

# **PREFACE**

## **THE AUTHOR OF THIS COMMENTARY**

No scholar or any other interpreter approaches the Bible without presuppositions which to one degree or another have the potential to bias his or her reading. In our postmodern age with its hermeneutic of suspicion, one way to mitigate this problem is to forthrightly acknowledge one's potential biases. You should know who I am before you hear what I have to say about the book of Genesis. I write unashamedly as an evangelical Christian who accepts the entire trustworthiness of Scripture. Although I do not think that this set of convictions commits me to a particular way of reading Genesis, it does affect the way I quite intentionally interpret Genesis within the textual, historical, and theological contexts of the entire Old and New Testaments. I quite intentionally read Genesis as the foundational part of the macronarrative of the Bible and seek for readings that make sense of that macronarrative. I am also a Caucasian male born in America's upper midwest, but have spent a significant part of my adult life teaching and at times living in Western Europe. In recent years I have spent a considerable amount of my life offering graduate theological education to church leaders from the former Soviet bloc of countries. As I have had the privilege of teaching these men and women I have been struck by how their experience parallels the experience of dispersed Jewish people who came to accept the Pentateuch as Scripture and the experience of the earliest Christians.

## **THE AUDIENCES OF THIS COMMENTARY**

In line with the aims of this series of commentaries I have tried to write at a level an adult Bible school teacher could understand. Some of the earliest memories of my father are watching him get up early on Sunday morning, taking out the old Bible Study Textbook series commentaries, usually along with William Barclay's Daily Study Bible if he was working on the New Testament, and preparing a Sunday school les-

son with great care. I have been told by numerous people that he was a good teacher. In the main text of the commentary I have tried to write for someone like him. A first-generation Christian, he loved the Bible and especially appreciated the insights of careful scholars when they wrote accessibly. He knew no Greek or Hebrew, but nevertheless wanted to know as much as he could about the original language.

In the footnotes of the commentary I have a different audience in mind. Seminary students, ministers, and pastors who once studied Hebrew, and even professors will find more specific information on the details of the original language as well as pointers to the broader scholarly discussion about Genesis. The Hebrew words given in the text follow the convention of the series. Many of these Hebrew words are either relatively well-known or their pronunciation is significant for appreciating the text's nuances. For any words needing more technical explanation or discussion, I have left the information in the footnotes. I hope that the Hebrew and the footnotes will not discourage readers without the requisite background to appreciate them. The text can safely be read without the Hebrew or the footnotes.

## A NOTE ON THE NIV

Anyone reading this commentary will notice that I sometimes disagree with the most popular translation of the Bible in the American church today, the New International Version. Although this text is printed in the commentary, the basis for my comments is the Hebrew text. The NIV is popular because it reads well while still retaining an essentially literal approach to translation. It thus lies somewhere between a more literalistic translation like the New American Standard and a paraphrase like the New Living Translation. Unfortunately at times the noble desire to provide a translation that reads well results in missing subtle clues to the perspective of the Hebrew narrator of Genesis. In particular the repetitive nature of Hebrew narration is received as cumbersome and boring to contemporary readers. The natural reaction to this perceived repetitiveness is to use variation to create interest. But this sometimes results in obscuring the point which such repetition makes.

I fear that having come to the end of this two-volume commentary that some readers will infer that I regard the NIV as an untrustworthy translation. I do not. While at times it reflects the reformed theology of many evangelical Bible scholars, the NIV is a solid translation which Christians can safely read and find comfort in and motivation for living for Christ. But as a translation for careful study of the text the NIV's

periphrastic tendencies sometimes obscure the subtle clues which Hebrew narrative uses to display its viewpoints. Hebrew narrators usually stay in the background and make very few explicit comments on the events and human persons in the narrative. The narrator's perspective must be carefully teased out from the clues given in the narrative. The comments (especially in the footnotes) about this should not be regarded as a general criticism of the NIV.