

**HANDBOOK FOR
BIBLE CLASSSED. THE
BOOK OF GENESIS**

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Handbook for bible classed. The book of Genesis by Marcus Dods & Alexander Whyte

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MARCUS DODS & ALEXANDER WHYTE

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HANDBOOKS
FOR
BIBLE CLASSES.

EDITED BY
✓
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AND
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GENESIS.—MARCUS DODS, D.D.

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THE
BOOK OF GENESIS.

With Introduction and Notes

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THE BOOK OF GENESIS.

INTRODUCTION.

WHEN you go to see a picture, the artist is very careful to set you where the right light may fall upon it ; otherwise its beauties are blurred, its figures indistinct. And unless we stand in a writer's point of view, what was perfectly lucid and definite to him is confused or vague to us. Without understanding a writer's aim, we may derive much information from his book ; but we shall certainly miss many of his points, and be at a distinct disadvantage as readers. It is not without reason, therefore, that among the first questions we put about a book is this, What is the author's aim ? This question cannot always be answered from one perusal, sometimes not from many perusals. And hence it has become the familiar custom of literary men to introduce their books to the public by means of a preface, in which they indicate their object in publishing, and put their readers in an attitude of intelligence towards what is to follow. From what a world of labour and misapprehension would a few words of preface have saved us in connection with the book before us ! How thankful should we be for even a title-page giving a brief description of the book, and telling us the name of the author, and the place and date of publication ! We have not so much as a *title*. So barely does the book come down to us, that in its original Hebrew it goes by the name of its first word ; and not till it was translated did it win for itself the well-chosen name by which it has ever since been known. This namelessness suits its archaic character, and is a mark of its old-world origin. It comes upon our hands as a foundling, and it is only from its own lineaments and language we can learn anything of its origin.

One glance is enough to show us that the style of writing we have here to do with is the narrative style. Perhaps it is not too bold to say that here we have the beginning of *history*, the earliest written history. For such records as the Chinese annals and the Egyptian papyri and inscriptions, recording dynasties and deeds, are not history. You can have history only where you have a connection and progress ; some inner unity linking together successive periods, and forming of them one whole. There is no unity like the unity of God's purpose. It is this which carries on from age to age the real history of man ; it is this which links Adam with Christ, the origin with the consummation of things. So that wherever there was any consciousness of God and His purpose, there history could not fail to appear.

Again, you can only have very imperfect history in any nation which does not understand its position in the world, as well as in time. Even in the histories of Greece and Rome there is a limitation of view which spoils the history. It is only of their own country's growth the writers speak ; all other interests are subordinated to theirs. In Genesis, on the contrary, the race that is the immediate subject of the history is subordinated to the world at large. It is "that all nations may be blessed," that Abraham is called. What was it that in the earliest dawn, when all other races were but struggling into self-consciousness, gave to this Hebrew race a consciousness of its connection with all men, and thereby led them to a history worthy of the name ? It was here again the light brought by the consciousness of God and His purpose that showed them what else had been dark.

This book, then, is history ; but it is not a history of the whole world. The writer from the very first shows his determination ruthlessly to disappoint curiosity, and to pass by the most inviting openings. He is like a specialist leading you through a great museum, who merely throws open a door in passing, and lets you have a glimpse of exquisite sculpture or paintings before which you would like to spend hours, or treasures worth a king's ransom, or inscriptions which once determined the fate of empires ; but none of

these detain him, he hurries you on to his own proper department. He is a guide who is never seduced from the highway that leads to his own goal by the most alluring bypaths and branch roads. He merely tells you in a word where these roads lead to, and holds on his own way.

Neither is it a full history of any one people that we have here. You look in vain for information regarding commerce and literature, and much else that constitutes the life of a people. The later writers of this same history dismiss with something like contemptuous indifference the ordinary details which fill court chronicles and the annals of kings. "The rest of the acts of so and so,—if any one is curious enough to inquire about them,—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" It was a single thread of the history that they were following. As the historian of a nation's literature or commerce neglects much which a military historian includes, and as the writer who undertakes to trace the growth of our political institutions must select his material, so do these Biblical historians confine themselves to the exhibition of one element, though that the ruling element, in the national life. They seek to exhibit their nation as the theocracy. They trace its growth and fortunes as the kingdom in which God was pleased to rule and manifest Himself in a special way. And it is by this ruling aim we must measure the significance and importance of all they record. It is when we view the events they relate in connection with the origin, growth, and fortunes of God's kingdom on earth that we see them in their true light, and as the author saw them.

This Book of Genesis, then, stands first in the Canon of Scripture, because it gives an account of the origin of God's kingdom on earth. It was in the exodus that kingdom was born, at Sinai it received its legislation, in Canaan it was put in possession of its land. But these fundamental events of the history of religion could not have been understood without the Book of Genesis, in which we are led to the root and source of all, and are shown man's original relation to God, how that relation was marred by sin, how God restored it, and especially how the seed of His promise fructifying in the heart of

faithful Abraham produced at last a compact people of God, a kingdom in which God could rule, and from which He could bless the race. It is a Book of Origins, but specially of the origin of all that has a bearing upon the kingdom of God upon earth. The origin of those institutions and customs and laws which the Mosaic code took up and perpetuated is related—the origin of the Sabbath, of marriage, of sacrifice, of the prohibition to eat blood, of the capital punishment of murder, of circumcision, and so forth—all these origins are carefully related. Much may be omitted that the archæologist seeks to know, but nothing is omitted that is requisite to the clear understanding of the origin of that people and kingdom, whose history is the history of God's revelation of Himself. And to understand with what a master hand and in what never-fading colours these origins have been sketched, one has only to look into his own mind and recognise the ineffacable, indelible impressions there existing.

If it be asked, What materials does the author seem to have used for the fulfilment of this aim? the answer cannot be perfectly definite. The idea that he merely sat down and wrote without any consultation of documents, inquiring research into facts, or recording of traditions, will not stand examination. But to the careful reader one thing becomes perfectly clear, and that is, that the author is not engaged in writing a free and continuous history, as a man may write from personal observation, but that he is compiling or piecing together parallel accounts.

Neither has the author been at any pains to conceal this. He has been at greater pains to collect and preserve all the available information, than to piece it together into one fluent and smooth-flowing narrative. He allows you to see the joinings. He does not fuse the original stories and run them out again in one continuous stream into an entirely new mould, but bolts them together, for the most part solid and intact as he finds them. It is to this circumstance we owe the singular simplicity and everlasting beauty of the Book of Genesis. The grace and vividness of these stories that we never weary of reading, and in which each character stands out with a