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Genesis and Early Man (Book Review)

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Book Review

by John M. Zinkand

Genesis and Early Man--by Arthur Custance. Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975. Vol. II of "The Doorway Papers." 331 pages. Reviewed by Russell Maatman, Professor of Chemistry.

Just because there are so many aspects to the continuing debate on origins, some of those aspects do not receive the kind of attention they should. Here is one question which many Christians have asked, but which has nevertheless not received extensive attention: "If it is assumed that the first chapters of Genesis give us a truthful account of the history of early man, then what connection can be made between that account and the earliest recorded history of the different parts of the world?" To put it another way, what happens when we replace the "prehistory" section of the typical history textbook with the Genesis account of early man?

Custance shows that an amazing number of things happen. Quite possibly he has made a major contribution to our understanding of how modern races of men are related to the eight survivors of the Flood. At the same time (and this is almost his major point) he shows how human artifacts and human fossils have been improperly related to the supposed evolution of man.

Before summarizing Custance's argument, certain points must be made. First, Custance writes from a Christian point of view and he insists on taking the Bible seriously. Second, he has obviously read widely for many years. As a result, he is able to muster hundreds of references. Although his work should be analyzed by others expert in the field, it seems certain that the breadth of his knowledge will enable him to hold his own in any debate. Third, it is refreshing to read the work of a Bible believer who is scholarly but not dogmatic. Unfortunately, it sometimes seems that among those who discuss origins that one can prove his orthodoxy best by being most intolerant of the ideas of others. Custance actually has the grace to admit in one place that his argument may be oversimplified. May his tribe increase! Fourth, since Custance has taken on the mammoth task of outlining what occurred during the prehistorical period in the various parts of

the world, he is almost certain to have made some mistakes. He should, however, be commended for his effort rather than criticized for some mistakes which may have been made. What seems certain is that the main part of his thesis will stand. Fifth, it is probably inevitable in a discussion of the history of man that the age of man will enter in. Custance seems to feel that man is only a few thousand years old, and he puts forth some effort to prove his point. In point of fact, it does not seem that his thesis, which puts primary emphasis on the order of events and not the time between them, does not need an Adam who lived only (say) five thousand years ago. On this one matter his argument does not appear to be very strong, and it may be that those who argue that man is 25,000-50,000 years old have a better case.

Custance's thesis is an outline of post-Flood history. Noah and the seven others on the ark were the only humans left, and they started civilization in the Middle East. For a time after the Flood, the population increased but did not spread very far geographically and remained fairly homogeneous. The three families of man were the Japhethites, who became the Indo-Europeans or Caucasoids; the Hamites, who became the Mongoloid and Negroid peoples; and the Shemites or Semites, who became the Hebrews, Arabs, Assyrians, and others. The family of Ham became politically dominant and attempted to prevent more dispersal than had already occurred by erecting a monument visible to many people. They brought upon themselves a judgment which led to their dispersal over the whole earth. The people who migrated to the previously empty parts of the world were thus usually, although not always, Hamites.

Those who were dispersed over the earth were at a disadvantage with respect to those who remained in the Middle East. Custance uses the example of the cultured, city-bred person who is thrust into the wilderness: he is fortunate if he survives. Eventually the Japhethites also migrated, but their migration was not forced, and it occurred after there had been further development at the center of civilization, the Middle East. By the time the Japhethites encountered the Hamites who had previously migrated, the Japhethites had become

stronger and the Hamites weaker. Consequently, the Japhethites usually conquered the Hamites. Examples of peoples who were conquered are the Indians of the western world, the Tasmanians (every one of whom was killed), and the Australian aborigines. In some places, the Hamites (for example, in China, Japan, and Africa) were too numerous to be conquered by the time the Japhethites arrived.

As evidence for his thesis, Custance claims that cultural artifacts all over the world indicate that migratory routes radiate out from the Middle East. In many instances the most advanced form of an artifact has been found in or near the Middle East; a less advanced and younger form some distance away from the Middle East; a less advanced and still younger form even farther away, etc. At a sufficient distance from the Middle East the only memory of the original artifact might be a picture of it. Even the earliest Chinese culture can be shown to be related to that of the Middle East. Migratory lines also radiate away from places outside of the Middle East wherever there has been a sufficient buildup of population.

One of the most interesting corollaries of Custance's thesis is related to the perennial question of where one places Neanderthal man and other men said to be evolutionary predecessors of modern man. Custance claims that these so-called primitive men were not primitive at all, but that they descended from men no different from modern men. He claims (with considerable justification, it seems), on the one hand, that some extremely old bones supposed to be human have not actually been shown to be human, and that no one would claim they are human if it were not for the evolutionary hypothesis. On the other hand, he says, Neanderthal man (for example) was indeed human, and his body structure may have been different from that of modern man only because of the effect of the unfavorable environment on those who were forced (as noted above) to disperse. He shows that even today changes in climate and food can cause the kind of difference in the human body found when ancient man is compared with modern man. "Primitive" man is, therefore, precisely the kind of man who was least capable of being the ancestor of "advanced" man; there was such a strong tendency to lose skills and other manifestations of culture when men were thrust out of the center of civilization, that the best that colonies of men could do was to survive. In fact, many did not if these ideas are correct.

We might expect to find evidence that cultures far from the Middle East were derived from and inferior to those of the Middle East. Custance produces some impressive quotations by authorities (pages 45 and 49) who state that Neanderthal man may have descended from men no different from modern man.

It was once the custom for evolutionary anthropologists to use as models for "primitive" man modern American Indians, African bushmen, Australian aborigines, Eskimos, etc. Custance points out that these "modern primitives" are no longer taken to be models of "primitive" man. They are no longer models because one cannot show that they are fundamentally different from other modern men, even though superficially there may appear to be differences. By the same token, artifacts of men taken by some to be predecessors of modern man may well be artifacts of a culture no more different from our own than are the modern "primitive" cultures.

The question, "Who taught Adam to speak?" is also asked by Custance, and he marshals evidence to show that men learn to speak only from other men, that the speech of man is not a development of the barks and other noises that animals make, and that ultimately man could have learned to speak only by being taught by God Himself. Such a question has an obvious connection with the main thesis of the book. In the last section of the book he introduces material which has only a secondary connection with the main thesis, but is still very valuable. In this section he discusses in detail anthropological information about many non-Western cultures which has been developed in recent years and which sheds light on many passages of Scripture of both the Old and the New Testament. For example, he provides considerable information about marriage customs—bride prices, the relation of the husband to his wife's family, etc.—which make it possible to understand better certain parts of Scripture.

This book is recommended. It is literally full of interesting ideas and facts. It is written very well, and in spite of the sometimes difficult subject matter, it is a book difficult to stop reading. One feels that at times Custance has concluded a little too much from the available evidence, and no doubt some will find flaws in what he has said. But there can be no doubt that Custance has made a solid contribution to our understanding of pre-history, and we can be thankful that this book was written.