

Backgrounds, Exegesis and Theology in a Hermeneutical Framework?

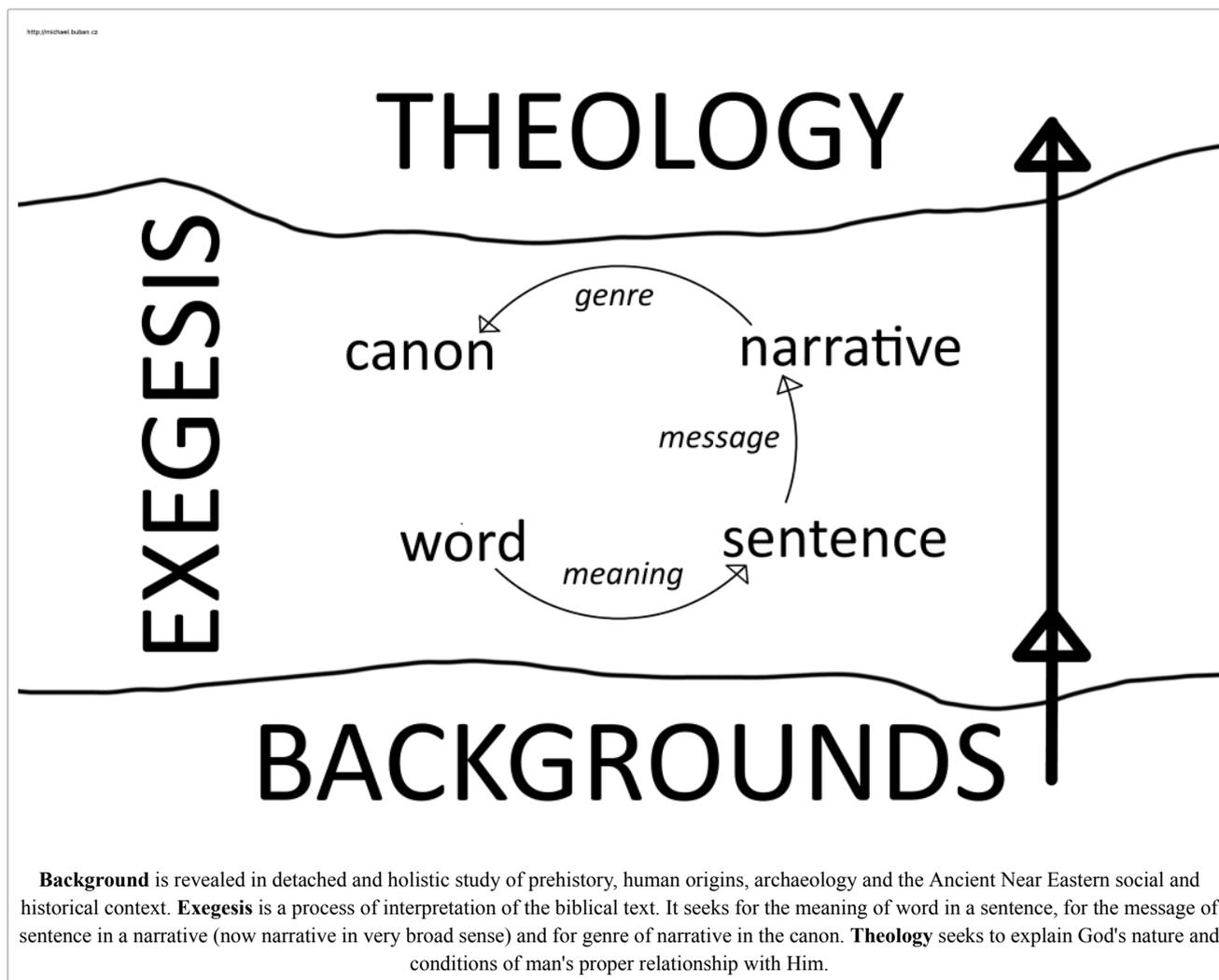
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In these days I look forward to spend another academic year as a masters student at Continental Theological Seminary. My experience there has been so far personally refreshing and intellectually stimulating. It has also brought about a number of adventures, which would otherwise be avoided during my daily routine, such as catching up on paper deadlines, paying insane dues and combining all kinds of transportation.

So, as I said, I'm looking forward to the next academic year. Three of the six courses that I need to finish are focused on the Old Testament, which I find exciting, because this is my area of expertise. Well... not really and not yet, but I'm working hard on making it so. On January, I'm taking Old Testament Theology, on April, I'm looking forward to Old Testament Exegesis and on May, I'm going to devour Old Testament Backgrounds.

Now hear what I want to say. When I looked at this schedule of courses, it reminded me something I shared with my students quite recently. When we talk about Bible backgrounds, exegesis and theology, we have to talk about it in a consistent and responsible hermeneutical framework. By "framework" I mean a mechanism which defines how these three things interlock and cohere. What I keep explaining to my students with no signs of weariness (on my side :-)) is that the proper starting point of this hermeneutical framework is background, not theology.

We start with the **Old Testament backgrounds** in order to **inform our exegesis**. And only a **proper exegesis**, which has been previously **informed by the knowledge of the background**, can be extrapolated into a **theology of the Old Testament**. A simple scheme should clarify this principle:



If we revert this order, only a disaster could follow! Our **theology is read into our exegesis** and brings **an exegetical necessity**. This necessity in turn influences our study of the backgrounds, because we either have to **remain ignorant of the Ancient Near Eastern context** or to start **chasing after all kinds of phantoms**, which are mere projections of our theology into the physical world. This is what happens when we look for the evidence of the physical giants who were begotten by demonic beings in Genesis 6 or when we try to inform modern cosmology with our concept of the creation that was exactly six days or 144 hours or 8640 minutes or 518400 seconds long.

Now wait a minute before you report this blog to your spiritual authority. I do see viable evidence for essential historicity of the events described in Genesis 1–11. My point is that if our theology is so strong that it can't allow but for a necessary exegesis, such as that the “sons of God” must have been spiritual beings and that the flood must have been universal, we will end up being limited in our exploration of the background. May God forbid that from happening!

This was just a small talk concerning method, not a complaint about the program of study. The exact order of courses at CTS is not given and I could have taken OT backgrounds last year. I was just reminded about something that I contemplate so often in these days, as I am doing some research for my own lectures. I'm looking forward to the Old Testament courses and I expect the professors to knock me out in the first round of the debate on hermeneutics. It will be a stretching experience, once again.

<https://selah.cz/theology/backgrounds-exegesis-and-theology-in-a-hermeneutical-framework/>