

The Importance of Genesis for the Study of History

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Starting Points

History textbooks generally start by chronicling the first civilizations from which archaeological evidence can be obtained. From fragments of pottery, weapons, tools, and other artifacts, historians reconstruct the stories of ancient peoples. While this is a helpful way to learn about cultures and civilizations of the past, this methodology alone give us an incomplete record of the past. When used alone, this method of composing history from empirical data assumes a naturalistic worldview.

What is the role of the Bible in history? In particular, what is the role of the book of Genesis? Secular histories assume that the Bible is merely a cultural artifact of an ancient Semitic people known as the Hebrews. However, the God of the Bible is not merely a tribal God, but He is the Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth. He has left us a record of the creation of the world, the first families on earth, and the first civilizations.

The Bible is God's special revelation. It is given by the inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16) and is without error in all that it teaches. So, rather than being regarded as less reliable than secular history textbooks, the Bible should be seen as more reliable. We are to come to man-made history books in a spirit of humility and teachability and respect for the knowledge that we can glean from the writers of such books. However, we must also recognize that their biases will influence their works, both in what they choose to include, and how they tell the story of history.

Scripture is useful for the study of history. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (New American Standard Bible).¹ The study of history is a good work. The study of how God, in His providence, governs all His creatures and all their actions, for the purpose of bringing glory to Himself and discipling the nations is not only enriching to the mind, but edifying to the soul. History shows us how God has brought forth His kingdom in the past, and how He continues to do so today. The Bible teaches us that it is God who acts, exalting Christ, and bringing forth His Kingdom. Certainly, there are episodes and periods in history that are dark and filled with evil. Nevertheless, God is carrying out His will, even in these times. Joseph's statement to his brothers concerning being sold into slavery sums up how God works in difficult times. "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive" (Gen.50:21 [Revised Standard Version]).

¹ All Scripture references are from the English Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

The Importance of Biblical Creation

Beliefs about one's origins influence one's destiny. Beliefs about creation determine one's purpose and goals for living. Modern naturalism denies special creation. The postmodern denial of any metanarratives that purport to tell the human story is a consequence of naturalistic evolution. The purpose of human action then becomes self-fulfillment, which is the contemporary narrative of 21st century America.

The Biblical narrative provides us with a comprehensive framework to interpret all of human life and action. The universe did not come into being through impersonal forces, but God created it. He separated the land from the seas. He created light to shine through the chaos. He put the heavenly bodies into orbit. He made the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the creeping things on the ground, and created man, in His own image, with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 10). Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were given the Cultural Mandate right after creation. God blessed them and said "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28 RSV). Our first parents sinned against God, and fell from their original righteousness, bringing alienation from God, one another, the creation itself, and even from their own bodies and souls. However, God instituted a plan of redemption, in which he promised to crush the head of the serpent who deceived Eve by his craftiness. History is the record of God keeping this promise, and bringing forth His kingdom from the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, and subduing the earth to Himself through the efforts of righteous men and women. History ends with Jesus comes again as King, to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate His eternal kingdom.

As God is the driving force of redemptive history, He is personally and providentially directing individuals, families, and nations toward His goal of "the earth being filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas" (Hab. 2:20). As men and women are redeemed by faith in the person and work of Christ, their hearts, minds, and wills are transformed so that they will seek God's glory, that they will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and that they will pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and put feet to their prayers.

The Bible also explains why history is filled with wars, strife, famines, and natural disasters. Apart from being created in the image of God, there is no adequate explanation for the goodness of man. Apart from the Fall, there is not a sufficient explanation for the evil of man. The Fall brought forth death; immediate spiritual death for Adam and Eve, and consequent physical death. The Fall turned husband against wife, brother against brother, family against family, and nation against nation. It turned man's relationship with creation from one which easily yielded the produce of the earth to an exploitative relationship.

Genesis 1-3 also explains the foundational relationships of humanity: the worship of God, marriage and family, and work and rest. The Cultural Mandate, given in Genesis

1:28, demonstrates the foundational tasks of the human race. "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it (King James Version). According to Paul Jehle, the word "replenish" is not limited to human reproduction, but it encompasses the raw materials of the earth, recreates them, and refines them. Human beings "take something that we observe, then break it down to its essential ingredients and reform it into a different form." Jehle writes:

The charter that God made with Adam was threefold. First, "Be fruitful and multiply," which is mankind's basic right to life. Second, "fill or replenish, the earth." The Hebrew word fill or replenish involved the scientific method, meaning to take something that we observe, then break it down to its essential ingredients and reform it into a different form. It is a concept that requires the right to liberty. When we have liberty, we can take natural resources and then refill the earth with the same natural resources in different forms through invention and technology. Third, "subdue the earth and rule, or have dominion, over it," which is the right to own private property.²

In the New Covenant, "taking dominion" extends to disciple-making. Not only is man called to common grace activities to replenish the earth, but it extends to evangelism and discipleship. The New Testament parallel is the Great Commission, given in Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The main verb in the sentence is "disciple," or "make disciples." Jesus did not envision only having a few Bible studies in each of the nation. If "all authority in heaven and earth" and that "He will be with us always," it follows that this task of discipling the nations will have some success.

The Necessity of Special Creation

Some have recently alleged that a literal view of the historicity of Adam and Eve is not necessary for a faithful reading of the Bible.³ However, if one denies the special

²Quoted in Kyle Mantyla | October 25, 2012 4:03 pm, "Barton Offers 'Another Example of the Many Biblical Principles Directly Incorporated into the Constitution'," Right Wing Watch, accessed June 07, 2017, <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/barton-offers-another-example-of-the-many-biblical-principles-directly-incorporated-into-the-constitution/>.

³ See, for example, Peter Enns, Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University in *The Evolution of Adam: What The Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), and Rachel Held Evans, New York Times Bestselling Author in: *Faith Unraveled: How a Girl Who Knew*

creation and historicity of Adam and Eve, human history and redemption come crashing down like a house of cards. From Adam and Eve, come the generations of all humanity, both righteous and sinful. From Adam and Eve, we know that human beings were originally created in righteousness, fell into sin, and have the promise of redemption. Apart from the existence of Adam and Eve, there is no Federal Headship. Fallen humanity is "in Adam." 1 Corinthians 15:22 states: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (KJV). According to Paul, one is either "in Adam" or "in Christ." All who are "in Adam" are in bondage to sin and death, just as Adam was. Christ, however, is the Second Adam who overcame Satan through His death and resurrection. All who are in Christ have overcome sin and death through Him. Fallen man is "in Adam." Redeemed man is "in Christ." Apart from being created "in Adam," there is no possibility of being redeemed in Christ.⁴ Denying the historicity of Adam and Eve repudiates the covenant of redemption.

Implications for Civilizations

The implications for civilizations are another area in which the Genesis record challenges modern secular assumptions. A naturalistic, evolutionary bias would lead one to believe that the human race was primitive, and that there were no advanced tools or cities until human beings had been on the earth for at least a few thousand years. However, Cain brought forth produce from the earth, which would lead one to assume that he was not a mere hunter-gatherer. He built a city, which he named after his son, Enoch. A city necessitates people living together in some kind of planned social contract, banding together for protection, and most likely, some form of division of labor. Only several generations after Cain, Jubal "was the father of those who play the lyre and the pipe" (Gen. 4:21). So, playing music skillfully was a part of the lifestyle of the people of the city of Enoch. We also see that Tubal-Cain "was the forger of all instruments of iron and bronze" (Gen. 4:22). These facts challenge the notion that it took human beings thousands of years to farm; create cities with division of labor, iron tools, and produce expressions of culture such as music. After the Flood, Nimrod built Nineveh and several other cities.

Another reason for early civilizations being rather advanced even prior to the flood is that it took many years for the genetic code to break down. In the generations after creation and also after the Flood, brothers, sisters, and other close blood relatives married because there was no one else for them to marry. In order for the human race to successfully propagate itself, the afflictions that today come to offspring of close blood relatives could not have happened.

The Tower of Babel provides another piece of evidence for the argument that civilizations became advanced soon after Creation. To have the ambition to "create a tower with its top in the heavens" implies that this structure wasn't two, three, or four stories high. Estimates have been made that the tower was 300 feet high, or about 20-30

All The Answers Learned To Ask Questions. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

⁴ See Romans 5:12-21

stories.⁵ Advanced construction techniques would be necessary to build a structure of this height. Consider, for example, the Flatiron Building in New York City, which is considered to be the first skyscraper. It was built in 1902, and is 302 feet tall. Paul H. Seely, in an article in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, dated the construction of the Tower of Babel at from 3500-3000 BC.⁶ Likewise, the time frame of the construction of the pyramids is estimated to be 2600-2400 BC, with the Great Pyramid being 450 feet tall.

Many other examples of ancient civilizations performing great feats of construction and engineering could be cited. However, the purpose here is to challenge the notion that the human race began as hunter-gatherers, and only were able to create civilizations and cultures after being on earth for thousands of years. The Bible makes it clear that technological development takes place early in the history of the human race. Even though archaeology confirms this, the prevailing evolutionary assumptions are that even walking on two legs was a slow, evolutionary process.⁷

So, one can see that interpreting human history from the perspective of Genesis may change one's assumptions concerning the purpose of history, the role of God as the creator and governor of history, the role of human beings in the world, the origin and nature of human conflict, the goal of history, and the progress of building civilizations and developing culture and technology.

⁵ See Geoffrey Thomas in "Genesis 11:1 The Tower of Babel." Alfred Place Baptist Church. January 04, 2013. Accessed June 22, 2017. <http://www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk/index.php/sermons/genesis/111-the-tower-of-babel/>.

⁶ Seely, Paul H. . "The Date of the Tower of Babel and Some Theological Implications." *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001): 15-38.

⁷ See, for example Wayman, Erin. "Becoming Human: The Evolution of Walking Upright." Smithsonian.com. August 06, 2012. Accessed June 22, 2017. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/becoming-human-the-evolution-of-walking-upright-13837658/>.

