

Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Lecture 2

Form Criticism – Gerhard von Rad

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Abstract

This lecture reviews the form-critical approach of Gerhard von Rad to the Old Testament Hexateuch, exploring his concept of the Credo (specifically Deuteronomy 26:5–9) as a structuring framework for salvation history (heilsgeschichte). Dr. Vannoy critiques von Rad's bifurcation of history into scientific historie and confessional heilsgeschichte, arguing instead that biblical faith is a direct response to actual historical acts of divine revelation rather than their generator. Finally, the lecture addresses 'Concessionary Evangelicalism' by analyzing H. M. Kuitert's claims of historical inaccuracy in Scripture and demonstrating how alleged contradictions, such as those regarding Uzziah's burial and Solomon's cities, can be resolved.

Outline

I. Gerhard von Rad's Form Critical Approach to the Hexateuch

A. The Three Core Propositions of von Rad's Theory

1. Statements of belief (the "Credo") stand behind the Hexateuch as a whole (e.g., Deut 26:5ff)
2. The Hexateuch is an aggregation of diverse materials changed into its present form under the guidance of the Credo
3. The Hexateuch as a whole must be understood as a gattung (genre) and its early stages as a sitz im leben (situation in life)

B. Elaboration on the Third Proposition (Hexateuch as a Gattung)

1. Comparison and contrast with Hermann Gunkel's method
 - a. Gunkel isolated individual story units
 - b. von Rad examines the entire structure of the Hexateuch as a single gattung
2. The role of confessional statements of belief as a skeletal outline
 - a. Deuteronomy 26:5–9 (the first-fruits offering confession of God's saving acts from Abraham to conquest)
 - b. Joshua 24:2–13 as another historical resume of Israel's history

C. Relationship to Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP) and Redaction Criticism

1. von Rad does not discard JEDP; he assumes it
2. von Rad focuses on the final form of the text
3. The redactor (compiler) receives greater theological prominence than in Wellhausen's original JEDP model

D. The Distinction Between Historie and Heilsgeschichte

1. Historie: scientific historiography dealing with objective historical facts of "what really happened"
 - a. von Rad asserts little to no historie exists in the Old Testament
2. Heilsgeschichte (Salvation History): "confessional history" formed and shaped by Israel's faith rather than objective event
 - a. von Rad focuses primarily on the theological value of heilsgeschichte rather than historie
 - b. Critical scholarship rejects the historicity of Moses' leadership, the Red Sea crossing, and the unified conquest
 - c. von Rad attempts to establish scientific standing for Israel's self-drawn history as a central theological subject
3. The "Burden" of the Divergent Histories
 - a. Modern critical scholarship seeks a "critically assured minimum" while the kerygmatic picture seeks a "theological maximum"
 - b. How heilsgeschichte was built: disparate tribal/local tales were combined and reinterpreted under a unified theology of "Israel as the people of God"

II. Vannoy's Critique of von Rad's Methodology

A. The Inverse Relationship Between Faith and History

1. von Rad claims history is a construct of Israel's faith
2. Vannoy argues that Israel's faith was nurtured in the context of actual redemptive history

B. The Exodus 14 Example (Red Sea Crossing)

1. The sequence of divine action: Word/Act precedes and establishes faith
2. Exodus 14:31: Trust in God was a response to the historical display of power
3. Order: Divine revelation -> Historical event -> Human faith response

C. Theological and Existential Implications

1. If heilsgeschichte has no basis in actual history, faith becomes merely existential identification with ideas
2. Separation of historie and heilsgeschichte is destructive to biblical faith
3. Reference to Gerhard Hasel and Frans Hesse: faith rests on what actually happened, not what is merely confessed

III. Concessionary Evangelicalism and Historical Reliability

A. The Rise of Concessionary Trends

1. Wellhausen, Gunkel, and von Rad's views have been challenged (e.g., William Henry Green)
2. Trend among some modern evangelical scholars to adopt concessionary positions
3. The claim that the Bible's primary message (pointing to Christ) is unaffected by historical inaccuracies in detail

B. H.M. Kuitert's "Do You Understand What You Read?"

1. Kuitert's claim that some Bible reports "simply did not happen the way they are told"
2. Rejection of literal accuracy as "reading the Bible badly"

C. Analysis of Alleged Contradictions and Vannoy's Solutions

1. The Burial of Uzziah
 - a. Problem: 2 Kings 15:7 says buried "with his fathers," but 2 Chronicles 26:23 says "near them in a field" due to leprosy
 - b. Solution: 2 Kings is a general statement; 2 Chronicles is specific. Alternatively, Uzziah's bones were moved in a secondary burial
2. Cities Traded Between Solomon and Hiram
 - a. Problem: 1 Kings 9:11 says Solomon gave 20 cities to Hiram, but 2 Chronicles 8:2 says Hiram gave cities to Solomon
 - b. Solution: Reflects a chronological sequence of transactions (exchange and return/reciprocity)
3. The Identity of Goliath's Slayer
 - a. Problem: 2 Samuel 21:19 says Elhanan slew Goliath, whereas 1 Chronicles says Elhanan killed Goliath's brother
 - b. Solution: "Elhanan" may be a throne name/alternate designation for David, "Goliath" could be a generic type/title for giants, or there is a textual issue

D. Critique of Kuitert's Conclusion

1. Kuitert concludes that historical precision is impossible and that the Bible being God's word does not require historical accuracy
2. Vannoy asserts that harmonization is possible and Kuitert's theory is poorly founded