Who Wrote Genesis? (III)

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The book of Genesis is concerned with events which all took place before the Exodus. The language, according to Professor Yahuda, suggests an Egyptian milieu. Is there anything in Genesis to indicate a later date for its composition? Many Egyptologists say that the Egyptian proper names in Genesis are of a kind that first began to be used two or three centuries after the Exodus. But Dr. Yahuda contests this, and argues that the way in which the king is referred to (by "Pharaoh" without the addition of his personal name) and the form of Joseph's Egyptian name are characteristic of the period of the Israelites' sojourn in Egypt.

A Later Date?

But there are some details in Genesis which do point to a later time than the Exodus. We may look at three. (1) Such remarks as "the Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen. 12. 6), and "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land" (Gen. 13. 7), were probably, though not necessarily, written at a time when the land was no longer in the possession of these people. (2) In Gen. 14. 14 Abram and his allies are said to have pursued the kings from the east as far as "Dan". We know from Josh. 19. 47 and Judg. 19. 29 that until that place was conquered by the tribe of Dan after the Israelites' entry into Canaan its name was Leshem or Laish. (3) Gen. 36. 31-39 gives us a list of eight kings who reigned over Edom "before there reigned any king over the children of Israel". It appears from recent archaeological research in Transjordan that Edom did not become a kingdom before the thirteenth century B.C.; the list of kings therefore probably takes us from that time down to the conquest of Edom by David about 1,000 B.C. (2 Sam. 8. 14).

But we should remember what was said in a previous article about the likelihood that additions were made in later editions of the Pentateuchal histories and laws. Such additions would not conflict with any conclusions to which the bulk of the work points in the matter of date and authorship. Let us look at these three post-Mosaic one by one.

(1) The remarks "the Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen. 12. 6) and "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land" (Gen. 13. 7) break the continuity of their contexts, and are pretty clearly parenthetic notes inserted at a later time when it was necessary to remind Israelite readers, living in Canaan, that it was not their race that inhabited the land in those early patriarchal days. (2) Gen. 14 stands by itself. The documentary theories find no place for it in their various sources, and they are no doubt right in treating it as a document of separate origin. The late Professor A. H. Sayce made the attractive suggestion that this narrative is based on a record of the event which was kept at Jerusalem (whose king Melchizedek figures in the story), and found there among the archives when David took the city. (3) It was an easy and natural thing for a later scribe to bring the genealogy of Esau up to date by adding the list of kings and "dukes" of Edom which we find at the end of Gen. 36. In the same way the genealogical tables of Gen. 10 may have been brought up to date by later additions, though there is good evidence that the first draft of this chapter reflects a period earlier than 1,000 B.C.

The Author's Sources

There is nowadays no reason why a man may not hold that Moses was the author of Genesis without thereby forfeiting his intellectual respectability. But we may still interrogate the book itself and try to discover what it has to tell us about the sources of information which were at his disposal. This was

Reeds and Palette as used by scribes in Moses' day.

(British Museum.)
what Astruc did in 1753, as we have seen, but the
criterion by which he distinguished Moses’ sources
(the various names of God used) has not proved to be
a reliable one. Mr. Stafford Wright, in How Moses
Compiled Genesis, suggests that Moses came into
possession of private records made by Joseph (with
whose career he must already have been
acquainted from Egyptian public records), and of
family records which had been kept by Judah, in
addition to a collection of other old writings, in
various languages and dialects, handed down from
father to son, which together made a chain
stretching back to Adam, whom he identifies with
“the first of the true modern civilised men”.

Another writer who has followed up this line
of research in considerable detail is Air Com­modore P. J. Wiseman, whose book New Dis­coveries in Babylonia about Genesis (Marshall,
Morgan & Scott, 6s.) should be consulted by
all who are interested in pursuing this matter
further. He bases his thesis on the recurring formula,
“These are the generations of...” or the like, which
shows good reason for translating the word for
“generations” in this formula (Heb. toledoth) by
“history”, and points out that the phrase is used in
Genesis “to point back to the origins of the family
history”. The formula, he holds, is the concluding
sentence of what precedes it and not the introductory
sentence of what follows; it serves as the colophon
of each of a series of documents which went to the
compilation of Genesis; and the person named in the
formula is either the writer of the preceding record
or the owner of the tablet containing it. And it is
certain that the proper appreciation of the signifi­
cance of this recurring formula in Genesis will supply
the key to the problem of the book’s compilation.
I believe that Air Commodore Wiseman is right in
inferring from these formulae the existence of a
series of records reaching back into antediluvian days.
Nothing that we know about the origin of writing
in Western Asia conflicts with this position.

We may sum up in the words of Dr. J. Garrow
Duncan in New Light on Hebrew Origins (S.P.C.K.,
1936), where he repeats a contention he had made in
1908, “that the original documents of the Old Testa­
ment were written as early as the period of serv­
dom, or emancipation from, Egypt, and that Moses
himself wrote these narratives... If Moses did not
write these narratives of the Pentateuch, it must
have been an author who had a similar upbringing and
intimate acquaintance with Egyptian knowledge,
legends, ideas and beliefs as well as Egyptian lan­
guages and customs” (pp. 178f.). Moses—or some­
one who had the same experience and qualifications
as Moses. Why not Moses?*

*In addition to books mentioned above reference should be
made to Dr. Yahuda’s The Accuracy of the Bible (Heinemann,
1934), in which he presents in more popular form the conclu­
sions of his larger work on the language of the Pentateuch; and
a little book published by the Bible League about 1933, The
Author of the Pentateuch, by A. H. Finn (author of an earlier
and much more elaborate work, The Unity of the Pentateuch.)

VI.

No. (vii): Restoration Belief (continued)

ONE of the most striking features of the
fossil record is the suddenness with which
new and well-marked types appear. The
earlier sedimentary rocks, representing an
immense period of time, contain no definite
fossil remains, although many of them are
perfectly suited to have preserved relics of life
had any existed; but at the very beginning of
the fossil record, in rocks about five hundred
million years old, life bursts upon us in great
abundance, with a mass of creatures belonging
to nearly all the main groups existing today.
And, after that, we find the most remarkable
new types always appearing suddenly, and
usually in great numbers and variety; while
older types often disappear equally suddenly,
in a way that is hard to explain.

For this reason, geologists used to believe
that there have been many total destructions
of life upon earth, each destruction being followed
by a complete new creation of life forms. Our
present world of life was held to be the last of
these general creations, after the annihilation
of its immediate predecessor. This belief,
which was called the doctrine of “Catastro­
phism,” obviously suits Genesis 1, as the emi­
nent Scottish theologian, Dr. Thomas Chalmers
(1780-1847), pointed out.1 And to this view
the present writer still holds, both as a geologist
and as a Christian.

Why, then, is this doctrine, once practically
universal among geologists, now generally
regarded as “disproved”? For that it is
actually disproved, the present writer flatly
denies. The fact is, that its early supporters
made two bad mistakes. Thus they assumed

(continued on page 262.)

Straightforward Psychology

Mr. Harold Thorp hopes to resume these
widely-appreciated studies next month.