

Introduction to Genesis 25-50

0. Before We Begin ...

- i. Confidence
- ii. Humility
- iii. Preparedness
- iv. Wonder

A. CONTEXT

1. The Historicity of Genesis

a. The History of the Historicity of Genesis

- i. Historical ('Higher' or 'Literary') Criticism

Method	What Is It?	Bible's Self-Attestation?	How Was It Applied?
Source Criticism			
Redaction Criticism			
Form Criticism			

- ii. The history *of* the text, or *in* the text?

- iii. Modernism makes for arrogance

- C.S. Lewis: 'Fern-seed and Elephants.'
- D.J.A. Clines: 'New Directions in Pooh Studies: Überlieferungs- und traditionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Pu-Buch.'
- D.J.A. Clines: 'The History of Bo Peep: An Agricultural Employee's Tragedy in Contemporary Literary Perspective.'

“The reconstruction of the history of a text, when the text is ancient, sounds very convincing. But one is after all sailing by dead reckoning; the results cannot be checked by fact. In order to decide how reliable the method is, what more could you ask for than to be shown an instance where the same method is at work and we have facts to check it by? Well, that is what I have done. And we find, that when this check is available, the results are either always, or else nearly always, wrong. The ‘assured results of modern scholarship’ as to the way in which an old book was written, are ‘assured’, we may conclude, only because the men who know the facts are dead and can’t blow the gaff.”

C.S. Lewis, Fern-Seed and Elephants, p10.

- iv. Most OT scholars are not historians
 - You can’t date a text according to theme
 - You can’t date a text according to language
 - Temporal proximity is no guarantee of accuracy
 - Temporal distance is no guarantee of unreliability
- v. Literary criticism (i.e. text as literature) before Historical Criticism

b. Archaeology & Genesis

- i. ‘Biblical Archaeology School’ (Albright)
- ii. ‘The Minimalist School’ (Thompson, van Seters)
- iii. Pillars of Belief
- iv. The Comparative Method
- v. Realistic expectations

‘There is a difference between asking intelligent questions and producing plausible answers. We have to learn to live with a disproportion between the intelligent questions we can ask and the plausible answers we can give. ... The most dangerous type of researcher in any historical field is the man who, because he is intelligent enough to ask a good question, believes that he is good enough to give a satisfactory answer.’

Arnaldo Momigliano: Biblical Studies and Classical Studies: Simple Reflections about Historical Method’, Biblical Archaeologist 45 (1982), 225.

c. Historical Issues in Genesis 25-50

- i. Authorship?
- ii. High or Low Chronology?
- iii. Camels, Wandering Arameans (& Chaldeans), Philistines and Other Potential Anachronisms
- iv. Repeated Stories
- v. Aetiologies
- vi. Early 2nd millennium BC / Bronze Age Society, Dimorphism & 'Hebrew'

d. Some Conclusions

- i. Genesis contains genuine 2nd millennium BC material
- ii. That material has a self-interest in fidelity (see below)
- iii. Orality & distance is no barrier to fidelity
- iv. The OT isn't unreliable until proven reliable
- v. But, yes, what we don't know is an ocean, and that's okay: it's reliable *for its purposes*.

2. Reading the Narrative of Genesis

a. Reading as Apprenticeship (Discipleship)

- i. The hermeneutical spiral
- ii. Our Bible-study question-asking doesn't play well with OT narrative.
- iii. Our patterns of teaching and personal reading don't play well with OT narrative
- iv. Is it possible to avoid the same application each week?
- v. God wrote *Genesis* as a book, not a comic-strip

b. Each of These Texts Is Not Like the Others

- i. OT Narrative is not uniform
- ii. Form follows content
- iii. 'Free motifs' in Genesis
- iv. The patriarchs as prophets (but to whom?)
- v. Oral and textual cultures

c. Gap Theory ... for Readers

'To understand a literary work, we have to answer, in the course of reading, a series of such questions as: 'What is happening or has happened, and why? [...] Yet a closer look at the text will reveal how few of the answers to these questions have been explicitly provided there: it is the reader himself who has supplied them'

Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p190.

- i. Show and (Very Rarely) Tell
- ii. Inappropriate gap-filling
- iii. Juxtaposition, aspect, delay, repetition
- iv. The context of *torah*
- v. Hold knowledge in abeyance

d. Summary

- i. Genesis scribes an oral prophetic heritage
- ii. It contains a lot more 'free motifs' than other OT narratives
- iii. Look for the narrator's voice & key speech
- iv. But mostly, look for the macro-picture (plot, themes, structure, & *how the narrative progresses them*)
- v. Better to 'just' observe than over-interpret: the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture was never conceived of as a doctrine of 'all Scripture is easy to read'. We're *apprentices* to the voice of God.

B. MEANING

3. An Overview of Genesis 25-50

a. The Content of Genesis 25-50

i. Methods of familiarisation (helps to know your learning style)

- 25^{R-A} Isaac's Line.
 - Princes
- 25²⁰⁻³⁴ Birth of Esau + Jacob: Jacob, not Esau.
 - Arameans? v20
 - How did she inquire of the lord? v22.
 - * Ab ≠ dead @ this point
 - ▷ Jacob, not Esau.
 - ↳ sees birthright
- 26 3rd wife-sister story. → Isaac = Blessed
 - v1 narrator conscious of distinction.
 - v1 Pl. 1. sibil. ???
 - v2-5 promise renewed. → also v24
 - ↳ v11 plays out differently: why?
 - (. Esau marries Hittites. v34-35)
- 27 Isaac decided to bless Jacob.
 - v27-29: blessing Kate God's promises.
 - v30-40: the pair of blessing blessing
 - ↳ 27⁴¹ - 28⁹ → from where shall v.ias come? ↵
- 28¹⁰⁻²². Promise renewed. note: offspring clearly conceived
 - || of us plural, not singular. (v14)
 - || Beware of presentism!

expectations of narrative set:
return to Bethel; blessing.

b. The Structure of Genesis 25-50

- i. No scholarly structure ever survives contact with the biblical text
- ii. If there is a generations (*toledoth*) structure to Genesis, how are the *toledoth* structured?
- iii. My 2c: the structure is a function of the theme.

The Generations of ...	Verses	Line	Notes
(Creation Account)	1:1 – 2:3		
The Heavens & the Earth	2:4 – 4:26	Adam & Eve; Unelected	Shepherds, tents, music, metal
Adam	5:1 – 6:8	Elect (Adam < Noah) [Macro]	Nothing except Enoch
Noah	6:9 – 9:29	Elect (Noah) [Micro focus]	
Shem, Ham, Japheth	10:1 – 11:9	Unelected	The big kingdoms / nations
Shem	11:10-26	Elect [Macro focus]	Nothing
Terah	11:27 – 25:11	Elect [Micro focus]	Leaves all to be est. by God
Ishmael	25:12-18	Unelected	Children, land, and 12 princes
Isaac	25:19 – 35:29	Elect	Barren, wandering, no rule
Esau (x2)	36:1(9) – 37:1	Unelected	Possessions, people, kings
Jacob	37:2 – 50:26	Elect	Ends with 70 in all, and in Egypt

c. The Theme of Genesis 25-50

- i. If blessing is more than sentiment, then what is it?
- ii. Promise / Covenant / Faith are not ends in themselves, they are the means of blessing.
- iii. What is context?
- iv. The theme, broadly, in each section of Genesis 12-50. This is grossly oversimplified, but it illustrates that the whole book is answering the various ways in which blessing cannot be thwarted. God even assures us that *he* won't thwart blessing (Noah) and that even his judgement (scattering at Babel) works to further his plan to bless (fill the earth):
 - Genesis 12-25: Can a person *contribute* to God's plan to bless? No.
 - Genesis 25-35: Given that God confirms his promises because of Abraham's obedience, and his firstborn receives the promise (i.e. prior context), is blessing through *merit* or *primogeniture*? No.
 - Genesis 36-50: But what if God's people do *evil*? No. That too works within God's plan to bless.

d. Notes on Specific Texts

- i. A *third* wife-sister story?
- ii. Morality and the silent narrator
- iii. Dinah, Judah & Tamar, Potiphar's wife
- iv. Divine-human communication in Genesis
- v. Was Joseph a diviner?

C. SIGNIFICANCE

4. The Significance of Genesis 25-50

a. How do we drive towards significance?

- i. What does this text uniquely contribute to our understanding (and/or affections)?; Or:
- ii. If we didn't have this text, what would be lost from our understanding (and/or affections)?

b. Narrative & Theological Significance:

- iii. What if the story ended at Genesis 25:11? How would the thematic development and plot be impacted? What would be lost?
- iv. What theological truths does Genesis 25-50 then introduce, emphasise, reinforce, nuance, develop, etc.? What *disposition(s)* to those truths does Genesis 25-50 cultivate?

c. Biblical Theological Significance:

- v. How does the narrative look beyond itself for fulfilment?
- vi. Are there particular 'structures' that look for something 'greater'?
- vii. How does the NT use Genesis 25-50?

If Blessing Is More Than Sentiment, What Is It?

1:22 And God **blessed** them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

1:28 And God **blessed** them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

2:3 So God **blessed** the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

9:1 And God **blessed** Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."

12:2-3 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will **ble**ss you and make your name great, so that you will be a **ble**ssing. I will **ble**ss those who **ble**ss you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be **ble**ssed."

17:16 I will **ble**ss her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will **ble**ss her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

17:20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have **ble**ssed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.

22:17-18 I will surely **ble**ss you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be **ble**ssed, because you have obeyed my voice."

24:35 The LORD has greatly **ble**ssed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys.

24:60 And they **ble**ssed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!"

26:3-4 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will **ble**ss you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be **ble**ssed,

26:12-13 And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD **ble**ssed him, and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.

26:24 And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will **ble**ss you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake."

27:27-29 So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and **ble**ssed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the LORD has **ble**ssed! May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and **ble**ssed be everyone who **ble**sses you!"

28:1-4 Then Isaac called Jacob and **ble**ssed him and directed him, "You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. God Almighty **ble**ss you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give the **ble**ssing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!"

39:5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD **ble**ssed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the **ble**ssing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field.

48:9 Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may **ble**ss them."

48:15 And he **ble**ssed Joseph and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, **ble**ss the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

49:28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he **ble**ssed them, **ble**ssing each with the **ble**ssing suitable to him.

Notes on Reading the Old Testament

How do we read the Old Testament, as God's New Testament people?

1. Four New Testament Principles

We rightly recognise and strive towards the New Testament's perspective on reading the Old Testament, in four quite specific ways:

First, we know that, while the Old Testament (Covenant) is not *our* covenant, we know that **God wrote the OT for us, his new covenant people** (1 Corinthians 10:11). We're committed to being students of the OT. God's word is enduring, and his word is still to be heard, even if the promises of the Old Covenant (Testament) have been fulfilled in Jesus.

This naturally leads us, second, to the reality that the Old Testament is **irreducibly forward-looking to Jesus**. Both Jesus' own understanding (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47), and that of his apostles (2 Corinthians 1:20; 1 Peter 1:10-12) is that the Old Testament is ultimately about the Christ, and the gospel he brings to light. More, he *fulfils* the OT. We're committed to reading the OT in light of Jesus.

Third, we know that this changes things with regards to the law: we are not under it, but **the law is still useful** for convicting of sin, pointing to Jesus, and teaching us how to love (Galatians).

Fourth, **we know that there is a plan and unfolding revelation when it comes to the Old Covenant** (and New!): salvation history. While the OT also teaches this, the NT makes abundantly clear that all of history is bound up with *God's plan* (e.g., Ephesians 1:9-10), a plan that was kept secret (while still being written in Scripture) and now revealed in the last days (Ephesians 3, Romans 16:25-27). The Bible hangs together, theologically, by 'developing revelation' (development-as-gradual rather than development-as-evolving!).

2. Yes, But How?

So far, so good. But what next? I remember when one minister first started at a church he stuck a piece of paper over his desk that said 'Yes, but how?'. We know *that* it's about Jesus and is still for us and that there is 'salvation history'. But *how* is it about Jesus? *How* is it for us? And how do we *use* salvation history to read?

There are two easily identifiable ways in which the Old Testament is about Jesus: promises and typology.

When God promises a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15ff) and that this prophet hadn't come yet (34:10-12), we look forward to its fulfilment in a specific person (Acts 3). More generally, we know that God's 'macro-promises' (e.g., blessing!) find their fulfilment and ultimate expression in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20).

The New Testament also teaches us to look for 'types', of which Jesus is the 'antitype'. Or, to put it another way, to look for shadows of the future of which Jesus is the reality.

This one takes a little more care. It's important that we don't reduce texts to allegory (creating spiritual meanings out of episodes that give no warrant to do so), but rather let *the texts* generate the associations themselves (if there are any at all). As a general rule of thumb, if the New Testament doesn't draw the connection, then we ought not do it ourselves!

But this is where Biblical Theology can help, too. The Book of Hebrews gives a way of viewing the Old Testament by looking for 'inadequate structures'. What I mean is, it repeatedly shows an OT person, event, system, or 'structure' *that the OT itself saw as inadequate*. Sinful priests, repetitive sacrifices, a physical tent / temple rather than God's actual presence, angelic mediation vs face-to-face, a land in Joshua while speaking of hope for a better one.

When we read the Old Testament, almost every 'macrostructure' we can think of generates (eventually, in the context of the *whole* OT), a forward expectation of something better: prophet, priest, king, sacrifice, blessing, the Spirit, temple, presence, land, 'nationhood', glory, creation itself, rest, where the law is 'written', etc. These *all* find their realisation in Jesus: the reality to the shadow.

[As an aside, which is why the 'wise man' category is unpersuasive. The OT – and the NT – doesn't generate that expectation. It's an imposition on the wisdom literature rather than flowing from it. This also stops us from limitless associations. Similarity is not typology. Otherwise, any person being obedient to God in the OT will all of a sudden by a type of Jesus, since he also was obedient to the law!]

3. What If There Is No Promise or Type?

It's from here onwards that we can start to fall off the log. *What happens when the passage before us has no promise, and has no type?* What do we do then? This is no mere idle curiosity, because *most* OT narrative is exactly that: story without shadow or promise.

In many ways, this is where we let ourselves down with the OT. Our prior commitments (as outlined in section 1) mean that we fall off the log in better directions than others (we make it about Jesus rather than about ourselves or the latest philosophy or wind of teaching or business ethics etc), but it's still falling off the log.

There are three things that can help us at this point.

The first is that **we need to remember that God wrote entire books**, not a series of small snippets strung together into books. Jane Austen wrote *Pride & Prejudice*. She didn't write a series of isolated chapters to be consumed like a comic book: the same characters across the book but with no plot or internal coherence beyond the page at hand. Likewise the biblical authors: God wrote *Genesis*; he wrote it to be read *as one*.

So here is our first port-of-call for being better Bible readers (i.e., better listeners at the feet of God). We need to learn to read and appreciate and delight in the message of *books as a whole*. The component parts *contribute* to a message rather than contain an isolated message *in themselves*. In this understanding, it's okay if the passage doesn't have a promise or a shadow, for instance. It could be that our text simply isn't large enough. And that larger passage will be about Jesus in a different way, not through shadow or promise.

[As an aside, OT narrative conceived on broad terms completely disrupts 'standard' models of expository preaching, Bible-study groups, and personal Bible-reading - things we rightly love! But it's fair to say they tend to be formatted and formed as listening genres based on the gospels and epistles which can be broken down relatively easily into smaller chunks, rather than narratives. But, if we're serious about being students (disciples) of Jesus, then we'll adapt our learning to God's modes of communication: we need to become readers and lovers of *story*.]

Second, though, it would be a mistake to 'keep expanding' our passage until we have a shadow or promise ... and then just sit there and ignore the rest.

The entire Megilloth would be a very large problem for us otherwise (Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Song of Songs). They don't have shadows or promises!

The reason we go 'broader' with narrative is because we remember that God's authors were prophets. The Torah was written by a prophet (Moses); the four 'history books' of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, are the 'former prophets'. The latter prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve. That's two of the three major sections of the OT. The third (The Writings) is a little trickier to justify, although their prophetic nature is fairly evident (Daniel, David was a prophet, etc.). This includes the narrative books of The Writings, *when taken as a whole*.

There's nothing wrong with focussing on the shadow or promise in a passage, of course! But the narrative is not simply a vehicle for these things. The narrative stands as a communicative prophetic act in its own right. The plot and purpose, the theme and trajectory, have prophetic scope. And that means a biblical theological scope, of a consequence.

This leads us then, third, for **the essential need to not be lazy with our Biblical Theology**. Biblical Theology, as it is often practised these days (but never in its original intention in the Goldsworthy heydays), consists of locating the event in a passage in salvation history, and then making it about Jesus somehow through verbal or conceptual associations. This is not biblical theology. It's actually allegory, the very thing Goldsworthy was arguing against when he published *Gospel and Kingdom*.

Instead, proper biblical theology does not 'jump to Jesus'. Also, it's not about the event, but the prophetic portrayal of that event (i.e., *how* the text presents it, and *why* the text presents it, not just *that* it happened – i.e., it respects authorial intent, when placed in the wider OT context).

Biblical Theology doesn't 'jump to Jesus'; it traces the 'theme' through to Jesus.

The Book of Judges is a good example. It's also a useful entry-point because, unlike most OT books, the author tells us what his book is about in Chapter 2! In Judges we are given a cycle of sin, judgement, and grace, but with a particular skew: a downward spiral into darkness as God's people do what is 'evil in God's eyes'. This is contrasted with the final chapters of the book: in the most horrific of events, this evil in God's eyes is 'right in

their own eyes'. The implied solution: Israel needs a king. Here, in the scope of the book as a whole we have an astounding proclamation (and somewhat alien to our 'power corrupts' view of life): we need a king to solve our problem of sin. While, yes, we *could* just 'jump to Jesus', in the context of the former prophets the message of Judges is but part of the message: we need a king, of God's choosing, not ours, of the line of David, but greater than David. That is, the gospel-fulfilment of Judges comes through the rest of the OT, not in spite of it.

The Book of Ruth is another good example of how the message of the whole book thrusts us forward to Jesus, but *through* salvation history, not in spite of it. There are no shadows or promises in the book. There is no easy way to Jesus. Boaz is in no way a type of Jesus. Their similarities begin and end with the law: because they are both obedient to the law and so live lives of kind adherence and loving obedience.

But the message of the book is clear: in this horrific period of the Judges, God was in fact preparing the way for King David. What an astounding message of kind and gracious provision during a period of being given over by God to increasing darkness because of their idolatry! What a message of comfort that would have been to the post-exiles, under foreign rule, waiting for the Messiah. Whatever the origins of each book of the Megilloth, their place in the canon is self-evidently post-exilic (Esther!). Ruth forms a biblical-theological foil to Judges – a foil of comfort and hope – to a people waiting for a king.

4. Growing in Our OT Reading

There are two habits that flow from our principles in section 1, but actually work against them. It's useful if we raise them to mind so we can handle the text more appropriately.

The first is that **we must oppose the bizarre insistence that the preached passage must *always* be about Jesus.** The claim that 'a sermon that doesn't mention Jesus is a Jewish sermon' is fairly immature. It's also very 'Sydney'. Don Carson once told a friend of mine that, globally, he could identify Moore College graduates simply by their insistence on this point (and possibly by their accent!). We just don't realise how odd we are on this.

But we don't need the Don to tell us! We can know this naturally now, from what we've been saying, above, in two ways.

On the one hand, we should acknowledge that it is a good intuition given the NT witness! But a closer reading of our (rightly) cherished passages of 2 Corinthians 1:20, Luke 24, etc. shows we've made a misstep. They don't say *everything* in the OT is about Jesus. Every promise finds its answer or amen in him! And whatever is in there, across all the Scriptures, is!

This qualification makes sense of Paul's typology in 1 Corinthians 10. While all OT reading takes place in the context of a gospel/Jesus fulfilment, it still has lessons for us to learn! That is, we need to go back to one of our original cherished principles: *the law teaches us to love, as the Christ's people, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.*

Further, we would also never say 'Genesis 35:23 is about Jesus'. Or at least we shouldn't. It's an absurdity. We also know that context is king: we know that 'cherry-picking' verses is not how to read a text.

So why, then, when narratives deal with meaning across whole books, or sections of books, would we apply that method to a single narrative episode (of any length), just because it happens to be what the preacher decided was a suitable unit to preach on? He may have just chosen a unit that makes no biblical-theological sense (i.e., tracing through to Jesus) without the wider narrative.

Genesis is about Jesus (in the context of salvation history). The shadows and promises are about Jesus. Any shorter passage has no guarantee it will have anything specifically relating to Jesus. And if it doesn't, trying to make it about Jesus is just allegorisation, and makes us bad Bible readers (i.e., bad listeners), where any word-association or similarity can be made to be about Jesus ('there's a tree, it must be about the cross!').

Typology works *with* the author's intention, and in this case, that means *narrative* intention; allegory ignores authorial intention. [As an aside, that's how Paul's 'allegory' in Galatians 4 still works, because it's essentially typology ... it works with the text's intentions rather than contrary to it].

Finally, as a second step forward, **in what sense, can I read the episodes of OT narratives as having moral or ethical implications for us?**

In one sense, not at all. It's not why they were written. The texts are descriptive, not prescriptive.

Take the following 'Bible-study application' question as an example: 'Who is in danger of being the wife of Potiphar in your life?' It sounds like it's applying the text, but it actually isn't. It's applying a *moral principle* (adultery is wrong and we should flee temptation), and is using the Potiphar episode as an *illustration* of the moral principle.

Now, thankfully, the moral intuition is correct, because we've obtained that information from elsewhere in Scripture. But it would be a mistake to say we're applying the Potiphar's wife episode at that point. We're not. We're applying the moral principles we unconsciously picked up elsewhere *via* the illustration that the episode provides.

But it seems a legitimate application because the text we're gaining the illustration from is authoritative. If we swapped the illustration of Potiphar's wife out for Rushdie's *Fury* or Campion's *The Piano*, the method we're actually engaging in would be made clearer.

Does this mean we should never read OT narrative like this? Yes and no.

It's best if we're clear. If we want to illustrate a moral principle from somewhere else in Scripture using the descriptive text in front of us, let's say that we're doing that. Let's not pass it off as 'this is how to apply this passage' as if its events are somehow prescriptive for us. Because that's not what we're actually doing, anyway. We're reading the narrative in light of the law (which is what stops us from applying passages about lying and deceit as legitimate).

But if we're clear about what we're doing, why wouldn't we use *our* Old Testament, *our* stories (i.e., the stories God wants us to know and take to heart), to drive home the beauty of kindness, the sacrifice of truth-telling, the glory of repentance and faith, the hidden glory of forbearance in suffering, etc.?

This method can be especially helpful if we don't know what to do with a passage. Rather than allegorisation (in our case, making false connections to Jesus because we

have a misguided application of the NT that each section of the OT as determined by us must be about him), or moralisation ('*this* passage teaches us that lying is bad'), and if at this stage of our discipleship to God's word narrative and story and biblical theology is all beyond us, maybe the best thing we can do is 'just' say (until the next time around, when we've grown as readers just that bit more):

'Let's observe what's in the passage. What deeds of God can we praise and thank him for? What do we know from the rest of Scripture to evaluate these human deeds? How, then, can these be illustrations of encouragement or warning for us?'

I remember Phillip Jensen saying exactly this to Sunday School teachers: if we don't know what to do with a story, don't make it up! Just tell the story. Or, as my Hebrew lecturer once pointed out: better to know a little with confidence than speculate, not least because the next time around we'll need to unpick the speculation before being able to make further steps forward.

5. Learn to Love Story Again

To sum up, we would do well to re-learn to love story. Doctors diagnose, engineers design, lawyers ... lawyer! Children love story. And the same story. Again. And again. We no longer live in a memory culture; we're no longer even in a textual culture. We're in a visual culture. We're in a culture of self-expression rather than listening.

Learning to love story-listening, learning to hear the contours and themes and delightful twists of a whole narrative, to anticipate and delight in what we've heard before, learning to say 'tell me that story again' ... learning to love the broad sweep of a biblical narrative and how its thread connects through the other narratives in the tapestry towards its fulfilment in Jesus ... us being willing to say 'you know what, I don't know what to do with this passage, let's just observe it rather than falsely interpret it' ... we'd go some way to avoiding pitfalls in reading OT narrative.

Old Testament narrative is for us; it is about Jesus. It's about his gospel, and the fulfilment of God's plans and purposes in him. We just need to ensure we actually read the narrative *as intended*, rather than pieces of it.