

(The Covenant Life Curriculum is the authorized curriculum of the following denominations:

- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
- Cumberland Presbyterian Church
- Moravian Church in America
- Presbyterian Church in the United States
- Reformed Church in America

Sin is a malignancy which continues to spread until it issues in the death of its victim. The estrangement from God set forth in the story of Adam and Eve manifests itself in various forms in all their posterity. A large part of Genesis 4 - 11 is devoted to telling this sad tale. It is usually agreed that these chapters are a combination of different traditions which were handed down in oral form before they were put into written form. Within the diversity of form and content is a unity of faith. In Genesis 1-11 Israel sees God in relation to mankind, of which she herself is a part. She knew that she as well as others was sinful. Though the stories reflect specific memories and cultural phenomena (for example, the life of the shepherd and that of the farmer), they are really speaking to the condition of mankind in all ages. pp. 45, 46

As you read Genesis 6-9 you were probably aware of certain repetitions in the narrative and of variations in the content. As an illustration of repetition: There are two statements of the entrance of Noah and his family into the ark (7:7 and 7:13). As an illustration of variation in content: According to 6:19 Noah is instructed, "And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark . . . "; while according to 7:2 he is instructed, "Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals . . . and a pair of the animals that are not clean . . ." Such repetitions and variations are usually accounted for on the basis of the theory that different Israelite traditions were combined to form the present narrative. In any case, the story achieves its purpose of presenting the judgment and mercy of God in a distinctive way. Repetitions and variations do not impede the word of God. pp. 47, 48

The Patriarchal Narratives

The patriarchal narratives constitute Genesis 12-50. It is recognized by persons of varying theological persuasions that these narratives were not written down in their present form until after the Exodus from Egypt. Many students think they are composed of three principal documents from different periods. In any case, the traditions which compose Genesis had to be shaped, passed on in oral form, and then handed down in both oral and written form. But this is what we would expect, since the ancient Near Easterner habitually transmitted much of his cultural heritage by word of mouth. Moreover, he was careful to transmit it accurately. Obviously these narratives reflect Israel's faith and interpretation. Here again this is something to be expected, since the unit of revelation is event plus interpretation (see ch. 1). Biblical narrative is largely "theological history," not the kind of history written today. p. 53