation of All Things (1:1–2:3)
 1. The beginning (1:1-2)
 2. The six days of creation (1:3-31)
 3. Sabbath rest (2:1-3)
 - B. The Account of the Succession from the Creation (2:4–4:26)
 1. The creation of man (2:4-7)
 2. The creation of the garden (2:8-14)
 3. The first commandment (2:15-17)
 4. The creation of woman (2:18-25)
 5. The temptation (3:1-7)
 6. The results of sin (3:8-24)
 7. The advance of sin in the family (4:1-16)
 8. The spread of godless civilization and the faith (4:17-26)
 - C. The Account of the Succession from Adam (5:1–6:8)
 1. The genealogy from Adam to Noah (5:1-32)
 2. The corruption of the human race (6:1-8)
 - D. The Account of the Succession from Noah (6:9–9:29)
 1. The commission of Noah (6:9–7:5)
 2. The destruction of all life outside the ark (7:6-24)
 3. The end of the judgment and Noah's worship (8:1-22)
 4. God's covenant with Noah (9:1-17)
 5. Curse on Canaan; blessings on Shem and Japheth (9:18-29)
 - E. The Account of the Succession from the Sons of Noah (10:1–11:9)
 1. The Table of Nations (10:1-32)
 2. The dispersion at Babel (11:1-9)
 - F. The Account of the Succession from Shem (11:10-26)

- II. The Patriarchal Narratives (11:27–37:1)
 - A. The Account of the Succession from Terah (11:27–25:11)
 - 1. The Lord's call to Abram (11:27–12:9)
 - 2. Abram and Sarai in Egypt (12:10–20)
 - 3. Abram's separation from Lot (13:1–18)
 - 4. Abram's victory over the invading kings (14:1–16)
 - 5. The blessing of Melchizedek (14:17–24)
 - 6. The Lord's covenant promise to Abram (15:1–21)
 - 7. Abram's lack of faith (16:1–16)
 - 8. The confirmation of the promise by signs (17:1–27)
 - 9. The time of fulfillment guaranteed by divine visitation (18:1–15)
 - 10. Abraham's intercession for Sodom (18:16–33)
 - 11. God's judgment on the cities of the plain (19:1–38)
 - 12. Abraham's deception before Abimelech (20:1–18)
 - 13. The birth of Isaac and expulsion of Ishmael (21:1–21)
 - 14. The covenant at Beersheba (21:22–34)
 - 15. The testing of Abraham's faith (22:1–24)
 - 16. The burial of Sarah (23:1–20)
 - 17. God's provision of a wife for Isaac (24:1–67)
 - 18. The death of Abraham (25:1–11)
 - B. The Account of the Succession from Ishmael (25:12–18)
 - C. The Account of the Succession from Isaac (25:19–35:29)
 - 1. The births of Esau and Jacob (25:19–26)
 - 2. The sale of the birthright (25:27–34)
 - 3. Isaac's deception (26:1–11)
 - 4. The blessing on Isaac and failure of Esau (26:12–35)
 - 5. Jacob's deception of Esau for the blessing (27:1–40)
 - 6. The flight of Jacob (27:41–28:9)
 - 7. The confirmation of the blessing at Bethel (28:10–22)
 - 8. Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel (29:1–30)
 - 9. The births of the tribal ancestors (29:31–30:24)
 - 10. The increase of Jacob's possessions (30:25–43)
 - 11. Jacob's flight from Laban (31:1–42)
 - 12. The treaty on the border (31:43–55)
 - 13. Jacob's preparation for meeting Esau (32:1–21)
 - 14. Jacob becomes Israel (32:22–32)
 - 15. Reconciliation with Esau and settlement in Shechem (33:1–20)
 - 16. The defilement of Dinah (34:1–31)
 - 17. Jacob's return to Bethel (35:1–15)
 - 18. The completion of the family (35:16–29)
 - D. The Account of the Succession from Esau (36:1–8)
 - E. The Account of the Succession of the Edomites from Esau (36:9–37:1)

- III. The Account of the Succession from Jacob: The Story of Joseph and His Brothers (37:2–50:26)
 - A. The Selling of Joseph into Egypt (37:2–36)
 - B. The Corruption of Judah and the Confirmation of God's Ways (38:1–30)
 - C. Joseph's Rise to Power in Egypt (39:1–41:57)
 - 1. Joseph's temptation by Potiphar's wife (39:1–23)
 - 2. Joseph's interpretation of the prisoners' dreams (40:1–23)
 - 3. Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams (41:1–40)
 - 4. The exaltation of Joseph (41:41–57)
 - D. The Testing of Joseph's Brothers (42:1–45:15)
 - 1. The test of conscience (42:1–38)
 - 2. The test of jealousy (43:1–34)
 - 3. The test of loyal love (44:1–34)
 - 4. The reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers (45:1–15)
 - E. The Move of the Family to Egypt (45:16–47:12)
 - F. The Wisdom of Joseph's Rule (47:13–27)
 - G. The Blessing of Joseph's Sons (47:28–48:22)
 - H. Jacob's Oracle for the Tribes (49:1–28)
 - I. The Death and Burial of Jacob (49:29–50:14)
 - J. Reassurance of the Blessing (50:15–26)

ENDNOTES

1. For a survey of the approach see Friedman 1987; Blenkinsopp 1992; for an evaluation of it, see Rendtorff 1992 and especially Knierim 1985a. For a survey of subsequent views, see Carpenter 1986; and for discussions favoring the former consensus, see Nicholson 1989; Emerton 1987, 1988.
2. For further discussion of the various theories, see the introductory comments in Matthews 1996; Rendsburg 1986; Knierim 1985b; Garrett 1991; Kikawada and Quinn 1987:36–53; Nicholson 1989.
3. The word "bless" is used with a different sense throughout the Book of Psalms as one of several words for praise. But how can our words make God more blessed or more enriched? Or how can we glorify or exalt one who is all-glorious and exalted in the highest heaven? We can only do so by making him known throughout the world through praise. In this way we are enriching God by extending his reputation.

COMMENTARY ON

Genesis

◆ I. The Primeval Universal Events (1:1–11:26)

A. The Creation of All Things (1:1–2:3)

1. The beginning (1:1–2)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* ²The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

1:1 Or *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . . Or When God began to create the heavens and the earth, . . .*

NOTES

1:1-2 All expositors have to deal with the relationship between v. 1 and v. 2. The Hebrew text begins v. 2 with a Waw disjunctive, indicating that the verse is not in sequence with v. 1 and so should not be translated “and then the earth became. . . .” Rather, v. 2 provides a series of circumstantial clauses to describe the existing conditions when God said, “Let there be light.” The NLT chose not to translate the Waw as “and” or “now”; and its marginal note attempts to capture the nature of the clauses as circumstantial, suggesting for v. 1 the translation “In the beginning when God created” or “When God began to create.” This is probably too free, for it makes the first verse a temporal clause when the Hebrew is clearly an absolute statement. The Hebrew MT has a preposition “in” followed by the noun “beginning” in the absolute state (so, “in the beginning”) and not in the construct state (which would mean “in the beginning of”). This is followed by the perfect tense and its subject, “God created,” and then the compound direct object, “the heavens and the earth.” In order to make the first verse a temporal clause, the noun “beginning” would properly be taken as a noun in construct, and the vowels of the verb changed to make an infinitive: “In the beginning of the creating of God,” or “when God created.” Most English translations have chosen the absolute as the preferred reading (“In the beginning God created”); some suggest in the margin that it could be taken as a temporal clause (“When God created/began to create”). But this suggestion does raise the question of the relationship between vv. 1 and 2. A number of commentators have taken v. 1 to be a report of the beginning of creation prior to the events of ch 1. Some of them take “waste,” “void,” “darkness,” and “deep” in v. 2 to refer simply to the yet unformed nature of the universe, an initial stage of creation to be completed in the subsequent events of the chapter. The benefit of this view is that it makes 1:1 “the” beginning, and that fits nicely with the straightforward reading of the Bible. The difficulty is that it does not do justice to the meanings of the words in v. 2 and their connection to *bara’* [TH1254, ZH1343] (to create) in v. 1.

Older commentators had seen that the words in v. 2 are too strong to refer to unshaped matter, that they are corrected, not completed, in the rest of the chapter, and that *bara’*, “to create,” usually produces something perfect and pristine, not waste and void. They also

sensed a need to fit Satan's fall from heaven into the order of things as well. This led to what has been known as the "gap theory," that Satan fell after v. 1 and brought darkness and chaos to the earth, so that God had to set about to correct it. This view had the value of keeping 1:1 as original creation, accounting for Satan, and keeping v. 2 as a chaos. But it required translating the beginning of v. 2 as "and the earth became," which is not how the Waw disjunctive clause with the perfect tense would be normally translated.

Other scholars, however, have concluded that v. 1 serves well as a brief introductory statement of the message of 1:1-2:3, with the particulars to follow. This view makes the most sense of the grammar, syntax, and philology of the beginning verses. Moreover, this arrangement is paralleled by 2:4-7, which begins with the introductory statement, followed by three circumstantial clauses (the first two of which are also causal) and then the Waw consecutive form to begin the narrative proper. For 1:1-3, this view does justice to the terms and the syntax, but its potential difficulty is theological: It would mean that Genesis is describing the beginning of the creation as we know it, but not the original creation of matter, with the story assuming the earth was already there when God said "Let there be light." The Bible clearly affirms that God created everything out of nothing, including the angels who were already there when God laid the foundations of the earth (Job 38:4-7). This "re-creation" view would account for the creation of everything we know, but not the actual beginning of matter. Other statements in Scripture would embrace all of that. It would also allow for a greater age for the planets and the stars, even though life on our planet would be recent. (For more detailed discussions on the issue, see Waltke 1975; NIDOTTE 1.606-609; Tsumura 1994.)

1:2 the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. It was by his Spirit that God sovereignly created everything. The Gospel of John clarifies that the God of creation is the living Word, the second person of the Trinity (John 1:3-4). In the darkness of the deep the Spirit hovered, preparing for the effectual, creative word of God. This is the pattern that fits all of God's works: The Spirit is at work when the word is given.

COMMENTARY

The first two verses of the Bible have received a good deal of attention over the years. The traditional understanding is that they refer to the actual beginning of matter, creation out of nothing (i.e., *creatio ex nihilo*), and are both therefore part of day one. That would mean that the first step involved making matter that at first was "formless and empty," and then a second step involved shaping it and filling it to make the world as we know it. But many biblical scholars have concluded that the vocabulary and grammar of the two verses pose difficulties for this interpretation. The language of the second verse with its "waste and void" seems to describe more of a ruined or dismantled state than merely a formless and empty mass; and the rest of the chapter provides the correction of the conditions in verse 2. That the universe is God's creation is perfectly expressed by the statement "God created the heavens and the earth" (1:1). This took place "in the beginning," not the beginning of God for there is none, but the beginning of our universe. The Bible is clear on this point. There is no room for atheistic alternative explanations. The sovereign work of creation is established by the verb that is used here—God "created." The word is *bara'* [TH1254, ZH1343] (to create); it can be used in sentences that declare creation that is made out of nothing; but it can also be used to indicate a refashioning or a renovation (e.g., God "created" the man from the dust; 1:27-28 and 2:7). This verb does

not go well with the following statement in 1:2, in that *bara'* would not likely be said to produce formlessness and emptiness and darkness (cf. Isa 45:18). The point is that what God creates is perfect, new, and fresh.

How then do we relate these verses? If the expressions of verse 2 do describe a chaos and not simply unformed matter, then verse 1 should be interpreted as a general summary statement of what the entire chapter will tell about the creation of the heavens and the earth (an expression for the whole universe) as we know it. This would mean that verse 1 is not part of day one, that the account in Genesis begins with the state of things recorded in verse 2 and not with the original creation of matter, and that the earth specifically and the universe in general could be very old. Genesis does not explain how these conditions came about, only that they were there. The second verse is set off by the grammar (with a Waw disjunctive) to form three circumstantial clauses: "[1] The earth was formless and empty, [2] and darkness covered the deep waters. [3] And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters." These clauses are circumstantial, explaining the condition of things when God said, "Let there be light" (1:3). They would not normally be the product of divine creation, but would describe a chaos that happened to the creation. Moreover, the chapter does not call them good, but sets about to correct them. First God corrects the darkness with light. Then the formlessness is corrected in the first three days, and the emptiness in the last three days. And all these things that God did were good.

Where did the chaos come from if the second verse is not an early stage of the creative process? An earlier theory posited that between verses 1 and 2 there is a gap of time, allowing for the fall of Satan and the entrance of evil into God's creation. The theory was put forward with the understanding that verse 1 was part of the first day; so God created the heaven and the earth, then the earth became waste and void, and then God created light. The conditions of waste and void and darkness may be the result of the fall of Satan, but the theory is not compelling. The second verse should not be translated "and the earth *became* waste and void," but "now the earth *was* waste and void."

If verse 1 is taken as a summary statement for the creation account, however, then it is not part of the first day. And whatever caused the chaos occurred before this account. The first day records the creation of light to dispel the darkness. In a sense, then, the account of creation has many aspects of re-creation in it, which fits with its later use in Scripture as a paradigm of redemption. The chapter details the creation of the universe as we know it, not the actual beginning of every form of matter. It begins with the clear proclamation that God created everything; then reports the chaos and how in six days God corrected the chaos by the creation. We know from the rest of Scripture that God created things before Genesis 1:1 because the angels were present to sing for joy at the wonderful work of creation (Job 38:4-7). Genesis is not interested in explaining the darkness or the formlessness or the emptiness, just what God did about it. But the expressions that are used lead one to suspect immediately that something ominous happened—darkness, throughout Scripture, suggests danger, and the verb "have dominion over" (1:28) implies putting down some

opposition. The challenge comes in 3:1 when the tempter, using the form of a reptile, is introduced. He manages to convince Adam and Eve to disobey the Creator. The serpent is already there as part of creation, but the tempter simply speaks after God has finished his work of creation—he too is present in the garden. Later, Scripture will identify the tempter in this account as Satan (see Rev 12:9). The prophet Ezekiel seems to be hinting at the same thing, saying that the evil spirit behind the king of Tyre was in Eden (Ezek 28:11-14).

If this is the proper interpretation of these difficult expressions and constructions, nothing at all is taken away from God's sovereignty in creation. Rather, God's sovereignty is clear in the way that he made everything, and made it perfect. The Bible clearly teaches that everything that exists was made by him through his powerful decrees, leaving no room whatsoever for atheistic evolution. But Genesis may be indicating that something happened in the earliest stages of creation which God had to correct, and in the process, he put everything the way he wanted it to be. In fact, Genesis develops a pattern of creation—un-creation—re-creation several times to show God's sovereignty over all things.¹

The account of creation is the logical starting point for Genesis, for it reports the beginning of all things. It is also the best theological way to begin the book, for it lays the foundation for the whole law in the decrees of the Creator.

The chapter portrays God as the sovereign creator of all life. As the prologue to the Pentateuch, it teaches Israel that the God who formed them into a people is the God who created the world, all that is in it, and everything in the cosmos beyond it. Thus, the theocracy is founded on the almighty God of creation. Israel's laws, customs, and beliefs were only as authoritative as the God who gave them; Israel would learn from the creation account that her God was the sovereign over all life, all matter, and all gods.

The implications of this are great. It means that everything that exists must be under God's dominion. The creation must be subject to the Creator. Forces of nature, all creatures, and all material objects are all part of his creation. The pagan nations may have venerated these things as gods, but none of them could pose a real threat to the plan of the one true God.

Second, the account of creation also lays the foundation for the law. If God was before all things and created all things, how foolish it would be to have any other gods before him (Exod 20:3). There were none! If God made people to be his image on earth representing him, how foolish it would be to make an image of God after the pattern of a human (Exod 20:4-6; Isa 44:9-20). If God set aside the seventh day for the enjoyment of his creation (Exod 20:8-11), how presumptuous it would be to treat the Sabbath day as any other day rather than enter into its celebration with the living God. The commandments of God find their rationale in creation, or rather, in the nature of the creator God.

A third implication is that if creation with all its richness and beauty and function came into existence by the word of the Lord (Ps 33:9-11), God's people certainly should realize that their lives will be ordered and blessed if they obey the

word of the Lord. What better way to introduce the law (i.e., the five books of Moses) than to articulate the very first ten commands, by which God brought all things into existence.

And what a contrast between this account and the pagan accounts of creation in the ancient world. Myths about battles among the gods, carcasses being used for parts of creation, or the fusion of spirit and matter in a way so perplexing that it defies logic—there was nothing uplifting and purifying in them. The elegance and majesty of the sovereign God simply giving the command for things to come into existence and then blessing them by his powerful word shows all pagan myths and modern alternatives to be base and foolish. And it was this powerful word that would motivate God's people to put their trust in him and not in the perverse deities of the world around them.

Fourth, the account of creation also begins the revelation of the nature of God as a redeeming God. It tells how he brought the cosmos out of formlessness and emptiness, countered darkness with the creation of light, made divisions in what he had created, and in the end sanctified and blessed all that he had made. All this would have had a powerful impact on Moses's first audience, for in many ways the redemption from Egypt reflected many of the motifs of creation: God's deliverance of his people from the *chaos* of Egypt through the *waters* of the sea, granting them *light* for the way, forming them into a nation that would be his *image* on earth, and *blessing* them with all provisions of life as they became his holy nation. The prophets and the apostles saw in creation the patterns of redemption. And Paul certainly drew upon it by writing that the one who caused light to shine out of darkness has caused his light to shine in our hearts (2 Cor 4:6) so that we might become new creations (2 Cor 5:17).

ENDNOTES

1. For particular views see the following resources: For the older "gap theory," A. C. Custance, *Without Form and Void* (Brockville, Ontario: Doorway Papers, 1970); for the recent-creation view, H. Morris and J. Whitcomb, *The Genesis Flood* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961); for progressive creationism, B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); for theistic evolution, H. J. Van Till, *The Fourth Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); for the literary view, H. Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1984).

◆ 2. The six days of creation (1:3-31)

³Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

⁶Then God said, "Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth." ⁷And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. ⁸God called the space "sky."



Exodus

JOHN N. OSWALT

INTRODUCTION TO *Exodus*

READERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT need to understand the book of Exodus. In fact, it might be said that aside from the book of Genesis, Exodus is the most important Old Testament book for Christians to be familiar with. To be sure, the New Testament does not quote this second book of the Canon as frequently as it does such books as Isaiah, Deuteronomy, and Psalms, but knowledge of the events narrated in Exodus, such as the giving of the Torah and the construction of the Tabernacle, are everywhere assumed in the New Testament. That the people called Israel—the people of the Messiah—came into existence at all was only because God miraculously delivered them from Egypt. The parallels between the exodus from Egypt and the resurrection of Christ are too many to enumerate here. But let it be said that from the Lord's Supper (Passover) to Pentecost (the giving of the Torah), the book of Exodus provides the subtext of the Gospels and Acts. One other point that must not be overlooked is that the work of Christ in making a new covenant possible is only understandable against the backdrop of the old covenant, a proper understanding of which is impossible without a grasp of Exodus. In the end, it is the book of Exodus that shapes the biblical understanding of what a life-giving relationship with God looks like.

THE PLACE OF THE BOOK IN THE TORAH

The division of the biblical material into books is very old, but it is somewhat unfortunate because it tends to make modern readers approach each book as a separate entity. That may be the correct approach in some cases, as for instance, the book of Job, but in other cases it is quite incorrect. One of those cases is the first five books, called the Torah (Hebrew for "Instruction"), or the Pentateuch (Greek for the "Five Books"). These books are clearly intended to be read as a whole. And it is very possible that the fifth book, Deuteronomy, both ends the first five and also leads into the next four: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, with all nine books giving a connected history of God's people from the creation until the return from Babylonian exile. The Torah, the first of these two divisions, takes the reader up to the point of entering the land that was first promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:7. It contains six great "scenes": (1) Creation and the Fallen World (Gen 1–11); (2) Canaan, Land of Promise (Gen 12–50); (3) Slaves in Egypt (Exod 1–15); (4) Sinai (Exod 16—Num 10); (5) In the Wilderness (Num 11–36); and (6) The Fields of Moab (Deut 1–34).

Within these different “scenes” there is a single line of thought, revolving around the question, “Who supplies my needs, and how are they to be supplied?”¹ If we conclude that *we* are the suppliers of our needs, then the answer to the second part of the question is, “by manipulating the forces in the world.” A certain view of the world is inevitable. In the Pentateuch (as in the whole Bible), God is attempting to demonstrate that *he* is the only one who can supply our needs, and that the supply is fully available to those who are in a lovingly submissive relationship with him. Genesis shows how the belief that we must each supply our own needs has blighted the world. It then illustrates in three different individuals—Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph—that if God will be trusted and obeyed, he will supply our needs better than we ever could on our own.²

But God does not merely wish to care for a few scattered individuals. This is clear not only from the blessing given to Adam, and thus to all his descendants (Gen 1:28), but also from God’s promise to bless the whole world through Abraham (Gen 12:3). The first move in this progression from Abraham to the world is a move from an individual scope to a national one. That is what takes place in the book of Exodus. One thing inherent in such a move was that the lovingly submissive relationship with God would be put into more formal and wide-ranging terms than it had been previously. The flexibility and simplicity of “one-on-one” relationships is not possible when an entire national group is involved.

The move from individual to national also provided the occasion whereby a much fuller revelation of the character of God and the character of humans could be revealed. That had not been necessary in the initial relationships with the patriarchs; God was simply establishing an open connection with human beings. Such revelation as the patriarchs received, however, was an absolute necessity if the relationship between God and humans was to rest on any kind of solid foundation. What we ultimately see in Exodus is the nature of the salvation God has planned. We see what the need, the cause, the purpose, and the goal of salvation are. In this way, the book of Exodus provides an irreplaceable foundation for understanding the rest of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments.

AUTHOR AND DATE

Author. The tradition that the church inherited from the Jews was that the human author of the Torah was Moses. Jesus clearly reflected this conviction when he quoted passages from the Torah and said, “Moses gave you this law from God,” (Mark 7:10; cf. Mark 10:3), and when he said, “haven’t you ever read about this in the writings of Moses” (Mark 12:26), and then recounted the story of the burning bush from Exodus 3. This position was largely unchallenged until the seventeenth century in Europe, when biblical scholars, imbued with the tenets of rationalism, became convinced that the kind of inspiration involved in Mosaic authorship was impossible. Over the next 100 years (1775–1875), a very complex theory of the authorship of the Pentateuch evolved. Eventually it came to be accepted that Moses was responsible for little, if any, of the Pentateuch. Instead, the Torah was the result

of the combining of at least four different books, with the last source, the so-called "Priestly work," only being added after the Exile, around 400 BC. In the book of Exodus, all of the Tabernacle material after chapter 24 was thought to have been taken from this Priestly work (Friedman [1987:250-252] has a chart showing what parts of Exodus he believes came from each of the four different works).

This theory, known as the Documentary Hypothesis, came to rule the thinking of all but the most conservative biblical scholars after 1875. This was the situation until the middle 1930s when new ideas about the origins of literature began to make an impression on Old Testament scholarship. These new ideas, arising from research into European folk literature, asserted that folk literature was never authored by single individuals but grew up in oral forms among communities in which a given narrative or song served some particular purpose in the community. The effect of this new outlook was the proposition that although the written forms from which the present Pentateuch was constructed may have been later (between 1000 and 400 BC), the original oral forms may have appeared much earlier. This seemed to make a place for the original accounts relating to the Exodus having actually first emerged in the Israelite community sometime near to the event (c. 1440 BC). There was still no place for Mosaic authorship, but there did seem to be a place for a certain historical authenticity in the narratives.

But the problem with this new approach, often called Form Criticism, is that it placed a new theory on top of an old theory, neither of which had any objective evidence to support it. Supposedly, if one wished to determine the original form of any portion of the Pentateuch, one would first have to decide which document that portion had come from. Then it would be necessary to determine what the oral prehistory of that portion of that document had been. Of necessity, this process became highly subjective, with different scholars coming to widely differing conclusions about which parts of a passage were "original" and which were not.

As a result of this subjectivism, many scholars have given up on the whole process of trying to determine what was original, and now treat the Torah as a literary whole that must be interpreted as such. There is much about this development that is welcome. For instance, it is much less common today to find scholars interpreting one part of a verse in isolation from another part because it is supposed that the two parts originally came from two different documents. Neither is it so common to dismiss one part of a poem because it was "obviously" not part of the original oral form. But there is one great misfortune to this approach. That misfortune is the tacit, and sometimes not-so-tacit, assumption that the original historical setting is not only unrecoverable, but indeed, is of no necessary interest to the interpreter.

This assumption has tragic consequences because the entire claim of the Bible to authenticity and authority rests upon the fact that God has acted in observable history in the ways reported in the text. If God did not act in the ways recorded, then the unique theology of the Bible becomes both inexplicable and suspect. Why should we give allegiance to a faith whose evidence has been manufactured? The well-known statement of the apostle Paul that if Christ has not been raised from the

dead, we Christians are the most pitiable people on earth (1 Cor 15:13-19) expresses the overall situation for the entire biblical revelation. While not every biblical book roots its theology in the specific activity of God in human history (e.g., Job), the revelation as a whole, culminating in Christ, does. Thus, those who believe in the God of the Bible have reason to expect that the book of Exodus reports accurately the historical events surrounding the exodus from Egypt and the establishment of the covenant at Mount Sinai. And this suggests that the accounts would have been written at or near the time of the events themselves.

All that having been said, is there any insuperable objection to Moses having been the author of the work? The simple answer is “no.” Whereas seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars believed that writing did not exist before about 1000 BC, we now know that it has been in existence at least since about 3000 BC. Moreover, the great advance in writing that we call the alphabet (one written symbol for one sound—requiring only about 35 characters as opposed to hundreds or even thousands for earlier systems) was certainly developed by 1400 BC (as at Ugarit, see Hamilton 2006). While the ancient manuscripts we have do not use an alphabet from this period and do use a later form of the Hebrew language than what would have been spoken at Moses’s time, this says nothing about the date of the book’s original composition. (For example, the fact that an edition of *Pilgrim’s Progress* appears in twenty-first century American English, printed in a newly created font, does not prove that *Pilgrim’s Progress* was written in the twenty-first century.) Additionally, the theological sophistication that scholars of previous centuries insisted was unknown in the 1400s BC was, in fact, quite common (cf. Kitchen 1964; 2003). If we accept the biblical claim that Moses was reared in the Egyptian royal court, there is every reason to believe that he would have had both the technical and intellectual skills to create a work such as the Pentateuch.

But is there any reason to think that Moses would have felt a need to compose such a work? Indeed there is. It is apparent that the covenant between God and Israel follows a literary form that was well-known in the latter half of the second millennium BC. It was a form utilized by emperors when they entered into treaties with subject peoples (see the discussion below on ch 20). One of the features of this form is that the covenant was required to be written down and deposited in a safe place, often in the temple of the people’s chief god. There it could be reread regularly (see Deut 31:10-13; 24–25) and appealed to in the case of any disagreement among the parties. It would be natural for Moses, having written the covenant according to the form required, to continue and supervise the composition of other related writings: the patriarchal history that explained the promises of the covenant; the Egyptian sojourn that led up to the reception of the Torah; and the people’s subsequent acts of disobedience and experiences of God’s discipline and grace as he continued to keep his side of the agreement.

One of the features of the Pentateuch that gave rise to the Documentary Hypothesis, however, was the presence of different styles, vocabularies, and approaches throughout the work. Since the European biblical scholars had been raised on the

classical literary ideals of unity of place, plot, time, and style, it seemed impossible that one person could have been the author of the whole Torah. The first thing that needs to be said in response to this is that it is a mistake to apply modern literary standards to an ancient work. There is now clear evidence that ancient authors did not work with the same commitment to the literary unities that came to hold sway in Europe. The second thing is that different kinds of material often necessitate different styles, vocabulary, and so forth. The most gifted narrator in the world would have a hard time writing a compelling manual on sacrifices. The third point rests upon the recent recognition of biblical scholars that the most fruitful approach to biblical interpretation is to treat books as wholes. If that is true, and it certainly seems to be, it is a strong argument against those books being the product of a haphazard and often unconscious evolution. Finally, it should be noted that nowhere does the Bible say that Moses wrote every word of the Pentateuch. To be sure, we are told that he wrote major parts of it, such as the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 31:9, 24), but it is nowhere said that he is the sole author of the whole. Thus, it may be entirely consistent with the facts to say that Moses, under the inspiration of the Spirit, provided the guiding direction and focus for the writing of the Pentateuch, writing large parts of it himself, directing the transcribing of oral narratives such as those of the Creation, the Flood, and the patriarchs, and directing the compilation of the additional commandments revealed at various points along the way. He is the single figure that explains the thematic unity of the whole, but it is quite possible that other hands were involved in the work with him.³

Date. As already mentioned, it seems logical that Moses would have recorded the events of the Exodus and Sinai at a time close to their occurrences. But when was that time? The earliest biblical date that we can tie into our dating system with some sense of accuracy is the death of King Solomon. This is possible because the Egyptian king lists come all the way down into the Christian era, giving the number of years each king reigned, and we can, with correlations with Assyrian lists (e.g., the Assyrian Eponym Canon) work backward to assign dates to the various pharaohs. If the pharaoh of the Exodus were named in the Bible, we could establish the date of the event to within 10 or 15 years (see Gardiner 1966:64-66). Unfortunately, that is not the case. The first pharaoh named in the Bible is Shishak, who attacked Jerusalem five years after Solomon's death (1 Kgs 14:25). Since Shishak's dates are only accurate to plus or minus about 10 years, we can say that Solomon's death occurred between 931 and 922 BC. First Kings 6:1 tells us that the founding of the Temple, which occurred in Solomon's third year (967 BC?) took place 480 years after the departure from Egypt. That date would be about 1447 BC.

But several factors complicate the matter. Foremost among these has been the claim of archaeologists in the last century that there was no evidence of a conquest of the land of Canaan before about 1225 BC. The first extrabiblical mention of Israel occurs also at about this time. As a result, it became fairly common for biblical scholars of all theological persuasions to accept a date of about 1275 BC for the Exodus (taking the 480 years to be symbolic: 12 generations of 40 years each).

However, recent reviews of the archaeological data have argued that the evidence for a 1275 conquest is no more persuasive than that for one in 1400. The result is that many archaeologists now deny that there was a conquest (and consequently, an Exodus) at all (see Finkelstein and Silberman 2001).

But another possibility is that archaeologists are using a faulty dating system. It is known that many of the Canaanite cities experienced destruction in what is now taken to be about 1500, and there is no explanation for this in the records we now have. But that date of 1500 depends on the assumed dates of one type of pottery. If that pottery actually appeared some 100 years after the date now assumed (and there is reason to believe that is the case) then these destructions, the details of which accord well with the biblical claims, would have actually occurred about 1400 BC and would provide significant evidence of the dates of the Exodus and conquest (see Bimson 1978). If Bimson is correct, we may assume that the book of Exodus was first written down in the wilderness period between about 1445 and 1405 BC.

OCCASION OF WRITING

As noted above, the literary form of the covenant God entered into with his people at Mount Sinai required that the covenant be written down (see 24:4; 34:27-28) and kept in a place that was both prominent and secure (25:16). That being so, there is every reason to believe that Moses would have also felt inspired to write down an explanation of the setting for the covenant (Beckwith 1985:127-138). The form of the covenant (see the discussion below) began with a historical prologue, "I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from . . . slavery" (20:2). That bare statement begs for amplification: Who is the LORD? Why were the people in Egypt in the first place? How did they become slaves? Why did the LORD decide to rescue them? What purpose did the LORD have in rescuing them? And those are the questions the book answers for us.

AUDIENCE

If the positions taken above are correct, the projected audience for the book of Exodus was very large. The first audience was the Israelite people of that day, who seemed to suffer from a sort of spiritual amnesia. As soon as the going got difficult, they seemed to forget everything that they had seen and heard from God, what God had done for them, and what they had solemnly committed themselves to. Within days of the Exodus itself they were wishing that they were back in Egypt (16:3). Within weeks of taking an oath in blood to keep the covenant at all costs, they were dancing around a gold calf, praising it for having delivered them from Egypt. How desperately these people needed to be reminded of all that God had done for them and revealed to them in rescuing them from Egypt and in committing himself to them in the covenant. If God's saving purpose was ever to be realized in the world through these people, then the lessons of Egypt and Sinai had to be impressed upon them.

OUTLINE

- I. Deliverance: A Revelation of Yahweh's Power (1:1–15:21)
 - A. Preparation for Deliverance (1:1–7:7)
 1. The need for deliverance (1:1–22)
 2. The preparation of the deliverer (2:1–25)
 3. The call of the deliverer (3:1–4:28)
 4. The offer of deliverance (4:29–7:7)
 - B. The Events of Deliverance (7:8–15:21)
 1. The plagues (7:8–12:30)
 - a. Moses's staff and the first series of plagues (7:8–8:19)
 - b. The second series of plagues (8:20–9:12)
 - c. The third series of plagues (9:13–10:29)
 - d. The death of the firstborn and the Passover (11:1–12:30)
 2. The Exodus (12:31–14:31)
 - a. Journey into the wilderness (12:31–13:22)
 - b. Crossing the sea (14:1–31)
 3. The song of the sea (15:1–21)
- II. Wilderness: A Revelation of Yahweh's Providential Care (15:22–18:27)
 - A. Water at Marah (15:22–27)
 - B. Manna and Quail from Heaven (16:1–36)
 - C. Water from the Rock (17:1–7)
 - D. Protection from the Amalekites (17:8–16)
 - E. Jethro's Visit to Moses (18:1–27)
 1. Jethro's faith in response to Moses's report (18:1–12)
 2. Jethro's advice for organizing the people (18:13–27)
- III. Covenant: A Revelation of Yahweh's Character (19:1–24:18)
 - A. Motivation to Accept the Covenant (19:1–25)
 - B. Presentation of the Covenant (20:1–23:33)
 1. The Ten Commandments: a summary of the terms (20:1–17)
 2. The terms of the covenant for the people (20:18–23:19)
 - a. Introduction (20:18–21)
 - b. Proper use of altars (20:22–26)
 - c. Fair treatment of slaves (21:1–11)
 - d. Cases of personal injury (21:12–36)
 - e. Protection of property (22:1–15)
 - f. Social responsibility (22:16–31)
 - g. A call for justice (23:1–13)
 - h. Three annual festivals (23:14–19)
 3. Yahweh's covenant promises (23:20–33)
 - C. Acceptance of the Covenant (24:1–18)

- IV. The Tabernacle: A Revelation of Yahweh's Purpose (25:1–40:38)
- A. Instructions for the Tabernacle and Its Service: The Right Way to God's Presence (25:1–31:18)
 1. Instructions for building the structure and furnishings (25:1–27:19)
 2. Instructions relating to the priesthood (27:20–30:38)
 3. Craftsmen: Bezalel and Oholiab (31:1–11)
 4. Instructions for the Sabbath (31:12–18)
 - B. The Gold Calf: The Wrong Way to Secure God's Presence (32:1–34:35)
 1. The making of the calf (32:1–6)
 2. The Lord's response and Moses's intercession (32:7–14)
 3. Moses's response and intercession (32:15–35)
 4. The Lord's presence will go with them (33:1–23)
 5. The renewal of the covenant (34:1–35)
 - C. Report of Building the Tabernacle: Securing Yahweh's Presence in Yahweh's Way (35:1–40:38)
 1. Instructions for the Sabbath and a call for material and skills for the Tabernacle (35:1–36:7)
 2. Building the Tabernacle (36:8–39:43)
 - a. Constructing the sanctuary (36:8–38)
 - b. Constructing the furniture for the sanctuary (37:1–29)
 - c. Constructing the courtyard and its equipment (38:1–20)
 - d. Inventory of materials (38:21–31)
 - e. Making the clothing for the priests (39:1–31)
 - f. Moses inspects the work (39:32–43)
 3. The Tabernacle completed (40:1–38)
 - a. Setting up the Tabernacle (40:1–33)
 - b. The Lord's glory fills the Tabernacle (40:34–38)

ENDNOTES

1. For further discussion of the theme of the Pentateuch, see Clines 1978 and Alexander 1998.
2. It might be said that Isaac forms a fourth illustration of the truth, but the Isaac narrative is distinctly secondary (for whatever reason) to the other three.
3. See Harrison 1969:3-82, 566-575 for a penetrating discussion of Old Testament higher criticism in general and Exodus in particular.
4. 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 10:2; 14:4, 19; 16:12; 29:46; 31:13.
5. 5:2; 8:10; 9:14, 29; 11:7; 16:6, 12; 18:11; 33:13.

COMMENTARY ON

Exodus

◆ I. Deliverance: A Revelation of Yahweh's Power (1:1–15:21)

A. Preparation for Deliverance (1:1–7:7)

1. The need for deliverance (1:1–22)

These are the names of the sons of Israel (that is, Jacob) who moved to Egypt with their father, each with his family: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, ⁴Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. ⁵In all, Jacob had seventy* descendants in Egypt, including Joseph, who was already there.

⁶In time, Joseph and all of his brothers died, ending that entire generation. ⁷But their descendants, the Israelites, had many children and grandchildren. In fact, they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful and filled the land.

⁸Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. ⁹He said to his people, "Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. ¹⁰We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country.*"

¹¹So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labor. They forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king. ¹²But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the

Egyptians became. ¹³So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. ¹⁴They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands.

¹⁵Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah: ¹⁶"When you help the Hebrew women as they give birth, watch as they deliver.* If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live." ¹⁷But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too.

¹⁸So the king of Egypt called for the midwives. "Why have you done this?" he demanded. "Why have you allowed the boys to live?"

¹⁹"The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women," the midwives replied. "They are more vigorous and have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time."

²⁰So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

²²Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Throw every newborn Hebrew boy into the Nile River. But you may let the girls live."

1:5 Dead Sea Scrolls and Greek version read *seventy-five*; see notes on Gen 46:27. 1:10 Or *will take the country*. 1:16 Hebrew *look upon the two stones*; perhaps the reference is to a birthstool.

NOTES

1:1 *that is, Jacob.* An addition to the NLT to clarify the sense of “Israel.” The Hebrew text tends to use “Israel” and “Jacob” somewhat interchangeably after Gen 32:25-31.

family. Lit., “house.” Since extended families tended to live in the same building, or “house,” the extended family is often referred to as a man’s “house” (cf. 2 Sam 7:5, 11).

1:5 *Jacob had.* Lit., “those going out of the thigh of Jacob.” “Thigh” here is euphemistic for genitalia; thus, it means those who were procreated by Jacob.

seventy. The LXX reads “75” instead of the MT’s “70” both here and in Gen 46:27 (see NLT mg). It is difficult to judge between the two. There are numerous discrepancies between the LXX and the MT in numbers. The total of the actual names cited in Gen 46:18-27 is 66; 70 would then be a round number.

1:7 The Hebrew here has no less than three verbs to express the idea of multiplication. Clearly the point is being emphasized. So also the adverb “strongly” (*me’od* [TH3966, ZH4394]) is repeated twice in reference to “became . . . powerful.”

1:10 *We must make a plan.* Lit., “come, let us be wise”; this suggests an element of shrewdness. They would not wait for events to overtake them.

1:11 *to wear them down.* The NLT captures the idea of *’anah* [TH6031, ZH6700], which has the connotation of bringing a person down either in spirit (“humiliate”) or physically (“afflict”).

1:12 *alarmed.* Heb. *quts* [TH6973, ZH7762], a rather strong term associated with dread and loathing. The Egyptians were not just worried, they were terrified. It denotes the same emotion that Ahaz felt when confronted with the Syro-Israelite attempt to depose him (Isa 7:6, 16).

1:15 *Shiphrah and Puah.* It seems likely that these two women are only named as representatives of a much larger group of midwives, since two women could not have served all the midwife needs of the entire people.

Hebrew. This word occurs 12 times in the first 10 chs of the book, and only 22 times elsewhere in the OT. Six occurrences are in Genesis in the Joseph story, and eight are in 1 Samuel in connection with the Philistines. Six others (21:2; Deut 15:12; Jer 34:9, 14) have to do with a “Hebrew” slave. The word is often used in a dismissive way by either Egyptians or Philistines. It seems to reflect not so much an ethnic group as it does a class, and a lower class, at that. Cf. Gen 14:13; Jonah 1:9.

1:16 *watch as they deliver.* Lit., “you look upon the two stones” (see NLT mg). Egyptian women squatted on two bricks to give birth.

1:21 *families.* Lit., “houses” (see note on 1:1).

COMMENTARY

It is immediately apparent from the opening verses of Exodus that the book does not stand alone. We are introduced to a family about whom the book gives no prior information. We are told that they “moved to Egypt,” but not where they moved from. We also learn (1:5) that one member of the family, Joseph, was already in Egypt, but we are not told why. The narrator assumes that the reader has already read the “prequel,” to use a neologism from the movie industry. But if the book of Exodus assumes the existence of the book of Genesis, the opposite is also true. Genesis assumes a sequel; it is not complete in itself. It has shown that the path to cursing is distrust, disbelief, and disobedience (Gen 3), and the path to blessing is trust,

belief, and obedience (Gen 12, 15, 22, and likewise in the stories of Jacob and Joseph). But the basis of trust was a succession of divine promises that, if they convinced the patriarchs that God sincerely wanted to give them what they longed for, were still largely unfulfilled at the end of Genesis.

Furthermore, as discussed in the Introduction, it is evident in Genesis that God intends for his blessing to be experienced not just by a few patriarchs, or even their extended family, but indeed by the whole world. This is implied in Genesis 4–11 where the effects of the curse are seen as extending to the whole world (i.e., all the children of Adam and Eve). Thus, if God is the sole creator and if his intention was to bless the human race, then it would not do for only Jacob and his children to share that blessing. This intention is made explicit in Genesis 12:1-3 where God says that “all the families of the earth will be blessed through” Abraham. The book of Exodus is necessary, then, to continue the saga of God’s promises: how they can be indeed fulfilled for Abraham’s descendants and what may be necessary to extend them to the whole world.

It seems very probable that some portion of the Egyptian sojourn of the Israelites occurred during the time when Semitic peoples, whom the Egyptians called “rulers of foreign nations” (anglicized as Hyksos), had invaded and were ruling northern Egypt. This was a roughly 200-year period between 1750 and 1550 BC. (Shaw [2000] considers this period to have begun about 1665. The actual length of the Egyptian sojourn is open to some question. Note that Gal 3:17 [supporting the LXX reading of 12:40] reduces it from 430 years to about 220.) It is easy to imagine that a pharaoh who himself had Semitic antecedents would have been sympathetic to the Israelites, along the lines of the pharaoh depicted in Genesis 47. With that kind of patronage, the Israelites could have easily grown numerous and “powerful” (1:7).

But about 1550, a new Egyptian dynasty arose (the eighteenth) and evicted the Hyksos, reestablishing native Egyptian rule over the entire land. Again, it is easy to imagine that this new king, whose throne name was Ahmoses, was the one “who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done” (1:8). If any residual knowledge of the great man had been preserved among later Hyksos pharaohs, it would have disappeared, or even been purged, when the new dynasty found itself in power. Anything reminiscent of the hated past would have been erased, as a later dynasty erased the memory of the heretical pharaoh Akhenaton. Sarna (1991:5) points out that the use of the verb *qum* [TH6965, ZH7756] (“arose,” 1:8; NLT, “came to power”), instead of *malak* [TH4427, ZH4887] (reigned), signals the beginning of a new dynasty.

This Hyksos background also makes it easier to understand why the Egyptians were very uneasy about the Israelites. Jacob’s family had settled in the northeast delta of Egypt just inside the border with the Sinai peninsula, near where the Suez Canal is today. The Bible calls this part of Egypt “the region of Goshen” (Gen 47:1). The Hyksos had been ejected back into the land of Canaan, but if they determined to try to come back, the only people standing between them and the heart of Egypt was a vast horde of their Semitic relatives! It is no wonder that the pharaoh was worried that “they will join our enemies” (1:10). At the same time, he was also worried

that they might leave entirely, perhaps depopulating this rich region. Thus, it is easy to see why he thought they needed to make a plan. On the one hand, they had to make it so the Israelites were not in a position to help Egypt's enemies, but on the other hand, they had to make it so that Israel would not go off with the evicted Hyksos.

The plan was simple enough. They would enslave the Israelites, not merely limiting their freedom to develop military skills, but also limiting their power to pick up and move out. But there was a further intent, and that was to break their spirits, or "wear them down" (see note on 1:11). The verb *'anah* [TH6031, ZH6700] can be translated in several ways including "afflict" and "humble" (KBL 719), but the underlying sense is "to put down." God had dramatically exalted the people and now the Egyptians were setting out to reverse that. They believed that a thoroughly subjugated people would lose the will to resist.

But, in a situation similar to that which Jacob experienced in the house of his uncle Laban, the Egyptians discovered that their stratagems could not overthrow the intentions of God. Laban consistently tried to trick Jacob and misuse him, but God continued to counteract those efforts and to bless Jacob in spite of Laban (Gen 31:6-13). So here, it seemed that the Egyptian efforts to put the Israelites down were actually having the opposite effect, and the Egyptians grew "alarmed" (1:12; see note) over the apparent failure of their plan. They were faced with a situation that did not fit their paradigms and were filled with dread. As is often the case with dictatorial power, the Egyptians tried to quell their fear with the application of force. They were "without mercy" (1:13) and "ruthless" (*perek* [TH6531, ZH7266], 1:14), apparently forcing the Israelites to engage in the building work while also working the fields to provide their own food.

The pharaohs of the eighteenth dynasty were a new breed of Egyptian leader. They were military dictators who were intent on building an empire. The pharaohs of the Old Kingdom (3000–2400 BC) and the Middle Kingdom (1950–1750 BC) seem to have been more aloof from the people and the daily affairs of the realm. Not so with these New Kingdom (1550–1325 BC) pharaohs. They were much more men of the world, and they were determined to extend their imperial borders as far up the Canaanite coast and as far down the Nile valley as necessary to forestall the invaders they believed had been responsible for the fall of the first two kingdoms. No one could excel the building efforts of the Old Kingdom pharaohs (builders of the great pyramids), but every pharaoh had to at least make an effort to reach that standard. But not only were they expected to build temples and palaces, they also needed to build military garrisons and store cities for the dramatically enlarged armies. Those kinds of projects required vast labor forces. It appears the Egyptian people themselves provided the labor for the Old Kingdom's pyramids, laboring freely for the distant and unapproachable god-king. It may well be that for the much more human pharaohs of the New Kingdom, the Egyptians did not find themselves quite so ready to donate their labor for every edifice that the pharaoh decided to build, and that made the enslavement of an underclass like the Hebrews

(see the note on 1:15) necessary. Part of this New Kingdom building frenzy was the construction of the cities of Pithom and Rameses (1:11), which are tentatively identified with Retebe and Qantir (Daba') in the northeast delta region. They would have been erected as supply bases for the troops campaigning in Canaan.

The emphasis on population growth, child-bearing, and fertility in this chapter reflects a common concern throughout the ancient world, one that is very foreign to us today. In that time—with little to mitigate the effects of natural disasters, warfare, and very high infant mortality—there was a very real danger of a people group simply disappearing off the face of the earth. The empty cities of Teotihuacán in Mexico and Angkor in Cambodia are only two examples. This fact helps to explain some of the fixation of pagan religion on matters of fertility and sexuality. Somehow power had to be gained over these natural forces to insure that “I and my family” would not be one of those that disappeared. Thus, it is hardly accidental that at the heart of God’s promises to Abraham was the assurance that his family, far from disappearing, would cover the earth like sand on the shore or stars in heaven. Furthermore, it is not accidental that every one of the three primary matriarchs—Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel—was unable to conceive in a natural way. God was making a point. Fertility and fecundity are not gods to be gained control of and manipulated for our own supposed benefit. Rather, they are gifts that fall upon those who are in a lovingly submissive relation with the Creator. So here, even though the Israelites are in a strange land, they were still experiencing the blessing of God, and they multiplied explosively (see the note on 1:7). And even when there was a concerted attempt to bring them down, God continued to multiply them.

This is why the pharaoh was finally driven to a desperate stratagem. If he let things continue as they were, the Hebrews would become more numerous than the Egyptians, at least in the northern part of the country. But if he simply turned his army loose on them, slaughtering them all, he would be depriving himself of his prime labor source. So he had to find a way to break the Israelite fertility cycle without simply erasing a large group of individual laborers. Clearly he had reason to congratulate himself on the plan he devised. He would kill all the Israelite boy babies but leave the girls alive (1:16). This would have the effect of bringing the Israelite nation to an end within not more than two generations. However, the girls, with their evidently high child-bearing potential, could be married into other lower-class groups, thus keeping the supply of slave labor constant for the foreseeable future. But the pharaoh failed to account for a group of women who feared God more than they feared the mightiest man on earth. He also failed to realize that he was arraying himself against one who was not a man nor a personified force of nature but the creator of the universe who had committed himself to make the descendants of Abraham into a great nation. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that when this pharaoh set himself to destroy the Israelite babies (in effect, God’s firstborn; cf. Exod 4:22-23; 13:2), he was setting in motion a chain of events that could only end in the death of the Egyptian firstborn.

The challenge to God’s power and veracity was now coming to a head. God had

promised Abraham that his descendants would be a great and numerous people living in the land of Canaan. But these descendants were not living in the land of Canaan, and there seemed no prospect of that ever happening. Furthermore, the single most powerful man on earth had made up his mind to wipe out the Israelite people group. If the Israelites had a problem, God also had a problem. If the Israelites needed to be delivered, God had a reason to deliver them. If he could not or would not deliver them, then everything in the book of Genesis was a dead letter. On the other hand, if he could keep his promises against these impediments, then what would that say about his nature and character? What kind of a God would *that* be, who could triumph against these odds?

And what would it take for that process of deliverance to begin? What would it take for the will of earth's mightiest man to be frustrated? It would only take a few powerless women who would dare to take God seriously. The contrast between Pharaoh and the "midwives" (1:15) could hardly be more stark. He is the emperor, they are slaves; he is a male, they are females; he is rich, they are poor; he is all-powerful, they are powerless. If there was anyone in the universe they should fear, it would be he. He had the power to snuff out their lives as casually as snuffing out a candle. But these women, two of whom (see note on 1:15) are named for all eternity while the mighty pharaoh is left nameless, refused to obey him, regardless of whatever fear they may have had. Why? Because they had a greater fear. They were more worried about offending God than they were about offending the pharaoh. They had the right perspective, the same perspective Jesus spoke about when he said we should not fear those who can only kill the body (Matt 10:28). But the fear of God is not simply a dread of what he might do to us. Rather, it is a way of living that takes into account all that God is, not only his greatness, but also his faithfulness and kindness (cf. Gen 20:11 [KJV]; Deut 10:12-13; Pss 19:9; 25:12-14). It is to live with reality in view. Thus, to fear the Lord is to do what he says. The midwives were governed by this attitude.

The response of the midwives to the pharaoh's inquiry (1:19) continues to underscore the theme of fertility. Whether their statement was true or not, it served to reinforce the Egyptians' perceptions that the Israelites were for some reason enjoying the blessing of fertility while the Egyptians were not. As a result, the pharaoh was driven to a final, desperate ploy: The Egyptian people were given the duty to go among the Hebrew slaves, get their baby boys, and "throw [them] into the Nile River" (1:22). It is somewhat odd that this method of killing the babies is the only one mentioned, but it is not quite as odd as it first appears. In the Nile delta there are literally hundreds of branches of the river, so it would not have been necessary to go for miles to reach the river and throw the babies in. It may well be that other methods for killing the babies were used as well but that this method is highlighted because of what takes place in the next chapter in connection with the Nile. Just as the attempts to wear the people down by means of oppression failed (1:11ff), so the attempt to use the Nile as the means of their destruction was doomed to failure. In fact, God was going to turn the device directly on its head and use the Nile as

a key element in the preparation of their deliverer. This was as Joseph said to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Gen 50:20). At the same time, one wonders whether the turning of the Nile to blood in the first plague (7:14-25) was a judgment for this horrible crime.

The stage is now fully set. We, the readers, understand how desperate the need for deliverance was. The Hebrew people, the descendants of Abraham, were being ruthlessly oppressed. But more than that, there was a concerted effort afoot to destroy them as a people. Clearly, there was a great human need. But the situation also posed a problem for God. If the descendants of Abraham disappeared off the earth in the context of slavery in Egypt, then he would be seen as a fraud. He could not leave these people in this condition; he needed to deliver them if his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were to have any meaning at all. Furthermore, if the world was to know him and experience his blessings, he could not leave the people in the clutches of a pagan human emperor. He would have to reveal who he is if the world was to be saved through a proper knowledge of him. The situation was very similar in the Babylonian exile hundreds of years later. Is Yahweh the only Holy One, or not? If other gods can take his people out of his hand and hold them captive, it would certainly appear he is not. At that time, God again said he would demonstrate his holiness to the world through his people. He would do so by delivering them from their captors, cleansing them from their idolatry, giving them a new spiritual sensitivity, and putting his Spirit within them (Ezek 36:19-28). Interestingly, in that passage, God says several times that Israel should not think they had deserved this deliverance but rather that God was doing it for his name's sake. That is, sin and its consequences pose a problem for God that is as serious as it is for the sinner. God needs to deliver his people to continue to demonstrate to the world who he really is and where the only hope of deliverance lies.

◆ 2. The preparation of the deliverer (2:1-25)

About this time, a man and woman from the tribe of Levi got married. ²The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was a special baby and kept him hidden for three months. ³But when she could no longer hide him, she got a basket made of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River. ⁴The baby's sister then stood at a distance, watching to see what would happen to him.

⁵Soon Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, and her attendants walked along the riverbank. When the

princess saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it for her. ⁶When the princess opened it, she saw the baby. The little boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This must be one of the Hebrew children," she said.

⁷Then the baby's sister approached the princess. "Should I go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" she asked.

⁸"Yes, do!" the princess replied. So the girl went and called the baby's mother.

⁹"Take this baby and nurse him for me," the princess told the baby's mother. "I will pay you for your help." So the woman took her baby home and nursed him.