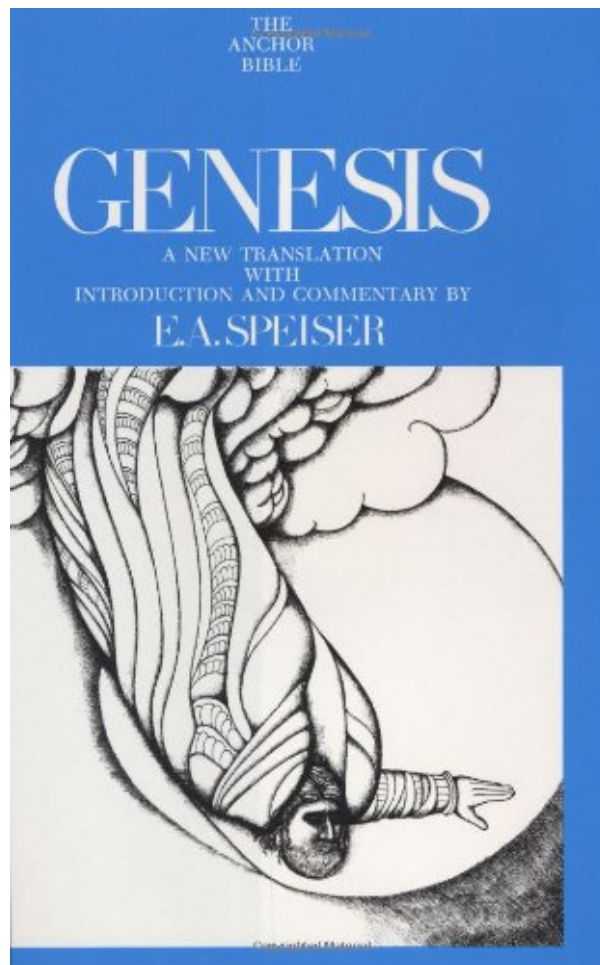


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Genesis is Volume I in the Anchor Bible series of new book-by-book translations of the Old and New Testaments and Apocrypha. Ephraim Avigdor Speiser was University Professor and Chairman of the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

Using authoritative evidence from archaeology, linguistics, and comparative religion, the author presents some startling conclusions about the first book of the Bible. He proves, for example, that the famous opening phrase, "In the beginning," is not true to the meaning of the first word, that the designation "Torah" for the Pentateuch is a misnomer, that the best-known stories of Genesis are grounded in pagan mythology. Speiser is an iconoclast in the tradition of Abraham; he exposes the false in order to help achieve truth. As he says in his introduction, he "is not motivated by mere pedantry...but by the hope that each new insight may bring us that much closer to the secret of the Bible's universal and enduring appeal."

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Most helpful customer reviews

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

An Essential Stop for the Serious Student

By Henry E. Neufeld

Speiser is an expert linguist and critical scholar. Other reviews comment on his support of the documentary hypothesis, but that is practically universal amongst critical scholars. The question is just how much value one gets from that understanding when interpreting. Speiser belongs to that older school of critical scholarship that tends to believe that having identified source and redactional elements, one's work is done.

Some current scholarship, on the other hand seems to take the view that you can dismiss such considerations and still deeply understand the text. Often either the full acceptance or the dismissal of form, source, and redaction criticism are done without serious consideration.

What Speiser will do for the student of Genesis is point out clearly the more or less standard division of the sources. In many commentaries it is very difficult to tell what is what in source theory of the Pentateuch, and sometimes students dismiss as excessively complex or poorly supported something they have never really been able to see clearly portrayed. Speiser will help with that task.

Speiser's volume is not my favorite Genesis commentary. I personally prefer von Rad Genesis: A Commentary (Old Testament Library). While he also strongly supports the documentary hypothesis, he tends to build on the theological themes more effectively than does Speiser.

I rate this as a good buy for a serious student of Genesis. Don't expect it to lead you directly to sermon points if you're a pastor. It's more for background study that will fuel your thinking and bear fruit later. A more directly theological commentary, such as von Rad, Waltke (Genesis: A Commentary), Brueggeman (Genesis: Interpretation : A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)), or even the shorter volume by Derek Kidner in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary series (Genesis (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)) will be better for Saturday night sermon prep!

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

A Classic!

By TroughtonFan

What a wonderful, remarkable book this is! In presenting this strangest book in the Bible, Speiser rises far above merely recounting (and very well, too) the results of centuries of source-criticism that finds not Moses as the author, but no less than 4 different authors, each with his (or her) own highly distinctive authorial personalities -- the Shakespearean J, the dream-mystic E, the "begat" ancestral-line archivist P, and the redactor(s) R. The translation is crystal clear and therefore even more enchanting than ever, with dazzling scholarship behind virtually every word choice made. Speiser establishes one of his central theses -- that J, E, P and R felt constrained by the sincerest promptings of faith and honor to give us the most authentic retelling of the ancient traditions they could, with the highest possible respect for their sources -- convincingly indeed. To cite a powerful example, Speiser argues that the rare reference to Abraham as "the Hebrew" must be

derived from a non-Hebrew chronicle source (now long lost), and so stands as independent proof of that Patriarch's existence. Speiser knows and shares what a treasure trove of unimaginably ancient lore the Table of Nations is. He links the "sons of the gods/ daughters of men" memory with the Flood, which immediately follows it in the Genesis narrative, a connection I'd not seen before. But more than all these, he allows the magic of these ancient dawntime stories to shine with all the fresh glory of the rising sun. What a different world from ours emerges! The Serpent's trick in the Garden is more cunningly calculating than most will realize or remember. The very accessible Yahweh dines with Abraham with His two companions in a tent, and informally shares over luncheon that He will destroy Sodom. The blind, elderly Isaac sniffs the robe Jacob (in disguise) is wearing to make sure his blessing goes (he thinks) to Esau, whose aroma he compares to the wilderness and the hunt. Jacob enjoys the regular and enthusiastic favors of two wives in addition to their slaves, and one wife sells a night with him to the other wife for a day's gathering of mandrakes. Joseph forgives his brothers. The Patriarchs are shepherds. The consideration for the Covenant is mass circumcision, and the contract is sealed when Abraham walks between two butchered animals. The mysterious Melchizedek receives the Patriarch's tithe. Solemn oaths are taken by placing one's hand under the oblige's thigh. "Dynasty" set in the second and first millennia BC. A beautiful lost world, and a great read in Speiser's incomparable retelling. Get it and enjoy it.

25 of 28 people found the following review helpful.

Essential for the serious student

By Michael Baxter

Speiser was one of the greatest experts on Semitic languages of the 20th century. This book is essential reading for anyone who wants to know what the Hebrew really means. There is also a lot of helpful background material (though after nearly 40 years this is no longer up to date) and thoughtful analysis. Speiser was no fundamentalist, and was often prepared to say that the text is not to be taken literally, but he was less "critical" than many authors. He believed firmly in the Documentary Hypothesis, and each passage is carefully dissected into its J, E and P components, but this material can be ignored by anyone (including myself) who rejects that hypothesis. There is probably no single commentary that would suffice for a detailed study of Genesis, but this book should be one of the commentaries at hand for the serious student.

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