

## STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE IN GENESIS 1-11

Gary V. Smith\*

The relationship of structure to meaning, which is recognized in the syntactical study of language, is also to be recognized as significant in the conscious and unconscious development of longer portions of oral and written forms of communication. The linguist derives the meaning of language from a careful study of individual words as well as from an analysis of syntactical patterns. In a similar manner, the exegete discovers the meaning of the text from a study of individual verses as well as from the larger structural context of which they are a part. In order to comprehend the purpose of a text, one must make use of every clue the author provides. History, archaeological data, vocabulary, syntax, context, comparative studies and structure must be given their rightful places.

Advances have been made in many of these areas in past studies of Genesis 1-11, but the tendency until recent years has been to place more emphasis on finely defined points of distinction and detail rather than on structure. A brief look at the use and interpretation of structure by the various schools of interpretation will bring forward those methodologies that will prove most helpful in attempting to find the purpose of Genesis 1-11.

### I. THE USE OF STRUCTURE

Source critics offer little in the area of methodology to those who are specifically interested in the structure of Genesis 1-11. Their results indicate that these chapters were written over a long period of time by a number of authors and redactors. On the basis of their methodology, the text has been divided up into different documents written by various authors who had divergent theological interests and assembled by still other individuals who had their own understanding of things. Under such circumstances one can hardly expect to find an overall structure, for even the individual documents are somewhat unstructured. Driver,<sup>1</sup> an advocate of this approach, finds that "J" is somewhat of a "pre-scientific" thinker whose main interest is to satisfy the curiosity of man by offering interesting explanations to a variety of unrelated questions. This early source covers such diverse topics as how the world was made, why people wear clothes, why work is necessary, why serpents crawl on their bellies, why people speak different languages, and a host of other unconnected questions. Although Driver states that the material has "been combined together in accordance with a def-

\*Gary Smith is chairman of the department of Old Testament at Winnipeg Theological Seminary in Otterburne, Manitoba, Canada.

<sup>1</sup>S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen, 1904) xvii.

inite plan,"<sup>2</sup> there is little in his discussion that betrays any concern for or understanding of the structure of Genesis 1-11.

Form critics, who have concentrated on primary categories like the lament, the hymn, and many other short units of oral tradition, have attempted to come to grips with the problems of structure, purpose and the situation in which the literature was used. Through the study and comparison of Israelite and non-Israelite texts, there have been some remarkable discoveries. But in spite of this more positive aim, their success at dealing with the structure of Genesis 1-11 is far from satisfactory. Gunkel, an advocate of this approach, views the "sagas" and myths" in this our section as independent entities. Since each individual unit comprises a whole,<sup>3</sup> the broader perspective gained by the form-critical method is limited by the history and use of each particular *genre*. As Muilenburg notes, "It does not focus sufficient attention upon what is unique and unrepeatable. . . . Exclusive attention to the *Gattung* may actually obscure the thought and intention of the writer or speaker."<sup>4</sup> Consequently this approach has made some rather artificial generalizations concerning the character and historical setting of similar types of literature. One cannot but consider that their overdependence on the *Sitz im Leben* of comparative literature has led to an understanding of some passages that is quite foreign to the content and the theology of the author.

The present-day investigation into the characteristics of the various pentateuchal traditions by men such as Wolff<sup>5</sup> and Brueggemann<sup>6</sup> with their emphasis on the kerygma of tradition offers a new twist to the study of sources. Wolff's work is based on the example set by von Rad, who concentrated on locating and emphasizing the message of the text in terms of the confession of the community. Such an approach implies that the text was written with a purpose in mind—that of making something of a statement concerning man's beliefs. If this is the case, one of the most important tasks of the exegete is to locate that kerygmatic formulation central to each piece of literature. A second task for those following this method of interpretation is to relate the kerygma of a body of literature to the cultural crisis through which the tradition gained its canonical form.<sup>7</sup> This latter endeavor has proven more subjective and less conclusive, partially due to the fact that the approach

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>H. Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1964) 42-44.

<sup>4</sup>J. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969) 5. See also D. Greenwood, "Rhetorical Criticism and Formgeschichte: Some Methodological Considerations," *JBL* 89 (1970) 418-426.

<sup>5</sup>H. W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," *The Vitality of the Old Testament Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 41-66.

<sup>6</sup>W. Brueggemann, "The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers," *The Vitality of the Old Testament Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 101-113.

<sup>7</sup>W. Brueggemann, "Wolff's Kerygmatic Methodology," *The Vitality of the Old Testament Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 37.

has not placed sufficient emphasis on questions of history or ancient Near Eastern studies.<sup>8</sup> Such studies have been helpful, and Wolff's analysis and advance on the understanding of the kerygma is especially significant where he rejects some of the well-established positions of von Rad and Noth.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years there has been an increasing tendency to pay more attention to literary structure and the way in which sub-units fit into the focus of the entire unit.<sup>10</sup> This type of approach has been carried out by those following the methodology of rhetorical criticism. Its aim is to make a careful analysis of each literary unit in order to discover the author's purpose as it is embedded in the creative design of the whole.<sup>11</sup> The sensitivity that will enable the reader to grasp with appreciation the intent of an author can be attained by an awareness of the relationships and interrelationships between the unit's various parts. Related and repeated vocabulary and syntax play a very important part in the structuring of most compositions. When the author repeats a word, phrase or thought, he is directing emphasis toward this recurring note. The key word, phrase or thought will frequently serve as a guide to the isolation of both the extent and focus of the unit. Its association with other phenomena enables the reader to discern the structure of the composition and comprehend the purpose of the author. Such a process of analysis can be applied to small as well as large units. While the complexity of associations and the difficulty of identifying patterns will increase as the length of a composition increases, this should not lead one to the conclusion that larger units are unstructured.

It is with these latter principles in mind that the large unit of Genesis 1-11 is here considered. As the structure becomes evident, the ways in which the thoughts and purposes of the authors have been interwoven into the patterns of expression will become clearer.

## II. THE STRUCTURE OF GENESIS 1-11

Most commentators consider the first major section of literature in Genesis to include the first eleven chapters.<sup>12</sup> Skinner attributes the cohesive characteristics of this section to its origin in a "pre-literary and uncritical stage of society, when the popular imagination worked

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>9</sup>See especially Wolff's analysis of the kerygma of the "Deuteronomic historical work" in Joshua-Kings in which the call to repentance formula is emphasized. For another evaluation of past ways of interpreting Genesis see G. van Groningen, "Interpretation of Genesis," *JETS* 13 (1970) 199-218; W. Kaiser, "The Literary Form of Genesis 1-11," *New Perspectives on the Old Testament* (Texas: Word, 1970) 48-65.

<sup>10</sup>A. Richardson's view (*Genesis 1-11* [London: SCM, 1953] 93) that Gen 6:1-4 "bears little relation to what precedes or follows it" is contrary to the way in which more recent studies are conducted.

<sup>11</sup>Compare G. von Rad's work on the credo (*Genesis* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973] 13-24) and the articles in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of J. Muilenburg* (eds. J. J. Jackson and M. Kessler; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974).

<sup>12</sup>Although von Rad (*Genesis*, pp. 158-166) finds a "new point of departure in the divine relation of salvation" at Gen. 12:1, he groups 12:1-3 with 11:28-30 and makes a major division at Gen 12:10.

freely on dim reminiscences of the great events and personalities of the past. . . ."<sup>13</sup> Others find the unifying characteristic of this composition to be its cosmic and worldwide emphasis, which distinctively summarizes vast periods of antiquity. But because of the variety of literary *genres* and the broad scope of divergent topics, few have treated the unit as a structural whole. The primary structural characteristic that most identify is the recurring heading, "These are the generations of. . . ." <sup>14</sup> A more thorough look at the structural unity of the repeated and interrelated themes and phrases indicates that a much more significant creative design is embedded in the structure of Genesis 1-11.

### A. *The Major Structural Division*

The striking linguistic similarities that the author places in the Adamic and Noahic stories help to determine the main division of these eleven chapters. As Westermann says, "The resemblance between the end of the Flood narrative and the Creation story is self-evident."<sup>15</sup> This fundamental break is recognized by von Rad, who concludes that "the words of Genesis 8:21f may actually be called the real conclusion of this history, for at that point the history of mankind begins anew."<sup>16</sup> Others have observed that there is something of a new beginning at chap. 9,<sup>17</sup> but few of the major commentaries have made this the major break in the outline of Genesis 1-11.<sup>18</sup>

When Genesis 1 and 2 are compared with 8 and 9, one begins to perceive the extent to which the author uses repeated phrases and ideas to build the structural relationships within the units. The following relationships are found: (a) Since man could not live on the earth when it was covered with water in chaps. 1 and 8, a subsiding of the water and a separation of the land from the water took place, allowing the dry land to appear (1:9-10; 8:1-13);<sup>19</sup> (b) "birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" are brought forth to "swarm upon the earth" in 1:20-21, 24-25 and 8:17-19; (c) God es-

<sup>13</sup>J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (New York: Scribner's, 1917) iv.

<sup>14</sup>Skinner, Keil, Spurrell, Leupold, Carpenter, Lange, Wright, Elliot, Kaiser, Driver, Stigers, and many others. See also M. H. Woudstra, "The Toledot of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive Historical Significance," *CTJ* 5 (1970) 184-189.

<sup>15</sup>C. Westermann, *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 22. "The Flood narrative of chs. 6-9 is so closely connected with the narratives of the Creation of the world and of man that each can only be correctly understood with the other."

<sup>16</sup>G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper, 1962), I, 164, and his *Genesis*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>17</sup>B. Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis* (New York: KTAV, 1974) 61; R. Davidson, *Genesis 1-11* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973) 84; D. Kidner, *Genesis* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1967) 92-100; J. Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 169; J. Blenkinsopp, "The Structure of P," *CBQ* 38 (1976) 284; D. J. A. Clines, "The Theology of the Flood Narrative," *Faith and Thought* 100 (1972-73) 182-242.

<sup>18</sup>One of the rare exceptions is Kidner (*Genesis*, p. 92). The reason for this may be that commentators have paid more attention to topics and not given enough attention to structure.

<sup>19</sup>The *rûah* is instrumental in this process in 8:1. For a similar identity of the *rûah* in Gen 1:2 see H. M. Orlinsky, "The Plain Meaning of *Rûah* in Genesis 1:2," *JQR* 47 (1957) 174-182.

establishes the days and seasons in 1:14-18 and 8:22; (d) God's blessing rests upon the animals as he commands them to "be fruitful and multiply on the earth" in both 1:22 and 8:17; (e) man is brought forth and he receives the blessing of God: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" in 1:28 and 9:1, 7; (f) man is given dominion over the animal kingdom in 1:28 and 9:2; (g) God provides food for man in 1:29-30 and 9:3 (this latter regulation makes a direct reference back to the previous passage when it includes the statement, "As I have given the green plant"); and (h) in 9:6 the writer quotes from 1:26-27 concerning the image of God in man. The author repeatedly emphasizes the fact that the world is beginning again with a fresh start.<sup>20</sup> But Noah does not return to the paradise of Adam, for the significant difference is that "the intent of man's heart is evil" (Gen 8:21).

### B. *The Primary Theological Structure in Each Division*

Of all the ideas recorded in these two related accounts there is one phrase that by its repeated use has an overpowering theological emphasis. God's blessing, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth," is the promise the author impresses on the mind of his readers. Brueggemann considers this oft-repeated blessing formula to be the key to understanding the kerygma of the priestly writers.<sup>21</sup> But it is more: It is the key theological focal point in the two parallel sections of Genesis 1-11. If this blessing is of central significance to the author of Genesis 1-11, then we must carefully consider the observation of C. Westermann that the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 10 are the realization and fulfilment of this blessing.<sup>22</sup> The association of the genealogy in Genesis 5 with creation and God's blessing is made quite clear. The repetition of the phrase, "He created them male and female, and he blessed them and named them mankind . . .," at the beginning of the genealogy in Gen 5:2 demonstrates the relationship the author sees between the blessing and the genealogies.<sup>23</sup> The promise was fulfilled. God spoke, and it was so. The genealogy is evidence that the blessing of God to Adam was fulfilled. Westermann's identification of Genesis 10 as the fulfilment of the blessing given to Noah gives a balance to the composition, but the distinctiveness of Genesis 10, when compared to Genesis 5, causes one to question his conclusion.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup>D. L. Petersen ("The Yahwist on the Flood," *VT* 26 [1976] 441) understands that "for P, the flood is a return to the pre-creation state described in Gen. 1 . . . ; the post-flood state is therefore a new creation. . . ."

<sup>21</sup>W. Brueggemann, "The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers," *Vitality*, p. 103.

<sup>22</sup>C. Westermann, *Creation*, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup>For a study of the genealogies see M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969); D. J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylon About Genesis* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1936); and D. S. DeWitt, "The Generations of Genesis," *EQ* 48 (1976) 196-211.

<sup>24</sup>Westermann, *Creation*, pp. 24-29.

The style of Genesis 5—"And 'x' lived 'a' number of years and begat 'z.' Then 'x' lived 'b' number of years and he begat other sons and daughters. So all the days of 'x' were 'c' number of years and he died"—is not found in Genesis 10. The portion in the second section of Genesis 1-11 that is parallel to chap. 5 in the first section is Gen 11:10-31.<sup>25</sup> The style of chap. 11 is identical to chap. 5, and both reveal the marvelous way in which God's blessing was realized. It is also significant that ten generations divide Adam from Noah and ten divide Noah from Abraham. By ending the genealogy with Noah, the author has left another indication of his division of Genesis 1-11.

What then is the author's purpose in chap. 10, and how does it fit into the structure of the composition? Genesis 10 is really a table of nations instead of a classical genealogy. The plural forms and names of cities<sup>26</sup> make it clear that the author was more concerned at this point with the expansion of mankind<sup>27</sup> into the various geographical areas of the world than with the lineage and age of the great men of antiquity. Chapter 10 describes the fulfilment of God's blessing to Noah that he and his seed should "fill the earth." The author skillfully develops this theme of expansion in the first section in Gen 4:16-26. This quasi-genealogical sub-unit describes the territory of Cain (4:16), the city that he founded (4:17; cf. 10:10-11), and the general development of civilization.

The diagram on page 313 summarizes the theological development that has been observed through our analysis of repeated structural indicators. The blessing and its fulfilment is vital to both sections.

### C. *The Secondary Theological Structure in Each Division*

The author has interwoven into this broad structure of blessing and the fulfilment of blessings a factor that limited the blessing of God and delayed the establishment of his kingdom on earth.<sup>28</sup> This secondary theme, which is subservient to the ultimate realization of God's design for man and the world, is the curse.<sup>29</sup> The curse<sup>30</sup> is the

<sup>25</sup>Speiser (*Genesis*, p. 79) states that "this section resumes the genealogical record that was interrupted at the end of ch. V."

<sup>26</sup>Kittim and Dodanim are plurals, while Tarshish, Nineveh and Calah are cities.

<sup>27</sup>Westermann (*Creation*, p. 25) sees chap. 10 as being a description of the expansion of mankind.

<sup>28</sup>Kidner (*Genesis*, p. 13) says, "Chapters 1 to 11 describe two opposite progressions: First, God's orderly creation to its climax in man as a responsible and blessed being and then the disintegrating work of sin. . . ." See also the discussion by T. E. Fretheim, *Creation, Fall and Flood. Studies in Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969) 113.

<sup>29</sup>H. C. Brichto, *The Problem of Curse in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), and J. Scharbert, "'Fluchen' und 'Segen' im AT," *Bib* 39 (1968) 1-26. Westermann (*Creation*, p. 26) classifies these texts under the title "crime and punishment," but W. M. Clark ("The Flood and the Structure of the Pre-patriarchal History," *ZAW* 83 [1971] 190) outlines some weaknesses in Westermann's approach and suggests the "revolt" theme to take its place.

<sup>30</sup>Gen 3:13, 16; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25.

**Section One**

**Blessing (Gen 1:28)**

**multiply**

**fill the earth**

**expansion  
(Gen 4:16-26)**

**genealogies  
(Gen 5)**

**Mankind is destroyed**

**Section Two**

**Blessing (Gen 9:1, 7)**

**multiply**

**fill the earth**

**expansion  
(Gen 10)**

**genealogies  
(Gen 11:10-31)**

opposite of the blessing, bringing death and destruction instead of fruitfulness and life. In his development of the curse theme, the narrator creates parallelism between the two sections of Genesis 1-11 and progression within each sub-unit. Analysis of section one reveals an inter-relationship between the curses in Genesis 3 and 4. Thematic and linguistic relationships are recognized by Skinner, who concludes that the "literary connection between ch. 3 and 4:1ff is due to conscious or unconscious imitation of one writer by another."<sup>31</sup> He finds a similar sequence (sin, investigation, and punishment in the form of a curse), the same dramatic dialogue, and a similar psychology at work, as well as a number of linguistic parallels.<sup>32</sup> Clark, who follows Westermann's idea that a legal court pattern has influenced the narrative and vocabulary of Genesis 3 and 4, finds the following relationships between these chapters:<sup>33</sup> (a) a command or decision of Yahweh (2:17; 4:4a-5b); (b) a temptation with similar roles by the snake and "sin" (3:4-5; 4:7); (c) the act of sin (3:6; 4:8, both times with brevity); (d) the result of the sin (3:7; 4:8); (e) the legal investigation (3:10; 4:9); (f) excuses and denials (3:12; 4:9); (g) accusations (3:13; 4:10); (h) the pronouncement of judgment (3:14-19; 4:12); (i) the recognition by the guilty party of the justice of the judgment (3:20; 4:13 f.); (j) mitigation (3:21; 4:15); and (k) notice of execution of the judgment (3:23; 4:16). Although there is reason to question both the degree to which court patterns have influenced these narratives and the extent of the detailed parallelisms found by Clark, there does seem to be a firm relationship between the curses in Genesis 3 and 4.<sup>34</sup>

In the remainder of section one the author follows a logical progression in his development when he describes the results the two curses have upon man, who has destroyed his relationship to God and his brother. In Gen 6:1-9 and following, the final extension of the curse's power falls on society as a whole. The desire of Cain in Gen 4:7 was extended to the point where "every intent of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually." This accurately describes the situation before the flood in Gen 6:5. The world that God had created "good" (Gen 1:31) was now in the opposite state. The curse upon the world is a somewhat expected result.

By repetition the author draws our attention to the fact that the curse in all three episodes is related to three basic areas of man's existence: (a) man's relationship to God; (b) man's relationship to life or death; and (c) man's relationship to the ground. Man's relationship to God is described in terms of his walk in the presence of the

<sup>31</sup>Skinner, *Genesis*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>32</sup>Compare Gen 3:16b with 4:7b; 3:9 with 4:9; 3:13 with 4:10; 3:17 with 4:11. P. F. Ellis (*The Yahwist: The Bible's First Theologian* [Notre Dame: Fides, 1968] 139) finds sin, punishment and forgiveness patterns in Genesis 2-11.

<sup>33</sup>Clark, "Flood," pp. 196-197.

<sup>34</sup>See the critique of this theme in D. J. A. Clines, "Theme in Genesis 1-11," *CBQ* 38 (1976) 487-489.



Lord. Adam initially walked in communion with God.<sup>35</sup> When Adam and Eve were cursed they were driven "from the presence of the LORD" (3:8, 24). Enoch (5:22) and Noah (6:9) "walked with God," but Cain's curse resulted in his "going out from the presence of the LORD" (4:16). The ultimate curse of removal from God's presence is found in the flood incident when all flesh is blotted out.<sup>36</sup> At this point man's relationship to God is identical to his relationship to life and death. Man is warned that death will be one of the results of the curse in Gen 2:17, and Cain realized that the threat of death was part of his curse (4:14-15). The third area influenced is man's relationship to the ground.<sup>37</sup> In Gen 3:17 the ground on which Adam was forced to toil was cursed. Cain was "cursed from the ground" in Gen 4:11-14, and the destruction of society by the removal of man "from the face of the ground" is referred to in Gen 6:7; 7:3, 4, 23. The curse does not bring fruitfulness, multiplication and a filling of the earth, but just the opposite.

In the second section of Genesis 1-11 there are some parallel developments of the curse. But the curse is a less prominent factor in these chapters. This is partially because the eternal covenant with Noah and all mankind in Gen 9:9-17 has removed the ultimate threat of another curse on society and the land as a whole. The removal of the "curse" in Gen 8:21-22 plays a key role in explaining the difference between sections one and two. R. Rendtorff's<sup>38</sup> interpretation of Gen 8:21 has focused considerable attention on the importance of this verse. Although his interpretation of *qll* to mean "to regard or designate as accursed" has been generally accepted by von Rad,<sup>39</sup> Clark,<sup>40</sup> and Brichto,<sup>41</sup> lexicography and Hebrew grammar raise doubts concerning Rendtorff's translation. It is true that *qll* in the *pi'el* can mean "view as accursed" and that *'rr* has a more specific reference, "to curse," but the use of the two words together in Gen 12:3 and in Deut 28:15 and 45 raises a serious problem with Rendtorff's conclusion. The syntactical structure of the infinitive clause with *'ôd* in Gen 8:21 normally denotes repeated action instead of continuous action as Rendtorff supposes, and this also argues strongly for the traditional understanding of this verse instead of Rendtorff's.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Gen 2:15-22 implies this and 3:8 verifies it.

<sup>36</sup>The interpretation of Gen 6:3 is problematic but points in this direction.

<sup>37</sup>J. Scharbert, "'rr," *TDOT* 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 409.

<sup>38</sup>R. Rendtorff, "Genesis 8:21 und die Urgeschichte des Jahwisten," *KD* 7 (1961) 67-78.

<sup>39</sup>von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 122.

<sup>40</sup>Clark, "Flood," pp. 206-209.

<sup>41</sup>Brichto, *Curse*, p. 217.

<sup>42</sup>Petersen, "Yahwist," pp. 442-443, and Clines, "Theme," pp. 496-498.

In spite of the need for another flood, God takes a new course of action in the post-flood world. God's new course found within the flood story is the election of Noah to overcome, through the blessing of God, the power of the curse. His birth (Gen 5:29) is related to Gen 8:21, and it is through God's chosen righteous man (Gen 6:8-9) that there is hope for the world. The curse on sin is not removed but overcome by God's blessing on the blameless man of faith, who "did according to all that God had commanded him" (Gen 6:22; 7:5). It is recognized that man and society will again repeat the former cycle of sinfulness in section two, for "the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen 8:21). Consequently, it is not surprising to find, in line with the first section, that God's righteous man falls into sin,<sup>43</sup> that brothers are at odds (the sons of Noah), and that society gradually develops into a state displeasing to God. But God reacts to man slightly differently in section two. His forbearance and grace is emphasized by his repeated remembrance of his covenant with his elect. This more individualistic approach did not cause God to give up his worldwide interest or his desire to bless mankind. The narrator's treatment of Noah at the end of section one and at the beginning of section two makes it clear that the blessing of God on his elect will be the method that God will use to bring his blessings on all the earth.

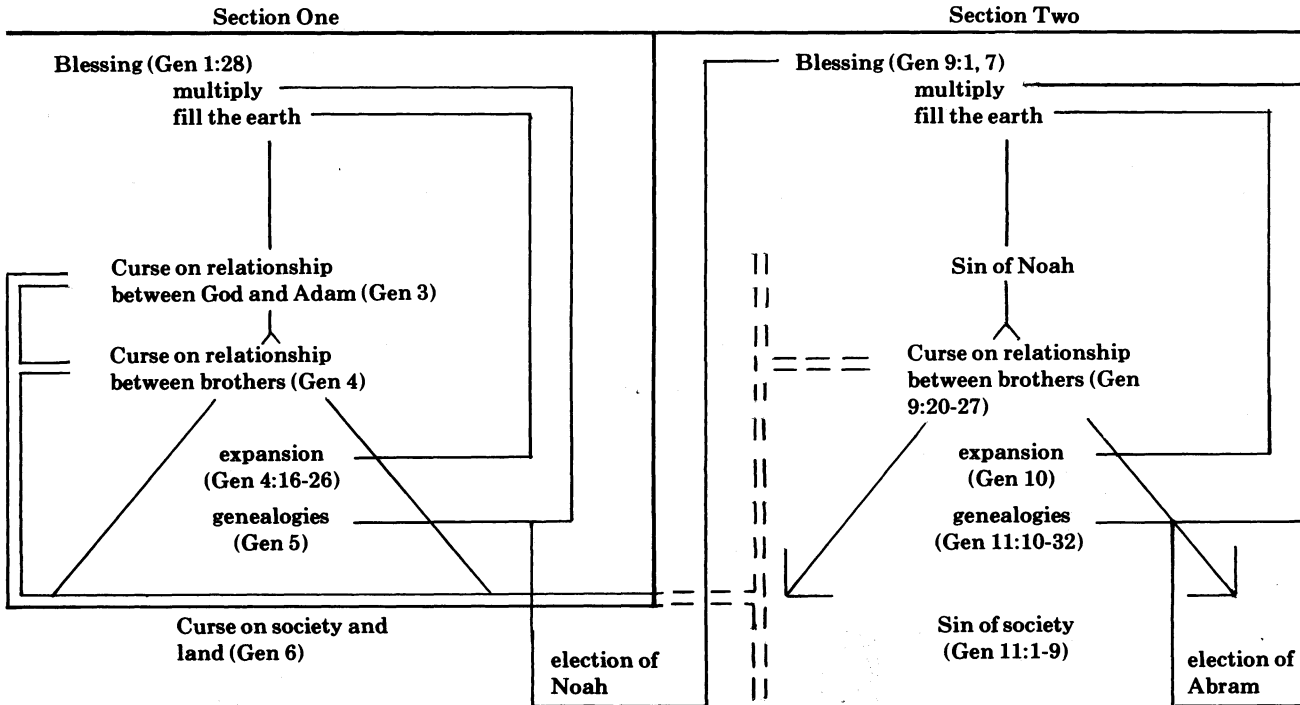
When one looks for the narrator's development of the curse in section two, it is found that the curse on Canaan and the blessing on Shem have to do with one's relationship to God, one's life and prosperity, and one's ability to fill the earth.

In the episode of Gen 11:1-9 no formal curse is found. But society in its arrogance is in rebellion against God. The judgment of God removes this powerful nation from its national headquarters into every part of the earth. By this action the danger of creating another society like that found in Gen 6:1-9 is avoided. The inhabitants of Babel are no longer able to do everything that they purpose to do (Gen 11:6). Like Cain, they are ejected from their former abode to wander about looking for a new place to live. Missing in this judgment is the traditional note of grace that was forthcoming after the curse of Adam, Cain, and the flood.<sup>44</sup> One must not conclude that now God has no interest in the nations, for in chap. 12 he elects another man to take the place of Adam and Noah, and it is through Abram that God will bring his blessings upon all the families of the earth.

The following illustrates the theological structure that completes the previous diagram.

<sup>43</sup>The nature of Noah's sin is not clear. The author was not interested in giving all the details. For some suggestions see F. W. Bassett, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan: A Case of Incest," *VT* 21 (1971) 232-237, or J. Hoffizer, "Some Remarks to the Tale of Noah's Drunkenness," *Studies on the Book of Genesis* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 22-27. One can hardly agree with von Rad's opinion (*Genesis*, p. 136) that one "must on no account morally condemn this drunkenness."

<sup>44</sup>von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 153.



### III. THE THEOLOGICAL CONTINUITY OF GENESIS 1-11 WITH THE REST OF THE PENTATEUCH

The theological development of the author's purpose is clarified in the previous analysis of the structure of Genesis 1-11. It is from this same theological viewpoint that the author of the Pentateuch interprets the lives of the patriarchs and the struggles of the nation of Israel. Life or death depends on whether man receives from God a blessing or a curse. The blessing is the will of God stated in its most basic form. Its existence is of primary importance, for without God's blessing men and animals are not able to flourish. This blessing is related to the world of nature as well as the course of history. The world as a whole, and individuals as well, are dependent on God because of the blessing. Blessings and curses are powerfully fulfilled, for it is God the Creator who stands behind these decrees. God's Word, which created the universe, now controls the world by means of blessings and curses. To follow the fulfilment of the blessing and the curse is to trace the involvement of God in the history of mankind in the rest of the Pentateuch.

Man is pictured in the middle of the situation as vice-regent on the earth.<sup>46</sup> The text indicates that it is man who at least partially determines whether the world will receive a blessing or a curse. Man has the conditional ability to accept God's Word in faith and live accordingly. He can walk in the presence of the Lord as God demands, or he can despise God and receive the curse.

When one looks at the Pentateuch as a whole, one begins to see that a secondary purpose that Genesis 1-11 fulfills is that of being the theological foundation for the rest of the Books of Moses. Although Abram and the children of Israel begin new eras in history, God's dealing with them is consistent with his action in Genesis 1-11. The blessing given to Adam and Noah is essentially the same as that given to Abram. Gen 12:1-3 is a blessing that promises multiplication of seed and a new land that is to be filled. After Abraham's experience on Mount Moriah God again promised him, "I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens... and your seed shall possess the gate of its enemies" (Gen 22:17). Isaac's benediction on Jacob uses the same terminology: "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you... that you may possess the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham" (Gen 28:3-4). When God appeared to Jacob he said, "Be fruitful and multiply... and I will give the land to your descendants after you" (Gen 35:11-12). The identical blessing is passed on by Jacob in Gen 48:4 and to the covenant nation in Lev 26:9 and Deut 28:1-14. This blessing of multiplication was seen as partially fulfilled, as Gen 47:27, Exod 1:7, and Deut 1:10 indicate. The fulfilment of "fill the earth" is one of the central topics of the rest of the Hexateuch.

The "presence of the Lord" concept that is linked to the blessing

<sup>46</sup>The concept of man made in the image of God also points in this direction.

is developed in the rest of the Pentateuch in these oft-repeated phrases: "I am with you,"<sup>46</sup> "I will make a covenant with you,"<sup>47</sup> and "I will dwell in your midst."<sup>48</sup>

The curse is not a dominant theme in the patriarchal narratives, except in the phrase, "Those who curse you, I will curse."<sup>49</sup> But it is important in the context of God's covenant with Israel. The blessings and cursings of Deut 27-28 and Lev 26 that set before the people "life and prosperity or death and adversity"<sup>50</sup> reflect an understanding of man's relationship to his Sovereign that is identical to, though more developed than, the blessings and curses found in Genesis 1-11.

It is through the structure of Genesis 1-11 that the author has given mankind of all times the belief that God's power in blessings and cursings are put in force by the relationship to God that man establishes. These relationships influence each man's destiny and, to a greater or lesser degree, the destiny of all mankind.

<sup>46</sup>Gen. 22:22; 26:3, 24, 28; 28:15; 31:3; 39:2, 21, 23; 46:4; 48:21; Exod 3:12; 4:12, 15; 6:6-7; 13:21; 23:20-22.

<sup>47</sup>Gen 6:18; 9:9, 11; 15:18; 17:2, 7, 21; Exod 6:4-7; 19:5; 34:10, 27.

<sup>48</sup>Exod 25:8; 29:45, 46; Lev 26:12; Num 5:3; 35:34; Deut 12:11.

<sup>49</sup>Gen 12:3; 27:29; Num 24:9.

<sup>50</sup>Deut 30:15.