

GENESIS 1-11 THEOLOGY  
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**0. INTRODUCTION: PRIMAEVAL HISTORY**

- The early chapters of Genesis had arguably a greater influence on the development of Christian theology than any other part of the OT.<sup>1</sup>

The *first question* that arises with regard to these 'origins' is whether they are in the main of the nature of - history or of legend, — whether (to use the expressive German terms) they are *Geschichte* things that happened, or *Sage*, things said. There are certain broad differences between these two kinds of narrative which may assist us to determine to which class the traditions of Genesis belong.<sup>2</sup>

- But *the most serious problem for the modern reader* of Genesis is to know how to relate Genesis 1–11 to current *scientific* and *historical* knowledge. The issues here are so vast, that I can only point to some of the many studies available (see bibliography) and urge that *Genesis be read on its own terms*, not on ours.<sup>3</sup>
  - We naturally ask questions such as: When? How long? What were the customs? etc.
  - But this is not what the Author of the Book is primarily interested in when communicating with us.

**0.1. EVOLUTION OF CRITICISM**

- [GUNKEL] Erzählt die Genesis (d. i. das sogenannte »erste Buch Mose«) *Geschichte oder Sage?* 'Diese Frage ist dem modernen Historiker *keine Frage mehr*;...<sup>4</sup>
- [BRUEGGEMANN] For the communities of faith that have valued the book of Genesis, it is finally *a theological statement*. The world and Israel belong to God, exist because of God's intention, and

<sup>1</sup> ANCIENT COMMENTARY

<sup>2</sup> SKINNER, J. *Genesis*, s. iii.

<sup>3</sup> WENHAM, G. J., *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 1: Genesis 1-15*, Dallas : Word Books, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> GUNKEL, H. *Genesis*, s. VII.

are called to live towards God's hope. Every *scientific*, *historical*, or *literary* analysis that misses this claim misunderstands the text.<sup>5</sup>

- ...the alleged fragmentation within—inside Genesis. Genesis may indeed *appear confused* or broken—it has many *variations*—but there has been an increasing *appreciation that the variations have a positive role*: they are part of Genesis's *literary art*, and so the text begins to emerge as a unity<sup>6</sup>
- ...Gen 1–11 is setting out a picture of the world that is at odds both with the polytheistic optimism of ancient Mesopotamia and the humanistic secularism of the modern world.<sup>7</sup>

## 0.2. GENESIS: LITERARY STRUCTURE

[Diptychs - Broadie]x

...regarding *structure*: Genesis consists of twenty-six diptychs. Building on older insights that several Genesis texts occur in pairs and that Genesis is somehow *binary* or dialogical, this study makes a basic observation: The entire book is composed of diptychs—accounts which, like some *paintings*, consist of two parts or panels. There are, for instance, two panels of *creation* (1:1–2:24), two of primordial sin (2:25–4:16), two genealogies (4:17–chap. 5), two parts to the flood story (6:1–9:1:17), two complementary histories about Noah's sons (9: 18–chap. 10), and so on—to a total of twenty-six diptychs (six in chaps. 1–11, seven in the Abraham story, six in the initial Jacob story, and seven in the Joseph story). Genesis then falls into fifty-two panels—a refinement of the medieval division into fifty chapters.<sup>8</sup>

- There are two basic creation accounts: pre-flood (1:12:24) and post-flood (9:1-17).
- There are two stories of disobedience: pre-flood (6:14) and post-flood (9:18-28).
- There are two genealogies of continuity: pre-flood (5) and post-flood (10:132; 11:1029).
- There are two major traditions of sin and judgment: pre-flood (34) and post-flood (11:19).

## 0.3. TOLEDOT "THEOLOGY"

(toledot = lineages, stories)

- The Call as an Interpretive Center: The substance of the call in Genesis is the promise.<sup>9</sup>

1.	Gn 2:4	These are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	אֱלֹהֵי תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ	Heaven and Earth
2.	Gn 5:1	This is a book <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֵי אָדָם	Adam
3.	Gn 6:9	These are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	אֱלֹהֵי תוֹלְדֵי נֹחַ	Noah
4.	Gn 10:1	And these are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	וְאֵלֵהֶם תּוֹלְדֵי בְנֵי נֹחַ	Sons of Noah
5.	Gn 11:10	These are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	אֱלֹהֵי תוֹלְדֵי שֵׁם	Shem
6.	Gn 11:27	And these are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	וְאֵלֵהֶם תּוֹלְדֵי תֵרַח	Terach
7.	Gn 25:12	And these are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	וְאֵלֵהֶם תּוֹלְדֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל	Ishmael
8.	Gn 25:19	And these are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	וְאֵלֵהֶם תּוֹלְדֵי יִצְחָק	Isaac
9.	Gn 36:1	And these are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	וְאֵלֵהֶם תּוֹלְדֵי עֵשָׂו הוּא אֶדְוִם:	Esau, who is Edom
10.	Gn 36:9	And these are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	וְאֵלֵהֶם תּוֹלְדֵי עֵשָׂו אָבִי אֶדְוִם	Esau, → Edom
11.	Gn 37:2	These are <i>tól<sup>e</sup>dót</i>	אֱלֹהֵי תּוֹלְדֵי יַעֲקֹב	Jacob

- What is *the important* question in genealogies? → Who is my father? Where do I belong? What is my (spiritual) inheritance?

[E.H.CARR:]<sup>10</sup>

- (1) Study the historian before you begin to study the facts (p. 23) ...In my first lecture I said: Before you study the history study the historian. Now I would add: Before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment.(p. 44)

<sup>5</sup> BRUEGGEMANN, Walter (1985, 338) In: BRODIE *Genesis as Dialogue*,

<sup>6</sup> (e.g., Fokkelman, 1975; Alter, 1981; Sternberg, 1985; Brichto, 1998). In: BRODIE *Genesis as Dialogue*,

<sup>7</sup> WENHAM, G. J., *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 1: Genesis 1-15*, Dallas : Word Books, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> BRODIE *Genesis as Dialogue*, p. xi-xii

<sup>9</sup> BRUEGGEMANN, W. *Genesis*, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> CARR, E.H. *What Is History?*

- (2) the historian's need of imaginative understanding for the minds of the people with whom he is dealing, for the thought behind their acts (p. 24)
- (3) The third point is that we can view the past, and achieve our understanding of the past, only through the eyes of the present. The historian is of his own age, and is bound to it by the conditions of human existence. The very words which he uses - words like democracy, empire, war, revolution - have current connotations from which he cannot divorce them. (p. 24)

## 1. THE FIRST CYCLE: EDEN

### 1.1. SIN: THE CRISIS (FOOD)

- **Gn 3:6** So when the woman (1) *saw* that the tree was good for food, and that it was a (2) delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be (3) desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.
- **1 John 2:16** For all that is in the world - the (2) desires of the flesh and the (1) desires of the eyes and (3) pride in possessions [ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου] - is not from the Father but is from the world.
- (1) **Mt 4:3** command these stones to become loaves of bread." (3) **Mt 4:6** throw yourself down, (2) **Mt 4:8** showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory

### 1.2. JUDGMENT: "AN END" OF THE WORLD

- changes in nature (difficulties in making a living)
- expulsion from Eden
- change in relationship with God

### 1.3. GRACE: NEW BEGINNING

- promise of the Redeemer: **Gn 3:15** I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring<sup>1</sup> and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

## 2. THE SECOND CYCLE: PREDILUVIAN WORLD

- the problem of unfettered sexuality

### 2.1. SIN: THE CRISIS (SEX)

Sex & violence

- **Gn 6:2** the sons of God (1) saw that the daughters of man were attractive
- **Gn 6:2** (2) And they took as their wives any they chose.
- **Gn 6:5** the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every (3) intention of the thoughts of his heart [וְכָל-יַיִצֵּר מַחְשְׁבַת לְבוֹ] was only evil continually.

### 2.2. JUDGMENT: "AN END" OF THE WORLD

- "natural" catastrophe
- changes in nature (more difficulties in making a living)
- change in ethics

### 2.3. GRACE: NEW BEGINNING

- the promise: the rainbow
- giving food ("sacrifice")

## 3. THE THIRD CYCLE: UNITED NATION

- the problem of unholy unity

### 3.1. SIN: THE CRISIS (TECHNOLOGY/ART/RELIGION)

Technology & fame

- **Gn 11:2** they (1) found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.
- **Gn 11:3** (2) Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly."
- **Gn 11:4** (3) "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

### **3.2. JUDGMENT: “AN END” OF THE WORLD**

- the "nature" of man – confused language
- change in God’s dealings with humanity

### **3.3. GRACE: NEW BEGINNING**

- → call of Abraham

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

- Primal history gives us the important answers about the past crises, judgments and new beginnings from God’s point of view.
- Our understanding of Gn 1-11 depends on our willingness to submit to the way God sees the fundamental interests and problems of humanity.
- The past “ends of the world” give us warning and promise of the future program of God with this kind of the world we live in right now.