

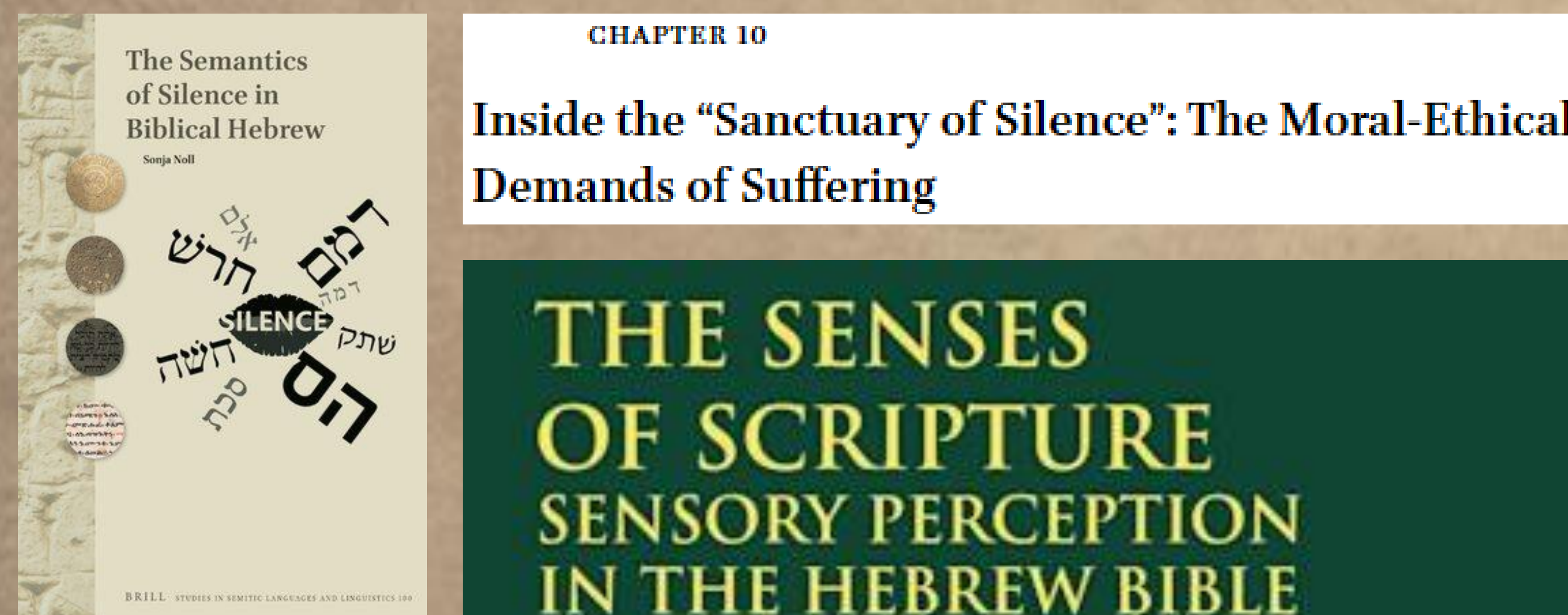
Sin's Earliest Echoes: The Pattern of Sin, Sound, Sentence in Genesis' Primeval History

Interpreting Text Through Sound

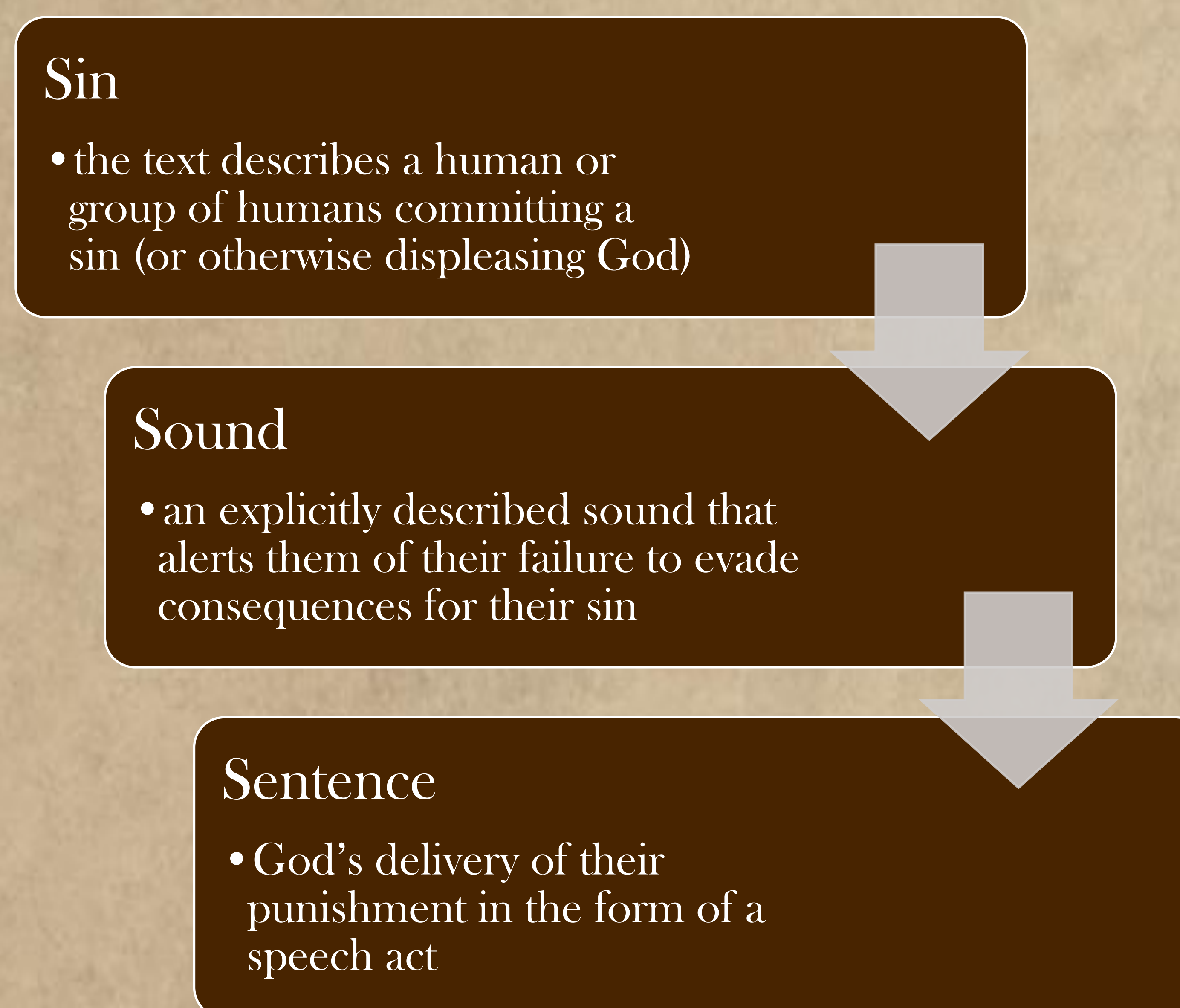
Before God creates anything else, Genesis 1 begins with God forming a sentence. Speech continues to be abundant throughout the Hebrew Bible and is thus heavily studied, but what about the other sounds? Over a century of substantial literature exists examining the sounds these texts make—the phonological patterns of these writings—there is little literature examining the sounds these texts describe, especially outside of music.

That said, scholars like Kaufmann, and more recently Knohl and Noll, have used the sounds (or lack thereof) described in scripture to successfully draw out insights on these texts. Most relevant is Avrahami's treatment of the complete Ancient Hebrew sensorium represented within the Hebrew Bible. Still, the role of textual representation of sound remains a relatively unexplored area in the study of the Hebrew Bible.

In my research, I used the Primeval History as a case study of sound's expository utility as I look to the sounds of Genesis 1-11's stories of sin in ultimate hopes of elucidating thematic elements of the text.



The Pattern



Why Primeval History?

Primeval History: roughly Genesis 1-11, which offers stories that explain the “origins of their audience’s present world” and have a distinct, universal scope

I chose the Primeval History as a case study because...

1. It is among the **first of the Hebrew Bible to be canonized**, allowing it to influence later passages.
2. It has had among the **longest “uninterrupted audience.”**
3. Next, with clear parallels both within the Bible and the Ancient Near East more broadly, these passages have a **wealth of comparison points.**
4. Finally, as the opening passage of both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, **the prominence and popularity of these passages** makes them ideal for presentation to a popular audience.

Prime Cases

Temptation and the Fall

Sin: The man and woman disobey God’s explicit command by eating the fruit.

Sound: Genesis 3:8 describes them hearing “the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden.”

Sentence: First, God curses the serpent; next, he condemns the woman; and finally, he condemns the man.



Cain and Abel

Sin: Cain sins through jealousy, murder, and deception.

Sound: God describes Abel’s “blood crying out.”

Sentence: First, Cain is “cursed from the ground.” Next, he is turned into a wanderer.



Tower of Babel

Sin: Up to interpretation—humans hoped to storm Heaven, hubris, slavery, idolatry, defiance of God’s Cultural Mandate, transgression of boundaries.

Sound and Sentence: In a brilliant end to the pattern, not only does sound alert the sinners of their failure to evade punishment as always, but the sentence is sonic in nature. The punishment is enacted by God’s speech and acting upon human speech.

