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COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

Genesis

by Matthew Henry

To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:

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AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES, CALLED

GENESIS

We have now before us the holy Bible, or *book*, for so *bible* signifies. We call it *the book*, by way of eminency; for it is incomparably the best book that ever was written, the book of books, shining like the sun in the firmament of learning, other valuable and useful books, like the moon and stars, borrowing their light from it. We call it the holy book, because it was written by holy men, and indited by the Holy Ghost; it is perfectly pure from all falsehood and corrupt intention; and the manifest tendency of it is to promote holiness among men. The great things of God's law and gospel are here *written* to us, that they might be reduced to a greater certainty, might spread further, remain longer, and be transmitted to distant places and ages more pure and entire than possibly they could be by report and tradition: and we shall have a great deal to answer for if these things which belong to our peace, being thus committed to us in black and white, be neglected by us as a strange and foreign thing, ^{<382>}Hosea 8:12. The scriptures, or writings of the several inspired penmen, from Moses down to St. John, in which divine light, like that of the morning, shone gradually (the sacred canon being now completed), are all put together in this blessed Bible, which, thanks be to God, we have in our hands, and they make as perfect a day as we are to expect on this side of heaven. Every part was good, but all together very good. This is the *light that shines in a dark place* (^{<319>}2 Peter 1:19), and a dark place indeed the world would be without the Bible.

We have before us that part of the Bible which we call the *Old Testament*, containing the acts and monuments of the church from the creation almost to the coming of Christ in the flesh, which was about four thousand years — the truths then revealed, the laws then enacted, the devotions then paid, the prophecies then given, and the events which concerned that distinguished body, so far as God saw fit to preserve to us the knowledge of them. This is called a *testament*, or *covenant* (*Diatheke*), because it was

a settled declaration of the *will* of God concerning man in a federal way, and had its force from the designed death of the great testator, *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, ^{<408>}Revelation 8:8. It is called the *Old Testament*, with relation to the *New*, which does not cancel and supersede it, but crown and perfect it, by the bringing in of that better hope which was typified and foretold in it; the Old Testament still remains glorious, though the New far exceeds in glory, ^{<409>}2 Corinthians 3:9.

We have before us that part of the Old Testament which we call the *Pentateuch*, or five books of Moses, that servant of the Lord who excelled all the other prophets, and typified the great prophet. In our Saviour's distribution of the books of the Old Testament into the *law*, the *prophets*, and the *psalms*, or *Hagiographa*, these are the *law*; for they contain not only the laws given to Israel, in the last four, but the laws given to Adam, to Noah, and to Abraham, in the first. These five books were, for aught we know, the first that ever were written; for we have not the least mention of any *writing* in all the book of Genesis, nor till God bade Moses write (^{<1074>}Exodus 17:14); and some think Moses himself never learned to write till God set him his copy in the writing of the ten Commandments upon the tables of stone. However, we are sure these books are the most ancient writings now extant, and therefore best able to give us a satisfactory account of the most ancient things.

We have before us the first and longest of those five books, which we call *Genesis*, written, some think, when Moses was in Midian, for the instruction and comfort of his suffering brethren in Egypt: I rather think he wrote it in the wilderness, after he had been in the mount with God, where, probably, he received full and particular instructions for the writing of it. And, as he framed the tabernacle, so he did the more excellent and durable fabric of this book, exactly according to the pattern shown him in the mount, into which it is better to resolve the certainty of the things herein contained than into any tradition which possibly might be handed down from Adam to Methuselah, from him to Shem, from him to Abraham, and so to the family of Jacob. *Genesis* is a name borrowed from the Greek. It signifies the *original*, or *generation*: fitly is this book so called, for it is a history of originals — the creation of the world, the entrance of sin and death into it, the invention of arts, the rise of nations, and especially the planting of the church, and the state of it in its early days. It is also a history of generations — the generations of Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc., not endless, but useful genealogies. The beginning of the New Testament

is called *Genesis* too (~~and~~ Matthew 1:1), *Biblos geneseos*, the book of the *genesis*, or *generation*, of Jesus Christ. Blessed be God for that Book which shows us our remedy, as this opens our wound. Lord, upon open our eyes, that we may see the wondrous things both of thy law and gospel!