

## Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 2, Form Criticism – Von Rad Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

### 1. Abstract of Vannoy, Genesis, Session 2, Form Criticism – Von Rad, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture transcript discusses Gerhard von Rad's approach to Old Testament criticism. **Von Rad's method**, unlike earlier forms of criticism, examines the Hexateuch as a whole, identifying a unifying "credo" in Deuteronomy 26 that shapes diverse source materials. He distinguishes between *historie* (factual history) and *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history), arguing that the Old Testament primarily presents the latter, a confessional history shaped by Israel's faith. The lecturer, however, critiques von Rad's emphasis on *Heilsgeschichte*, asserting that faith is a response to historical events rather than their origin. Finally, the lecture addresses the "concessionary evangelicalism" that accepts some historical inaccuracies in the Old Testament while maintaining its central message of Christ.

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Genesis, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).**



**Vannoy\_Genesis\_Session02.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 2, Form Criticism – Von Rad

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts, focusing on the work of Gerhard von Rad, and the subsequent critique of "concessionary evangelicalism":

#### Briefing Document: Gerhard von Rad's Form Criticism and Responses

##### I. Introduction

This document summarizes the lecture material focusing on Gerhard von Rad's contribution to Old Testament scholarship, particularly his form-critical approach to the Hexateuch (Genesis-Joshua). It also explores the concept of *heilsgeschichte* (salvation history) versus *historie* (scientific history) and its implications. Finally, it addresses the idea of "concessionary evangelicalism" and how some modern scholars handle historical issues in the Old Testament.

##### II. Gerhard von Rad's Form Criticism

- **Building on Wellhausen and Gunkel:** Von Rad's work is presented as building on the foundations of Julius Wellhausen's source criticism (JEDP theory) and Hermann Gunkel's form criticism. He does not discard JEDP.
- **Key Propositions:** Von Rad's complex theory is summarized in three propositions:
  1. **Statements of Belief:** "Statements of belief" stand behind the Hexateuch as a whole. These are summarized in confessional statements like the credo in Deuteronomy 26:5ff. This credo summarizes key events in Israel's history, including the patriarchs, the exodus, and the conquest.
  2. **Aggregation of Diverse Materials:** The Hexateuch is an aggregation of diverse materials that have been changed into their present form under the guidance of the Credo. The credo acts as a guide for how these diverse materials were shaped.
  3. **Gattung and Sitz im Leben:** The Hexateuch as a whole must be understood as a *gattung* (literary type) with a specific *sitz im leben* (situation in life). Von Rad seeks to apply Gunkel's form-critical method to the entire structure of the Hexateuch.

- **Elaboration on the Third Point:** Von Rad argues that the Hexateuch, a "tremendous edifice," was not a first essay, but "something pressed to the ultimate limits of what is possible and what is readable," having passed through earlier stages of development. He believes the Hexateuch is a type of literature whose *sitz im leben* can be recognized in its early stages.
- **Deviations from Gunkel:** While Gunkel focused on isolating individual story units and their *gattung*, von Rad directs his form-critical examination to the *entire structure* of the Hexateuch, looking for the statements of belief that unite the material.
- **Deuteronomy 26:5-9 Example:** This passage is highlighted as a central example of a "statement of belief." It summarizes the history of Israel from their Aramean origins to their possession of the promised land. This confessional statement shapes the narrative structure of the entire Hexateuch. This "credo" is linked to a cultic setting of bringing the first fruits of the harvest to the LORD.
- **Relationship to JEDP:** Von Rad does not reject the JEDP source criticism; he builds upon it. He takes the final form of the Hexateuch (Genesis to Joshua) as his focus, asking what structures the narrative from beginning to end. He argues that the "confessional-cultic" recitation of historical events shaped the overall structure. Von Rad brings the redactor to the forefront of analysis. The redactor was a figure lost in the emphasis of Wellhausen's JEDP documents.

### III. *Historie* vs. *Heilsgeschichte*

- **Distinction:** Von Rad distinguishes between *historie* (scientific historiography, what actually happened) and *heilsgeschichte* (salvation history, a confessional history). He posits that the Old Testament does not provide *historie* but *heilsgeschichte*.
- **Confessional History:** *Heilsgeschichte* is "confessional history," an expression of how Israel thought about its relationship with God. It is history formed by Israel's faith, not necessarily reflecting actual events. The modern historical view of Israel's past and the confessional history of Israel according to the Old Testament, are two distinct realities.
- **Von Rad's Interest:** Von Rad is primarily interested in *heilsgeschichte*, not *historie*. He wants to understand the history constructed by Israel's faith, even if it differs from what modern historical scholarship has uncovered.

- **Modern Scholarship's Challenge:** Modern historical scholarship has challenged the historicity of many Old Testament events (e.g., the exodus, the conquest). Von Rad acknowledges the challenges to the traditional picture of Israelite history.
- **Rehabilitation of *Heilsgeschichte*:** Von Rad proposes that "scholars are beginning to allow a scientific standing of its own to the picture of her history which Israel herself drew." He argues this is important for theological evaluation.
- **"Drawn Up by Faith":** The Hexateuch presents a picture of saving history "drawn up by faith and is accordingly confessional in character." The Deuteronomistic history has the same character.
- **Unified Principle of Israel:** Von Rad theorizes that old, disassociated tribal traditions were incorporated into the Hexateuch and Deuteronomistic history, becoming associated with all of Israel. The old traditions were given new interpretations and meanings that were foreign to their original intent. The "unifying principle" at work is Israel, the people of God, seen as a unified entity.
- **Object of Faith:** Von Rad's key idea is that the Israel in the Old Testament is the "object of faith and the object of a history constructed by faith."

#### IV. Vannoy's Response and Critique

- **Reversal of Cause and Effect:** Vannoy argues that Von Rad reverses the relationship between faith and history. Vannoy posits that Israel's faith was "nurtured and grew in the context of the unfolding of redemptive history."
- **Exodus 14 Example:** The crossing of the Red Sea illustrates that God's actions (divine revelation by act) precede and elicit Israel's faith (response). The events create faith, not the other way around.
- **Foundation of Faith:** For Vannoy, divine revelation, by word and act, precedes and constitutes the basis for faith. Von Rad's approach, in Vannoy's view, removes the foundation for faith in actual historical events.
- **Existential Identification:** Von Rad's approach results in an existential identification with the *ideas* presented, rather than an identification with events that actually happened.
- **A Burden:** The existence of two different views of history (historie and heilsgeschichte) is presented as a burden. Von Rad does not see *heilsgeschichte* as deceptive or fraudulent, but rather as an expression of Israel's faith. Vannoy, however, believes that this view misrepresents historical events.

**V. The Problem of Separation:** Vannoy argues that any separation between *historie* and *heilsgeschichte* is destructive to biblical faith. He asserts that only when faith is founded on real historical facts can it be legitimate.

- **Quote from Frans Hesse:** "Our faith lives from that which happened in Old Testament times. Our faith needs to rest on that which has actually happened, not on that which has only confessed to have happened." This is brought up to further emphasize Vannoy's point that faith needs to be based on true events, not just faith statements.

## **VI. Concessionary Evangelicalism**

- **Trend Toward Concession:** Despite challenges to the methodologies of Wellhausen, Gunkel, and von Rad, there is a trend toward "concessionary" positions in Evangelical circles.
- **Central Message of Christ:** The argument used by concessionary evangelicals is that the central message of the Bible points to Christ, and that this message is not affected by revising our method of biblical interpretation to reject inerrancy with respect to historical details.
- **Reinterpreting Historical Texts:** These scholars suggest that some Old Testament texts, while presented as historical, should be reinterpreted as non-historical, claiming that the events they describe did not really occur.
- **Example: H. M. Kuitert:** Kuitert's book, "Do You Understand What You Read?", is used as an example of this trend. Kuitert believes that much of the Bible does not need to be taken literally or historically. He gives the burial of Uzziah, cities traded between Solomon and Hiram, and who killed Goliath as examples of contradictions that show the Bible is not historically precise.
- **Vannoy's Rebuttal:** Vannoy asserts that the apparent contradictions in Scripture are easily answerable, and that it is improper for Kuitert to build an argument against historicity from them.
- **Conclusion:** The lecture ends with Vannoy setting up a continued discussion of Kuitert and his views, and a coming return to the "C" section skipped earlier in the lecture.

## VII. Key Takeaways

- Gerhard von Rad's form criticism of the Hexateuch focuses on the overall structure of the text and the confessional statements that he believes shaped it.
- Von Rad's distinction between *historie* and *heilsgeschichte* posits that Old Testament history is a product of faith, not an objective record of events.
- Vannoy critiques Von Rad, arguing that historical events are the basis for faith, not the other way around, and that faith in history is a vital component to the Biblical narrative.
- Concessionary evangelicalism represents a trend of conceding historical accuracy in the Old Testament while maintaining the focus on Christ's redemptive work.
- The historicity of the Old Testament remains a contentious issue.

This briefing document should provide a comprehensive overview of the main points made in the lecture excerpts. It highlights the central role of Gerhard von Rad's methodology in shaping modern biblical scholarship, while also demonstrating how his ideas are challenged by those who hold to a more traditional view of biblical authority.

## 4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 2, Form Criticism -- Von Rad

### Study Guide: Gerhard von Rad and Old Testament Historiography

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What are the three propositions von Rad uses to summarize his complex theory of the Hexateuch?
2. How does von Rad differ from Gunkel in his form critical examination of the Old Testament?
3. Where does von Rad find statements of belief that he argues structure the Hexateuch? Give an example.
4. What is the difference between *historie* and *heilsgeschichte* in von Rad's view?
5. According to von Rad, how was *heilsgeschichte* formed, and what is its nature?
6. How does Vannoy respond to von Rad's idea that *heilsgeschichte* was formed by Israel's faith?
7. How does the example of Exodus 14 illustrate Vannoy's point about faith and history?
8. What does Vannoy suggest is the biggest burden facing students of the Old Testament today in light of the distinction between *historie* and *heilsgeschichte*?
9. What is concessionary evangelicalism?
10. How does Kuitert use examples from Kings and Chronicles to argue that the Bible is not historically reliable?

#### Answer Key

1. Von Rad proposes that: 1) "statements of belief" stand behind the Hexateuch as a whole, 2) the Hexateuch is an aggregation of diverse materials changed under the guidance of the Credo, and 3) the Hexateuch should be understood as a *gattung* with a *sitz im leben*.

2. While Gunkel focused on isolating individual story units, von Rad directs his form critical examination to the entire structure of the Hexateuch. He believes that the whole Hexateuch can be understood as a single literary type.
3. Von Rad finds statements of belief in confessional passages such as the Credo in Deuteronomy 26:5-9. In this passage, an Israelite brings an offering and recites a summary of the people's history from Abraham to the conquest, which von Rad believes has shaped the Hexateuch.
4. *Historie*, in von Rad's view, refers to scientific historiography, focusing on what actually happened in history. *Heilsgeschichte*, on the other hand, is "salvation history" or "confessional history," representing Israel's interpretation of their relationship with God.
5. According to von Rad, *heilsgeschichte* is a history formed and transformed by Israel's faith, not necessarily by what actually happened. It is a confessional history that reflects how Israel thought about its own relationship with God.
6. Vannoy argues that von Rad has reversed the relationship, proposing that Israel's faith was nurtured by and grew in the context of unfolding redemptive history, not the other way around. He believes that faith is a response to historical events.
7. The events in Exodus 14, where God delivers the Israelites from Egypt, is an example of divine intervention. The response of the Israelites, as mentioned in the end of the chapter, is one of faith and trust in God and Moses.
8. Vannoy says that the biggest burden is reconciling the two views of history (*historie* and *heilsgeschichte*) as legitimate when they are so divergent. It is the conflict of the two and how they do not correlate.
9. Concessionary evangelicalism refers to a trend in some evangelical circles to concede to attacks on the historical reliability of Scripture and to adopt methodologies that question the accuracy of historical details.
10. Kuitert uses examples of discrepancies in the accounts of King Uzziah's burial, cities traded by Solomon and Hiram, and the slayer of Goliath. He argues that these inconsistencies suggest that the Bible writers did not record things as they happened.



## Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast Wellhausen's source criticism, Gunkel's form criticism, and von Rad's approach to the Old Testament. How do these methods build upon each other, and where do they diverge?
2. Analyze von Rad's concept of *heilsgeschichte*. How does it challenge traditional understandings of biblical history? What are the strengths and weaknesses of von Rad's theological perspective?
3. Discuss Vannoy's critique of von Rad, focusing on the relationship between faith and history. In what ways does Vannoy believe von Rad has reversed the order of their relationship? What implications does this have for biblical interpretation?
4. Evaluate the concept of "concessionary evangelicalism" as it is described in the lecture. What are the key arguments and concerns of those who adopt this perspective? What are the potential dangers or benefits of this approach?
5. How do the textual examples presented by Kuitert challenge a traditional reading of the Old Testament? What are the potential problems with using these examples to argue for a lack of historical precision in the Bible?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Form Criticism (Formgeschichte):** A method of biblical criticism that examines the literary genres or forms of biblical texts to determine their original context and purpose.
- **Gattung:** A German word meaning "literary type" or "genre," used in form criticism to categorize biblical texts by their specific literary characteristics and context.
- **Sitz im Leben:** A German phrase meaning "setting in life," referring to the social, cultural, or historical context in which a particular literary type or genre originated.
- **Hexateuch:** The first six books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.
- **Credo:** A statement of belief, often referring to the summary of Israel's history found in Deuteronomy 26:5-9.
- **Heilsgeschichte:** A German word meaning "salvation history," referring to the history of God's saving acts as understood and interpreted by the community of faith.
- **Historie:** A German term referring to history in the sense of scientific historiography, focusing on what actually happened in the past.
- **JEDP:** The documentary hypothesis, positing that the Pentateuch is made up of several independent sources written by different authors (Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, Priestly).
- **Redactor:** An editor or compiler of written materials, especially those who brought together and shaped the various sources of the Old Testament.
- **Concessionary Evangelicalism:** A position within evangelicalism that makes concessions to modern critical methodologies that challenge the historical reliability of Scripture.
- **Inerrancy:** The belief that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is without error in all that it affirms.

## 5. FAQs on Vannoy, Genesis, Session 2, Form Criticism – Von Rad, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ: Understanding Gerhard von Rad's Approach to the Old Testament

- **What is the central focus of Gerhard von Rad's form-critical approach to the Hexateuch (Genesis-Joshua)?**
- Von Rad shifts the focus of form criticism from individual story units to the entire structure of the Hexateuch. Instead of analyzing individual stories in isolation, he views the whole collection as a single "gattung" (literary genre) with a unique *sitz im leben* (setting in life). He argues that a series of confessional "statements of belief" stand behind the Hexateuch, shaping the aggregation of its diverse materials and giving it its overall structure. A key example of such a "statement of belief" is found in Deuteronomy 26:5-9, a credo summarizing the major events in Israel's history from Abraham to the conquest. These "statements of belief" are considered the organizing principles for the Hexateuch's narrative.
- **How does von Rad's approach differ from that of Hermann Gunkel, and how does it relate to Wellhausen's JEDP theory?**
- While von Rad builds on Gunkel's form-critical method by utilizing the concepts of "gattung" and "sitz im leben," he applies them on a much larger scale, to the Hexateuch as a whole rather than to individual story units. He examines what the *sitz im leben* of the early stages of the development of the Hexateuch as a whole is, represented by a statement of belief. He does not reject Wellhausen's JEDP source theory, but rather assumes it. He sees his work as taking place after the identification of JEDP sources and Gunkel's identification of literary forms within those documents. Von Rad then analyzes the final form of the Hexateuch, identifying a confessional framework that shapes its overall structure. He focuses on the redactor of the final text as the shaper of the narrative.

- **What does von Rad mean by *heilsgeschichte* and how does it differ from *historie*?**
- Von Rad distinguishes between *historie*, which refers to scientific historical study seeking to determine what actually happened, and *heilsgeschichte*, or salvation history. *Heilsgeschichte* is not concerned with a scientific view of "what happened," but with how Israel understood its relationship with God and how its faith shaped the narrative. It's a "confessional history," formed by Israel's faith, and not necessarily a reflection of actual historical events. *Historie* is objective, critical history while *heilsgeschichte* is confessional and faith-driven. Von Rad's primary interest lies in *heilsgeschichte*, the theological construction of history as Israel experienced it, not with historical accuracy.
- **Why does von Rad consider the confessions of faith in passages like Deuteronomy 26:5-9 so important?**
- Von Rad argues that passages like Deuteronomy 26:5-9 are central because they encapsulate the core beliefs and experiences that shaped Israel's understanding of its history and its relationship with God. These confessions served as a kind of skeletal outline, guiding the formation of the Hexateuch. He proposes that the varied materials of the Hexateuch were gathered, organized, and interpreted in light of these confessions, which he sees as being rooted in a cultic and confessional setting. He views the Hexateuch as a unified theological statement shaped by the need to confess the acts of God in Israel's history.
- **How does von Rad see the relationship between individual stories and the larger narrative of the Hexateuch?**
- Von Rad suggests that individual tribal or local traditions, which may have had their own original contexts and meanings, were incorporated into the larger narrative of the Hexateuch. These traditions were reinterpreted and given new significance within the framework of Israel's salvation history. He proposes that all of these previously disassociated stories were reinterpreted in light of the confession of Israel as God's people so that they become incorporated into the overall narrative.

- **What is Vannoy's critique of von Rad's approach, particularly regarding *heilsgeschichte*?**
- Vannoy criticizes von Rad's view that *heilsgeschichte* creates the historical events. He argues that von Rad has it backward. He insists that faith is a response to God's revelation and intervention in actual historical events, not the other way around. He provides the example of Exodus 14, where Israel's faith emerges from their experience of God's deliverance at the Red Sea. Vannoy contends that any separation between *historie* and *heilsgeschichte* is destructive to biblical faith because faith rests on real historical events, not just confessions about them. He feels the problem is that if *heilsgeschichte* has no relationship to what actually happened, it leaves one without a foundation for faith.
- **What is meant by "Concessionary Evangelicalism" in the context of Old Testament scholarship?**
- "Concessionary Evangelicalism," as presented, is a trend among some modern Evangelical scholars to concede some points of historical reliability when approaching the Old Testament, while still maintaining the core theological messages of the Bible. These scholars might accept the methodologies of source and form criticism, leading to a reassessment of historical claims. This often results in a willingness to see certain parts of the Old Testament as not literally historical but as the product of Israel's faith or confession, which is often in conflict with the traditional view that the events described in the Old Testament actually happened. This approach emphasizes that the basic message pointing to Christ is not affected if certain parts of the Old Testament are interpreted non-literally.

- **What specific examples are used to illustrate the problems arising from this "Concessionary Evangelical" approach?**
- The lecture uses examples from the historical books of the Old Testament, including: the burial of King Uzziah in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, the trading of cities between Solomon and Hiram in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, and the killing of Goliath in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. These examples are cited as "contradictions" by scholars like H.M. Kuitert to argue that not everything in the Bible can be taken as literal historical reporting. However, it is noted that there are solutions to these contradictions, either textual or in terms of historical context. Vannoy argues the concessionary method often misinterprets textual discrepancies, and concludes that the Bible does not contain a record of what really happened. He insists that the central issue of the historicity of Old Testament events remains foundational to faith.