

A DIFFERENT TYPE OF TYPE: THE APPLICATION OF PAUL'S HERMENEUTIC IN 1 CORINTHIANS 10:6–11

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Old Testament narratives hold a special place in the life of the church. Many children grow up hearing lay teachers talk about Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Gideon, David, and Elijah, to name just a few. Is it possible for those lay teachers to understand and convey a narrative's message, let alone have a seven-year-old child understand it? A right view of the perspicuity of Scripture allows for an understandable message without the reader understanding all the details.² Even if the reader misses or misinterprets details, he can still arrive at the intended message if he reads with a straightforward and devout hermeneutic.³ Paul provides an example of this hermeneutic applied to Old Testament narrative when he writes “now these things [narratives to be mentioned] took place as examples [τύπος]” in 1 Corinthians 10:6–11.⁴ In addition to providing a type of moral example to the Corinthians, Paul also provided a different type of type for later readers: a straightforward and devout hermeneutic characterized by three controlling principles. An application of Paul's hermeneutic from 1 Corinthians 10:6–11 to 2 Kings 5:1–27 demonstrates its validity when informed by basic prerequisites for interpreting Biblical narrative. The discussion below analyzes Paul's use of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians 10:1–11, establishes necessary presuppositions and fundamental principles for literary analysis, and provides a case study on 2 Kings 5:1–27 that compares a more academic literary analysis to a straightforward and devout reading utilizing Paul's hermeneutic.

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² Mark D. Thompson defines perspicuity as “The clarity of Scripture is that quality of the biblical text that, as God's communicative act, ensures its meaning is accessible to all who come to it in faith.” *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* in *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 170. Kevin J. Vanhoozer defines clarity as “the Bible is sufficiently unambiguous in the main point for any well-intentioned person with Christian faith to interpret each part with relative adequacy.” *Is There Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 315. Both definitions apply well to narrative literature that teaches one main message through implication.

³ By this, I mean a normal approach to reading a genre along with a presupposition that God inspired Scripture so that we can know him.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.

Paul's Use of Narratives in 1 Corinthians 10:6–11

Paul presented the Corinthian church with a masterclass of Old Testament knowledge and use in 10:1–13.⁵ Yet Paul seems to use the Old Testament differently in 10:1–5 than in 10:6–11. Two interpretational questions must be answered on the way to establishing Paul's hermeneutic. First, is there a distinction between Paul's use of the Old Testament in 10:1–5 and 10:6–11? Second, how do the narratives clearly referenced by Paul compare to Paul's use of them?

Comparison Between 10:1–5 and 10:6–11

Paul employed two different uses of the Old Testament within the larger pericope. Verses 1–5 present an analogy of history as Paul makes broad statements comparing Old Testament Israel to the New Testament Church.⁶ Analogy of history says “this is like that,” not “this is that.” In contrast, 10:6–11 contains specific allusions to Old Testament narrative that have an analogy of application. The discussion below highlights two distinguishing characteristics that show Paul is using a different hermeneutic in 10:6–11.⁷

In content, verses 1–5 differ from verses 6–11. First, the first section is broad in its subject. The four “all” (πάντες) statements show a generalization in addition to serving Paul's broader analogy. He is drawing the Corinthians into solidarity with Israel.⁸ By contrast, verses 6–11 employ “we/us,” “they,” and “some of them” (10:7, 8, 9, 10). Second, the first section alludes to general historical events. For example, rather than alluding to the multiple provisions of H²O (Exod. 15; 17; Num. 20), Paul describes “spiritual” water—Christ. This introduction of Christ

⁵ Wayne A. Meeks notes that the unity of 10:1–13 is often missed or ignored by scholarship. “‘And Rose up to Play’: Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 5, no. 16 (1982): 65.

⁶ See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 449; Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 451; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1993), 321; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 449. Richard B. Hays goes further by referring to 10:1–5 as “fanciful analogies.” Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 91.

⁷ A full discussion of analogy or typology is beyond the scope of this article. The New Testament clearly identifies several Old Testament types such as Melchizedek (Hebrews 7), the Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), and the tabernacle (Hebrews 9). However, unbridled typology works against a straightforward and devout hermeneutic by introducing a strong subjectivism.

⁸ Note how Paul called the Israelite's in the wilderness the “fathers” of the primarily Gentile Corinthian church (10:2).

into the Wilderness history as a moving rock forces the reader to evaluate Paul's use. Was he off his hermeneutical rocker by reading Christ into the Old Testament narrative? Unlikely. Or was Paul drawing a spiritual analogy without saying Christ was there? Several commentators agree with the analogy view. David E. Garland calls 10:2 "analogous spiritual circumstances" between Israel and the Church,⁹ which is similar to Simon J. Kistemaker, who labels his discussion of verses 1–4 as "analogy."¹⁰ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner describe it as analogical or typological.¹¹ Gordon Fee prefers to label 10:1–4 as analogies because they are not strict types and break down quickly.¹² Richard Hays describes 10:1–4 as "metaphoric correspondences."¹³ Nearly all of these draw some level of distinction between Paul's use of the Old Testament in 10:1–5 and in 10:6–11.¹⁴ Even though Paul used the Old Testament analogically in 10:1–5, his use of the Old Testament in 10:6–11 was qualitatively different. Third, Paul has a primarily positive tone in verses 1–5 before he gives a warning statement at 10:5 as a bridge to the next section. The next section is the inverse. The warnings of verses 6–10 contain some type of negation (e.g., do not be like) before concluding with a more positive statement in verse 11.

In structure, Paul uses τύπος (noun form, 10:6) and τυπικῶς (adverb form, 10:11) to create an inclusio and bracket verses 6–11 from the rest of the section.¹⁵ The repetition of "now these" (ταῦτα δὲ) in 10:6 and 11 further supports the inclusio. How is Paul using τύπος? David L. Baker provides a working definition for a type: "A biblical event, person, or institution which serves as an example or pattern for other events, persons, or institutions."¹⁶ This does not appear

⁹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 449.

¹⁰ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 312.

¹¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 449.

¹² Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 452.

¹³ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 160.

¹⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 452; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 442; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 451; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 165; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 312.

¹⁵ Gray D. Collier notes how the inclusio in 10:6 and 10:11 sets 10:7–10 apart. He also suggests a chiasm based "partially on parallel thought patterns in the verses, but mostly on parallels among four verbs." Collier, Gary D. "'That We Might Not Crave Evil': The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians 10:1–13," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17, no. 55 (1995): 60.

¹⁶ David L. Baker, "Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1994), 327.

to be how Paul uses “example” in this text.¹⁷ In other passages, Paul used τύπος in different ways. In Romans 5:14, the first Adam is a type of the second Adam, a more technical use. In Philippians 3:17, Paul wanted the church to imitate his pattern (τύπος; cf, 1 Thess. 1:7; 2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7), a more mundane use. The two appearances of τύπος in 1 Corinthians 10 are not Old Testament prophetic patterns but instructional examples.¹⁸ While there is continuity between 10:1–5 and 10:6–11, the content and structure of each section set them apart as distinct sections. Paul moved from employing broad analogies in 10:1–5 to employing specific Old Testament narratives as examples in 10:6–11.

Cited Narratives

Commentators differ on how many narratives are alluded to in verses 6–11. For example, Ciampa and Rosner hold three specific allusions and one general.¹⁹ Wayne A. Meeks²⁰ and Thomas R. Schreiner²¹ identify five allusions. David E. Garland,²² Paul Gardner,²³ and Anthony C. Thiselton²⁴ hold to four. The disagreement over the number revolves around verse 10, which lacks an identifiable detail. Paul made three indisputable allusions that each have a clear identifiable detail: Exodus 32 in 10:7 (“The people sat down to eat...”), Numbers 25 in 10:8 (“twenty-three thousand fell in a single day”), and Numbers 21 in 10:9 (“were destroyed by

¹⁷ Baker concludes that the New Testament never uses τύπος, τυπικῶς, or ἀντίτυπος in a technical sense. Baker, “Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament,” 321. In contrast, Leonhard Goppelt describes 1 Corinthians 10:6 as a hermeneutical term, a Biblical reference to typology, not just an example. Leonhard Goppelt, “τύπος” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972): 8:252.

¹⁸ Ciampa and Rosner agree with this conclusion when they note that typology is generally God-designed and positive while the narratives referenced in 10:6-11 are negative. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 453.

¹⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 463.

²⁰ Meeks, “‘And Rose up to Play’: Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10:1-22,” 68.

²¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 202.

²² David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* in Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 459.

²³ Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians* in Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 421.

²⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 731.

serpents”).²⁵ A brief survey of these cited narratives demonstrates continuity with their original setting, their Old Testament use, and their use by Paul.

Exodus 32 and 1 Corinthians 10:7

Paul used Exodus 32 to teach that God judges those who indulge in idolatry. Paul quoted from Exodus 32:6 to remove all shadow of a doubt as to which idolatrous action from Israel’s past. “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play” (10:7). Contextually, his use of Exodus 32 is poignant considering the issues facing the Corinthians. First, the Exodus narrative contains worship messiness. Israel credited Moses with their exodus, not Yahweh (32:1). Aaron made one calf but uses a masculine plural verb (“brought up,” 32:4).²⁶ Later, he called a feast for Yahweh (32:5). Who was Israel worshipping?²⁷ Paul raised a similar question later when he asked about worshipping demons (10:20–21). Second, the burnt and peace offerings of Exodus 32:6 connect contextually with Paul’s discussion of meat sacrificed to idols. Both the burnt offering and peace offerings often accompanied a fellowship meal (cf. Lev. 3 and 7).

Moses intended his reader to draw a close connection between Israel’s idolatry and God’s judgment. “Burned hot” (חרה) appears four times in the succeeding Exodus scenes (32:10, 11, 19, 22). “Consume” occurs twice (כלה; 32:10, 12). The passage uses two words for sin that are repeated six total times (32:21, 30 [2x], 31, 32, 34). The final verse of the chapter encapsulates Yahweh’s response to Israel’s idolatry: Yahweh plagued them because of the calf (32:35). “Plagued” (נגף) is also used of the second plague of Egypt (Exod. 7:27) and of the Passover

²⁵ Clarifying the “missing thousand” between the 23,000 in 1 Corinthians 10:8 and the 24,000 in Numbers 25 is beyond this article’s scope. We would do well to heed the counsel of C. John Collins who says the following after discussing the missing thousand, “In any case, the Corinthian Christians (and all others) would do well, first, to refrain from congratulating themselves over their tolerance of what defiles the whole people (1 Cor. 5:68), and second, to be zealous for the better gifts, that they might build the body up in loyal service to the Lord (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1, 12).” C. John Collins, “Numbers, Book of,” in *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 574.

²⁶ Although אֱלֹהִים (Elohim: God/gods) is plural, it usually takes a singular verb when used of Yahweh in a plural of majesty. See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 122. In Exodus 32, אֱלֹהִים is used with a plural verb in 32:1, 4, 8, 23 and with a singular verb in 32:11, 16, 27.

²⁷ Victor P. Hamilton believes the sin was idolatry rather than polytheism despite the plurals. Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 532

(12:13, 23 [2x], 27).²⁸ T. Desmond Alexander encapsulates well the primary lesson of Exodus 32 when he says, “God takes willful disobedience very seriously.”²⁹ No wonder Paul used Exodus 32 as an example.

Of Paul’s three clear allusions, only Exodus 32 contains clear Old Testament commentary. In Deuteronomy 9:7–21, Moses rehearsed the Golden Calf incident, noting how Israel provoked Yahweh (9:7, 8, 18) to anger (9:18–20). Psalm 106:19–23 picks up on the sin of idolatry before noting Yahweh’s threat to destroy Israel. In contrast to Deuteronomy 9 and Psalm 106, Nehemiah 9 uses the Golden Calf incident as an example of Yahweh’s mercy toward Israel in that he did not utterly destroy them. Nehemiah picked up on the covenantal overtones of Exodus 32 as he used it in his national prayer of confession before reaffirming the returned remnant’s commitment to the covenant. All three Old Testament commentaries on Exodus 32 highlight the idolatry, sin against Yahweh, and Yahweh’s judgment. Nehemiah paid special attention to the context and drew appropriate application to his setting. Paul’s use of Exodus 32 aligns with the primary lesson and the Old Testament usage of Exodus 32.

Numbers 25 and 1 Corinthians 10:8

If not for the number of people who died, we could not identify which of the many (many) idolatrous incidents Paul was referencing. Numbers 25 records Israel’s sin with Moab at Shittim. In 25:1, Moses described their sin as prostitution, although the word could describe both prostitution (Gen. 34:31; 38:15, 34) or idolatry (Exod. 34:15–16; Lev. 17:7). The sexual sins soon devolved into spiritual idolatry (25:2) as the women who seduced (25:1) became sexual “soulwinners” inviting the Israel men to worship (25:2). The waw consecutive imperfect that begins 25:2 sets up the idolatry as the uneventful next step. To be blunt, it is as if to say “now that we have slept together, let’s worship together through more sexual immorality.” Just like Exodus 32:19 and 22, Israel’s sin raised Yahweh’s anger (Num. 25:3–4).

Yahweh both directly and indirectly judged. In 25:5, Yahweh commanded Moses to provide justice by way of capital punishment. In 25:9, Yahweh stopped the plague due to the

²⁸ Douglas K. Stuart describes this plague as “a small-scale warning, a sample of God’s wrath. . . .” Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 689.

²⁹ T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, ed. John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 2016), 174.

zealous actions of Phineas (25:7), who embodied the zeal of Yahweh (25:11). Yahweh credited himself with sending the plague in his anger (25:11).³⁰ The sexual sins were deplorable, but the ultimate sin of the passage was idolatry as seen in Moses' command to kill all who bowed to Baal of Peor (25:5). The three other Old Testament references to the sin of Baal Peor also highlight the idolatrous nature. Moses recounted the incident "at Baal-Peor" as judgment on those who "followed Baal of Peor" (Deut. 4:3). In Joshua 22:17, Israel compared the incident at Baal Peor to the Transjordan altar, a misunderstood and perhaps unwise symbol of worship. Psalm 106, a national confession prayer, briefly mentions Numbers 25 without mentioning the sexual sins. Instead, the psalmist focuses on the idolatry, anger of Yahweh, and the plague judgment (106:28–29).

If idolatry is the focus of Numbers 25 and the sole focus of the three Old Testament retellings, did Paul mishandle Numbers 25 by focusing on the "sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 10:8)? No. Paul hit a primary theme within the narrative (sexual immorality) on his way to the primary message of the narrative: Yahweh judges the unfaithfulness of his people. Sexual immorality and idolatry are both disobediences. Why then did Paul choose to mention sexual immorality instead of idolatry? In his warnings, Paul cast a wide net of sins from idolatry (10:7) to sexual immorality (10:8) and finally to sinful attitudes (10:9). The warning against imitating Israel (10:6) is not solely a warning against idolatry. Rather, it is a warning against sinful desire in its varied forms. It makes sense that Paul would include sexual immorality within his net of sins, considering he has already spoken against it in 1 Corinthians 5:1, 11; 6:13, 18; and 7:1–2. Paul's use of Numbers 25 may be as exact as his use of Exodus 32 but does employ a primary theme that fits the Corinthian context.

Numbers 21 and 1 Corinthians 10:9

Paul's last clear reference to an Old Testament narrative stands out from the prior allusions in two ways. First, Paul described the Israelites grumbling as tempting Christ, not God. Paul did not try to read Christ back into Numbers 21 but had already compared Christ to God in

³⁰ Numbers 25 uses a different word for plague than Exodus 32. The word used in Numbers 25 is used in Exodus 9:14 to describe the plagues of Egypt. In this way, both Numbers 25 and Exodus 32 carry connections to the plagues of Egypt.

1 Corinthians 8:6.³¹ In his mind, to tempt God as Israel is also to tempt Christ. Second, Paul used a term for Israel's sin that is not found within Numbers 21. In 10:7, he quoted from Exodus 32. In 10:8, he used the same category of terms to describe Israel's sexual immorality. However, in 10:9, he described Israel's sin of complaining as a "test" (ἐκπειράζω), a designation that does not appear in Numbers 21. However, Numbers 14:22 references ten times in which Israel tested God. Chronologically, Numbers 21 occurs after this statement, but the statement establishes a pattern in which Israel tested God through complaint and rebellion. Paul's use of "test" demonstrated a broader awareness of how Numbers 21 fit within the Book of Numbers.

Israel sinned with her words by speaking against God and God's chosen leader (21:5). Yahweh responded by sending the fiery serpents to judge them. Unlike the prior two narratives, Numbers 21 does not mention Yahweh's anger. The people confessed their specific sin against Yahweh (21:7). Yahweh gave Moses specific and unusual instructions to make the bronze serpent lifted on a pole to bring Israel deliverance. This Yahweh-directed deliverance is unique among the three alluded narratives and shapes the message of Numbers 21. Yahweh provides a means of deliverance from his judgment to those who look to the means of deliverance.

The Old Testament contains only one clear mention of this fiery serpent narrative. Josiah in 2 Kings 18:4 destroyed the bronze serpent because the people had made it an idol. In the New Testament, Jesus highlighted the salvific implications of Numbers 21 (John 3:14), which further supports that deliverance is the primary theme of Numbers 21. In contrast, Paul focuses on a secondary but complementary theme within the passage: judgment that makes the deliverance necessary. He still employed a historical-grammatical hermeneutic that interprets the narrative as a true historical account, but he focused on a secondary theme.

The brief discussion of Paul's use of Exodus 32, Numbers 25, and Numbers 21 demonstrates that Paul understood both primary and secondary themes within the text. Rather than reinterpretation, Paul drew contemporary application from the original meaning.³²

³¹ Ciampa and Rosner describe 1 Corinthians 8:6 as "Paul's christological modification of the *Shema*." Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 382.

³² This is contrary to Steve Moyise, who views the lifted veil of 2 Corinthians 3:14–16 as the foundation for Paul's reinterpretation of the cited narratives of 1 Corinthians 10:6–11. However, the example Moyise gives in support of reinterpretation is in 10:4, outside the τύπος inclusio. Steve Moyise, *Paul and the Scriptures: Studying the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 53–54.

Narrative Hermeneutics of Paul

Two questions flow out of the above survey of cited narratives. Did Paul engage in midrashic interpretation in 10:6–11? What principles for interpreting narratives can be derived from Paul’s use of the cited narratives? The Jewish context of New Testament authors implies Jewish influence. Although full discussion of midrash is outside the scope of this article, a brief selective survey shows differing views of midrash. Scott Cunningham and Darrell L. Bock describe midrash as the “applicational interpretative technique applied to the canonical text.”³³ Martin Pickup notes how evangelical scholars generally admit a Jewish influence on New Testament writers, although there are disagreements on the extent.³⁴ To him, midrash is a “‘recontextualization’ of statements found in one portion of Scripture so that parallels with other divine contexts might be highlighted and the fullness of God’s eternal plan be made clear.”³⁵ Birger Gerhardsson agrees with the canonical text as the basis but notes how midrash always produces something new.³⁶ To Richard Longenecker, midrash “seeks to explicate hidden meanings. . . to contemporize the revelation of God for the people of God.”³⁷ If limited to a contemporary application of a canonical text, one may describe 1 Corinthians 10:6–11 as midrash. Paul took timeless truths from time-bound texts and applied them to his Corinthian audience. However, Paul did not exposit hidden truths from the cited narratives to create something new. In that way, midrash cannot accurately describe Paul’s hermeneutic.³⁸ Paul as

³³ They offer this focus as a hermeneutic rather than a genre. Scott Cunningham and Darrell L. Bock, “Is Matthew Midrash?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144, no. 574 (1987): 162.

³⁴ Martin Pickup, “New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament: The Theological Rationale of Midrashic Exegesis,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 2 (2008): 355.

³⁵ Pickup, “New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament: The Theological Rationale of Midrashic Exegesis,” 357.

³⁶ Birger Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God’s Son (Matt. 4:1–11 & Par): An Analysis of an Early Christian Midrash*, trans. John Toy (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1966), 14.

³⁷ Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 23.

³⁸ Ben Witherington III also avoids calling the cited narratives midrash and instead talks about Paul drawing historical parallels. Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 217, n. 1. This is contrary to Meeks, who describes 10:6–11 as midrashic and complex. Meeks, “‘And Rose up to Play’: Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22,” 65.

midrash muddies the water because of varying views. Describing Paul's narrative hermeneutic filters the water.³⁹

We can infer three hermeneutical principles from Paul's use of Exodus 32, Numbers 25, and Numbers 21. First, Paul utilized a normal interpretation of historical events. He did not allegorize, spiritualize, or typologize the literal details. Instead, he read the narratives as true past events with implications for his present audience. A warning from history is only effective if it is rooted in history. For example, never have I ever worried about repeating the error of Icarus. A fictional event with fake judgment does not carry weight in the real world. Paul warned the Corinthians not to let Israel's history repeat itself in their church.

Second, Paul drew out both primary and secondary themes of the narratives. The primary themes were derived from the overt focus of the Old Testament texts and aligned with Old Testament exposition of those texts. He derived secondary themes from major topics within the narrative (e.g., grumbling that tested in Numbers 21). By implication, it is appropriate to study a passage and emphasize a truth that may not encapsulate the primary message of the passage.

Third, Paul made appropriate theological connections and applications between the texts' settings and his reader. He generally moved from closer to looser contextual connections but never missed the connection. The idolatry at Mount Sinai, which included a feast, was spot-on for the Corinthians, whose dietary preferences mixed with their idolatrous culture.⁴⁰ The sexual immorality of Baal-Peor fit the licentious culture of Corinth and its sensuous worship of pagan gods.⁴¹ The warning against sinful attitudes toward God cautioned the Corinthian church against speaking out about God's sovereign right—and holy obligation—to judge sin, even the sin of his redeemed people. Paul's straightforward and devout hermeneutic enabled him to make relevant applications to his current readers through contextual links between his context and that of the Old Testament narratives.

³⁹ Anthony J. Saldarini concludes, "In summary, the comparison of the NT with Jewish midrash is beset with difficulties. Appeal to a midrashic mind or way of thought this too general and vague to settle intractable exegetical problems. No comprehensive genre linking together the many forms of midrash has been convincingly expounded." Anthony J. Saldarini "Judaism and the New Testament" in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpretation*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 41.

⁴⁰ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 164.

⁴¹ The sexual context of Corinth can be seen internally through the list of former sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. For a historical description of Corinth's sexual perversion, Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 12.

The Nature of Narrative

The narrative genre itself invites a straightforward hermeneutic. By their nature, narratives teach through implication with rare exceptions.⁴² If all scripture is profitable, then all scripture must be understandable. The Old Testament narratives are part “all scripture” (2 Tim. 3:16) and must be understandable despite their implicit message because an obscured message drives a stake through the doctrine of profitability.

Narratives evoke emotional responses because stories surpass stats and statements. One may share a truth statement and establish its reliability through carefully collected data points, but stories reach deeper. In a narrative, every detail is important, but not every detail is equally significant. Even a careful reader who misses details, nuances, or wordplay can still arrive at the narrator’s intended end. For example, Genesis 14 begins with a twelve-verse foray into the geopolitical drama surrounding Abram. When the Salt Sea Coalition rebelled against Chedorlaomer (14:4), havoc broke out. The kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Belah chose their battleground in a final stand (14:8) only to have the narrator merely report “they fled” without description of battle strategy (14:10). Without literary effort, Chedorlaomer defeated the Salt Sea Coalition, seized the loot, and took Lot “the son of Abram’s brother” (14:12). It is unlikely that the original reader of Genesis 14 knew details of every king mentioned or could see with their minds eye all the mentioned locations. However, the effect of the twelve-verse foray ought to be clear: the situation seems humanly impossible. The narrative whole is more important than the narrative parts.

A few Old Testament narratives contain internal indicators supporting a straightforward hermeneutic. When Nathan told a fictional story to David about a stolen lamb (2 Sam. 12:1–4), David took the narrative at face value (12:5) before Nathan revealed it was fictional and didactic (12:7). First Kings 13 records the story of the Man of God from Judah who prophesied against Jeroboam’s altars (13:1–2), was tricked into disobedience by a retired prophet (13:18), and was killed by God (13:26). “After this thing” in verse 33 implies that Jeroboam knew the Man of God’s demise yet did not repent himself. While “this thing” could point back to the initial confrontation (13:2ff), it is better to point back to the immediate context (cf. Gen. 15:1). If God were willing to kill a prophet over one small disobedience, how much more would he be willing

⁴² For example, the refrain in Judges 17–21 directs the reader explicitly to narratives’ message. “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6, 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

to judge Jeroboam? The narrator implies that Jeroboam knew what happened, understood the implications, but refused to repent. While limited in sample size and clarity, these two narratives show how a straightforward understanding of a story is meant to evoke a response. If narratives mean more than their parts and are meant to evoke a response, how can the reader know he is understanding the narrative correctly?

Narrative Presuppositions

Presuppositions are important because how you enter a narrative determines how you look at a narrative. For example, two groups walk into a large, ornately decorated room together. One group casually walks around the room, enjoying its beauty and reading signs that interest them. The other group handles objects, looks under chairs, and starts turning anything that can turn. Why such a different reaction? The first group was told they were entering a museum while the second group was told it was an escape room! Your presuppositions about narratives change how you interact with the narratives as a reader because you look for what you carry into the text. A straightforward and devout reading of a narrative does not mean an interpretational free-for-all. Three theological presuppositions create the scaffolding for a straightforward reading and encourage a devout or God-centric reading.

First, because God has spoken through his word, he wants to be known through his word. Psalm 19 declares God's revelation through creation and his word (19:1–11). Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2 also highlight the role of God's word in the life of his people. God has spoken because he wants his people to know. Second, because God created language and our minds, he can communicate clearly to us through our languages. In Genesis 2–3, God spoke his single prohibition to Adam and held Adam accountable for understanding him clearly. Later, God divided the languages at Babel (Gen. 11:7) as a declaration of judgment but united the languages again through the gift of tongues as a declaration of salvation (Acts 2:3–11). No one understands the product (language) better than the designer (God). Third, Biblical narratives are the word of God through which God wants to be known. God repeatedly pointed back to the Exodus redemption story as a means of knowing him (Deut. 4:32–35; 7:7–11; 10:17–22).

A survey of Paul's writings demonstrates that Paul shared all three presuppositions. He used the phrase "it is written" thirty-one times. Paul assumed God had spoken. In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul argued that God's revelation made Timothy "wise to salvation." Paul assumed God

wants to be known through his word. Paul believed that God could clearly communicate to us through language, as seen in Romans 15:4 and 2 Timothy 3:17. Finally, as seen through 1 Corinthians 10:6–11, Paul assumed that God wanted to be known through narratives. If the reader is to survey the narrative “room” as Paul did, he must share Paul’s hermeneutics and presuppositions.

Fundamentals of Narrative Literary Analysis

Narrative literary analysis is a tale of two cities in its relationship to the grammatical-historical hermeneutic. On the one hand, some may use this interpretational tool to bludgeon the inspired text into whatever shape the interpreter desires. In doing so, they jettison any possibility for a devout reading through their self-centric reading.⁴³ On the other hand, others use narrative literary analysis to support the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. Both interpreter and hermeneutical tool exist under the authority of the text, encouraging a devout reading through a God-centric posture.

Literary analysis reveals the beauty, intricacy, and import of Biblical narratives. Foils, irony, humor, reversals, dynamic characters, setting, allusions, and conflict, when seen, can take the reader’s understanding of the text from analog broadcast to 4K streaming. The core understanding of the text does not change but may be emphasized or nuanced through literary analysis. Many helpful books exist to explain how to do literary analysis of Hebrew Bible narratives.⁴⁴ But the core question is not “how does one do literary analysis?” but “what is necessary to understand about narrative literary analysis to copy Paul’s hermeneutical pattern?” Does one need to be a well-read student, Hebrew scholar, or even expert in literary analysis to understand narratives? No. However, there are basic principles for reading narratives that must be grasped to emulate Paul’s approach.

⁴³ Imagine taking a loved one’s letter to you and changing what they meant to make it say what you want it to say. The recipient does not possess the right to change what the sender has attempted to say. Interpreters flip the appropriate relationship between them and God’s Word when they place themselves and their hermeneutical tool as authorities above the text rather than submitting both to the authority of the text.

⁴⁴ See Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, UK: The Almond Press, 1983); Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); Meier Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 3 of *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Apollos, 1987); and Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Bible and Literature Series (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1984).

First, narratives nearly always convey truth implicitly through description of events, not prescription for application. The reader must keep the whole in view when looking at a part. Second, the narrator is always right and should be trusted. Subjective readings and doubts about reliability undermine the unity and message of the narrative.⁴⁵ Third, the core conflict must guide the reading and is most often theological in nature and contextually relevant. For example, in the well-known David and Goliath narrative (1 Sam. 17), the core conflict is not the mismatched battle. Rather, it is theological and contextual: will God fight for David, whom he has already anointed to be king (16:11–13)? Fourth, the literary camera frame follows the main character (protagonist). When a narrative contains multiple scenes, the narrator identifies the protagonist by following the protagonist. Other characters, whether major or minor, are important but not primary. Fifth, a character's beliefs and responses within the core conflict can be instructive for application. Consider David and Goliath again. The reader ought not to take application directly from David's actions and boldly slay their metaphorical giants. David did not pick himself up by the bootstraps to do something hard. Instead, he applied his knowledge of God (17:37, 45–46) and God's promises (16:12) to the situation in which God providentially placed him. Using his knowledge of God and his promises, the reader can boldly face whatever obstacle God providentially leads him to confront. Any reader who embraces these five principles—knowingly or intuitively—possesses the necessary tools to apply Paul's hermeneutical principles to Old Testament narratives.

Case Study: 2 Kings 5:1–27

The narrative of Naaman the leper provides a good test case for Paul's hermeneutical principles and principles of Old Testament narratives. First, it is an example of literary artistry including drama, diverse characterizations, a desperate and dynamic protagonist, compelling minor characters, and a racially and covenantally charged conclusion. Second, it is a better-known narrative than other possible test cases. Third, it is addressed briefly in the New Testament outside of Paul's writings (Luke 4:27). The first section of the case study is a more

⁴⁵ Yairah Amit comments that reading biblical narratives as fiction while claiming a literary methodology is essentially a breach of contract on the side of the reader. *Reading Biblical Narratives*, trans. Yael Lotan (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 93–94.

academic treatment employing literary methodology and analysis of Hebrew.⁴⁶ The second part attempts to analyze 2 Kings at a more surface level using the fundamentals of narrative literary analysis, narrative presuppositions, and Paul's principles of hermeneutics derived from 1 Corinthians 10:6–11.

Literary Analysis of 2 Kings 5:1–27

The narrator of 2 Kings 5 weaves together broader contextual themes, setting, plot, and characters to make his implicit message. Following Philip E. Satterthwaite's thematic structure of the Elisha narratives (2 Kings 2:19–8:15),⁴⁷ 2 Kings 5 contains both covenant blessings and curses. The account of Naaman and Gehazi's leprosy initiates a downward trend in the complex-plot narratives of the Elisha Cycle.⁴⁸ Naaman the Syrian appears as the ideal Israelite who expresses faith and commits to follow Yahweh. On the other hand, Gehazi acted more like a pagan through his racism, greed, and deceit. The Syrian began as a leper (מִצְרָע; 5:1) but stood before Elisha with skin like a little boy (נֶעַר קָטָן; 5:14–15), because he submitted to Elisha's word. The Israelite began as a young man (נֶעַר; 5:20) but left a leper (מִצְרָע; 5:27), because he rejected Elisha's word. Second Kings 5 continues the Elisha Cycle's theme of tangible blessings and curses based on one's posture toward Yahweh's prophet.

The geographic locations of Syria, Damascus, and the Jordan River do not influence the narrative as much as the contrasting specific settings—the houses of Naaman and Elisha and the courts of Syria and Samaria. The royal courts demonstrated their spiritual ignorance, whether in Syria (5:5) or Israel (5:7). In contrast, true knowledge was found in the house of Naaman through the servant girl and the house of Elisha through Elisha. The courts may control politics, but the homes control the narrative. The words from the little girl in Naaman's house and from Elisha in his house spurred both royal courts to action.

⁴⁶ The content is adapted from chapter five of my dissertation. Andrew Goodwill, "The Contribution of a Literary Analysis of 1 Kings 16:29–2 Kings 8:15 to the Law Theme in the Book of Kings" (PhD diss., Bob Jones Seminary, 2018).

⁴⁷ Philip E. Satterthwaite, "The Elisha Narratives and the Coherence of 2 Kings 2–8," *Tyndale Bulletin* 49, no. 1 (1998): 9. Satterthwaite proposes a thematic structure to the Elisha cycle built around the blessing and curse themes from the Jericho and Bethel narratives (2:19–25). The juxtaposition of these themes between the individual-focused short narratives and national-focused long narratives provides an implicit commentary on Israel.

⁴⁸ The eleven narratives of 2 Kings 3:5–8:15 oscillate between shorter, positively toned, simpler plots that average seventy Hebrew words (4:1–7; 4:48–41; 4:42–44; 6:1–7) and longer, increasingly negatively toned, complex plots that average two-hundred forty-seven words (3:5–27; 4:8–37; 5:1–27; 6:8–23; 6:24–7:20; 8:7–15).

The setting of the Jordan River functions as a test of obedience and a revealer of spiritual change. First, it is specific. Naaman must obey specific instructions. Second, the Jordan River is closer to Damascus than Samaria is. By returning in person to Elisha's home, Naaman added a significant distance (over forty miles) to his journey home. Since he was already healed, he could have kept the reward or sent it by his servants as he continued to Damascus. Naaman's physical return showed his spiritual change.

The plot of 2 Kings 5 drives to Naaman standing before Elisha (5:2, 8, 15) and has a threefold structure: Naaman's cure (5:1–14), Naaman's confession (5:15–19), and Gehazi's sin (5:20–27).⁴⁹ The exposition (5:1) gives the reader the interpretative guide to Naaman's character. Naaman was an important Syrian officer and the only named Syrian in the Elisha Cycle apart from Ben-Hadad and Hazael. While he was great and a mighty man of valor, his success came from Yahweh. The narrator uses twenty-two Hebrew words to exalt Naaman but brings Naaman down with the last word: a leper (מְצֹרֵעַ). Despite the prestige that he enjoyed because of Yahweh, Naaman was unclean toward Yahweh and men.

The captive Israelite girl who served Naaman's wife initiated the action of the narrative (5:2). The prophet in Samaria possessed the ability to meet Naaman's needs if Naaman could come before him (5:3). Interestingly, she did not promise that the prophet would heal (רפא) but that the prophet would gather (אסף). The account of Miriam's leprosy (Num. 12:13–15) is the only other occurrence of אסף to describe physical healing, making 2 Kings 5 a probable allusion to Numbers 12. In Numbers 12, Yahweh set a seven-day period, which ended with Miriam being gathered (אסף, 12:14–15) back into the congregation. In both Numbers 12 and 2 Kings 5, to be gathered includes healing and reconciliation. Other allusions to Numbers 12 include the shared use of seven in the gathering and the description of leprosy "like snow."⁵⁰ These connections with Numbers 12 hint that more is at stake than Naaman's physical healing. He must also be reconciled to Yahweh. Thus, the plot's conflict question revolves around Naaman finding both healing and reconciliation with Yahweh.

⁴⁹ Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2000), 35.

⁵⁰ Elisha commands seven dips for Naaman's healing, whereas Yahweh commanded a seven-day exile for Miriam's. Gehazi's leprosy is "as snow" (כַּשֶּׁלֶג) after he rebelled against Elisha's authority, just as Miriam's leprosy was "as snow" (כַּשֶּׁלֶג) after her rebellion against Moses' authority. Moses' leprous hand (Exod. 4:6) is the only other leprosy to be described "as snow" outside of 2 Kings 5 and Numbers 12.

The king of Syria sent Naaman to the king of Israel with a letter of intent and a large compensation for the healing (5:5). The king of Israel was the logical starting point to find the prophet of Samaria, but Naaman's letter reveals that the king of Syria holds the king of Israel responsible to heal (5:6). The king of Syria likely reasoned that the king of Israel sponsored the prophet of Samaria much like other court-sponsored prophets in Israel's history (1 Kings 18:19; 22:6). In despair, the king of Israel interpreted the letter as a Syrian excuse for war (5:7). His statement, "Am I God?" is ironic. Although he realized that God was the only one who could cure leprosy, he did not consider calling the man of God who resided near him. Instead, Elisha, the "man of God" (5:8), must send to the king to solve the king's issue (5:8). The change of location from the palace to the prophet's house and the change of title from prophet in Samaria to prophet in Israel emphasize that the prophet was not under the king's authority.

Elisha's choice to interact through proxy prevented Naaman from standing before him and serves three thematic functions. First, it highlights the despair of Naaman's situation as Elisha avoided him like one should avoid a leper.⁵¹ Second, it emphasizes prophetic authority.⁵² The prophet moved when directed by Yahweh, not man. Third, it distances the miracle from Elisha's person so that Yahweh received all the credit.⁵³ The instructions in 5:10 are simple but promise restoration physically ("your flesh shall be restored") and ceremonially ("you shall be clean").

Naaman jeopardized this restoration by failing to reconcile his expectations with Elisha's directions (5:11–12), but the counsel of Naaman's servants prevailed (5:13). The great man (אִישׁ גָּדוֹל; 5:1) who anticipated doing a great thing (דָּבָר גָּדוֹל; 5:13) must do something simple: wash and be clean. The miracle would happen only if Naaman puts himself under the prophetic word by going under the water. The narrative pace quickens as the narrator reports Naaman's compliance and subsequent healing (5:14). The change in pace focuses the suspense around Naaman's submission rather than Yahweh's ability. The description of Naaman's flesh as "a little child" (נֶעֱרָה קָטָן) describes him in similar terms to the Hebrew girl (נֶעֱרָה קָטָנָה; 5:2). The subsequent interaction between Naaman and Elisha reveals that there is more similarity between Naaman and the little girl than just their skin. They share the same God.

⁵¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2005), 90.

⁵² Cohn, *2 Kings*, 37.

⁵³ Ian Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, New International Biblical Commentary: Old Testament Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 195.

The plot peaks as Naaman finally stood before Elisha and confessed God as the only God in existence (5:15). Elisha refused to accept any reward for what Yahweh had done because he was only the servant (“As the LORD lives before whom I stand,” 5:16). Naaman made two requests of Elisha. First, he requested two mule-loads of dirt as a tangible reminder of what he had just experienced (5:17).⁵⁴ Second, he asked to be forgiven for the future religious duties involved with his position (5:17). The repetition of his plea for pardon at the beginning and end of 5:17 indicates his concern over the matter. The Syrian who had known Yahweh for a twenty-mile chariot ride had enough knowledge of Yahweh to know that Yahweh does not tolerate idolatry.

Naaman’s ride into the proverbial sunset is not the end of the story (5:19), as the narrator introduces Gehazi and his plan to exploit “Naaman the Syrian” (5:20). Whereas Elisha swore “as Yahweh lives” when refusing to take from Naaman, Gehazi swore “as Yahweh lives” when planning to take from Naaman. He pursued Naaman and told him a lie about prophetic visitors in need (5:21–22). He requested only a fraction of what Naaman had brought (cf. 5:5), and Naaman responded generously (5:23). After Gehazi hid the gift (5:24), he lied to Elisha, who asked for an account of his whereabouts (5:25) even though he knew what Gehazi had done (5:26).

Elisha rebuked Gehazi first through a rhetorical question, “Is it a time. . .” (הֲעֵתָּה). The *hey* interrogative appears with עָתָּה only here and Haggai 1:4. Based on Haggai 1:4, the question emphasizes appropriate time. It was no more appropriate for Gehazi to gather wealth than the restored remnant to beautify their houses at the temple’s expense. Elisha’s question includes four couplets associated with blessing: silver and clothing, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants.⁵⁵ Whereas Elisha refused to receive a blessing from Naaman (5:15), Gehazi sought a blessing. Elisha could have mentioned other sins, including greed, disregard of the prophetic word, and deceit. Instead, he placed Gehazi’s actions within the greater context of Israel’s history. In seeking a blessing from Naaman the Syrian, Gehazi ignored what Yahweh was doing in Israel. Naaman the Syrian was a harbinger of the Syrian advances of 2 Kings 6–7 and of the anointing of Hazael as promised by Yahweh to Elisha’s mentor, Elijah (1 Kings 19:15–19). Now was not the time for blessing because Yahweh was cursing. Because of

⁵⁴ Wray Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 335.

⁵⁵ David P. O’Brien, “‘Is This the Time to Accept. . . ?’ (2 Kings v 26b): Simply Moralizing (LXX) of an Ominous Foreboding of Yahweh’s Rejection of Israel (MT)?,” *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no. 4 (1996): 456.

Gehazi's disobedience, he and his descendants were cursed with the leprosy of Naaman (2 Kings 5:27). Naaman the Syrian leper obeyed the prophetic word, received a blessing, and stood clean before Elisha; Gehazi the servant of Elisha disobeyed the prophetic word, received a judgment, and left the presence of Elisha unclean.

Second Kings 5 contains three main characters (Naaman, Elisha, and Gehazi) and multiple minor characters. The minor characters are primarily agents, with the exception of the little girl. The king of Syria and the king of Israel advance the plot in both setting and theme. In setting, they change Naaman's location from Syria to Samaria to Elisha's house. In theme, they show that only an act of Yahweh will solve Naaman's problem ("Am I God?" 5:7). The servants of Naaman advance the plot by pointing out Naaman's pride and the necessity of humility (5:13). The little girl initiated the narrative action with her ten words (5:3). Although her part is small, she exemplified a righteous Israelite. In her captivity, she recognized the power of Yahweh's prophet when the king of Israel, who lived in Samaria, did not think to call the prophet of Samaria (5:7). As an exemplary Israelite, she is a foil to Gehazi in that she did not attempt to fleece "Naaman the Syrian" by leveraging her knowledge for her gain.

Naaman is a round and dynamic character who undergoes multiple changes. He moves from greatness (5:1) and pride (5:11–12) to humility (5:15), from leper (5:1) to clean (5:14), from entitlement (5:11) to generosity (5:15, 23), and from idolater to believer (5:15). Naaman's character functions diversely in the narrative. First, he is the protagonist. The narrator follows Naaman through the narrative until the focus turns to Gehazi at 5:20. In fact, Naaman appears by action, mention, or object of direct address in twenty-five of the twenty-seven verses.⁵⁶ He is the only non-Israelite in the Book of Kings to receive such a prominent position. Second, he is a foil to unfaithful Israelites represented by the king of Israel (5:7) and Gehazi (5:20–27). The king of Israel did not think enough of the God of Israel to call the man of God, but Naaman professed that there was no other but the God of Israel. Gehazi disregarded the prophetic word and exploited others for gain, while Naaman submitted to the prophetic word and gave generously in support of the prophetic ministry (5:23).

Gehazi acts as a foil to Naaman. Whereas Naaman became everything the reader would expect of the servant of Elisha, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, became the unfaithful servant.

⁵⁶ Verses 24–25 are the only verses that do not contain a reference to Naaman. In contrast, only sixteen verses refer to Elisha, and eight verses refer to Gehazi.

Gehazi's actions demonstrate his superficial perspective. To him, Naaman was a Syrian instead of a leper in need (5:20). The narrator reveals the most about Gehazi by how he describes Gehazi's physical spacing with reference to Elisha's character. When Gehazi returned from Naaman, he stood toward (אֶל) Elisha, not before (לְפָנָיו) him like Naaman (5:15). Standing before the prophet has been the position of blessing since 5:3, but Gehazi did not share Naaman's position because he did not share Naaman's obedience.⁵⁷

Elisha is a static, flat character, in contrast to the previous complex narrative involving the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4). He acts as an agent by giving directions to the king of Israel (5:8) and Naaman (5:10). His absence at the moment of healing and his rejection of Naaman's possessions reinforce his position as Yahweh's servant (5:16). In 5:8, Elisha's invitation to Naaman may seem self-aggrandizing ("that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel"). However, Naaman's profession (5:15) indicates that Naaman understood Elisha appropriately—Elisha was the representative of Yahweh. To recognize Elisha as a prophet was to recognize Yahweh as God. For this reason, those who accept Elisha receive blessing, while those who reject him receive curses (cf. Jericho in 2:19–22 and Bethel in 2:23–25).

The literary analysis reveals the narrative's primary message: God restores (blessing) anyone who humbly obeys but resists (curses) his people who proudly exploit others in his name. The beautiful literary features, intriguing interconnections with other Old Testament texts, and grammatical details from the Hebrew text support this message. However, must one understand all those details and connections to comprehend the narrative's message?

Application of Paul's Hermeneutics

Part two of this case study applies the three principles derived from 1 Corinthians 10:6–11 along with the narrative presuppositions and fundamentals of narrative literary analysis. The discussion is divided into pre-reading, reading, and meditation. In the pre-reading stage, the reader approaches the text as historical, trustworthy, and contextual. The narrative is not legend or myth but history, just like Paul's cited narratives. This leads the reader to read normally rather than looking for allegory or levels of imagery. The reader also trusts the narrator who has shared

⁵⁷ As Rick D. Moore says, "Gehazi wants to pass himself off as a servant, but the narrator knows differently, and so does the prophet." Rick D. Moore, *God Saves: Lessons from the Elisha Stories* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 82.

all that is necessary to convey his implicit message. Thus, the reader stays within the written text rather than expounding through subjective exercises of the imagination. Having read the preceding chapters, the reader is aware of the Syrian-Israelite conflicts (1 Kings 19, 20, 22),⁵⁸ the power of the prophet (1 Kings 18, 22; 2 Kings 1, 2, 3, 4).⁵⁹

The reading stage includes multiple careful readings that allow the reader to observe several readily seen details. First, the narrator follows Naaman except for the few verses in which Gehazi is followed. While other characters are important, Naaman and Gehazi are the focus. Second, leprosy brackets the narrative (5:1 and 27). Naaman was healed of leprosy because he obeyed, while Gehazi was afflicted with leprosy because he sinned. Third, Naaman, Gehazi, and Elisha all speak about God. Naaman declared God as the only true God (5:15). Elisha refused a reward because he was just the servant (“As the LORD lives, before whom I stand,” 5:16). Gehazi used Yahweh’s name only as an oath for his own gain (5:20). Fourth, acceptance by God is core to the conflict. This conflict has theological and contextual significance because of the character’s statements about God and the way leprosy brackets the narrative. These observations align with Paul’s hermeneutics, the narrative presuppositions, and the fundamentals of narrative literary analysis. This does not mean that every reader will make these same observations, but every reader can make them without needing the same tools applied in the literary analysis section.

The meditation stage analyzes and synthesizes the information into primary and secondary themes while making appropriate theological connections and applications between the reader’s and text’s settings. Using the observations above, the reader can craft a simple message statement: God accepts those who submit and obey him but rejects those who seek their own advantage. This message statement shares primary themes with the message formed about the literary analysis—relationship to God, obedience, and selfishness. Nuances such as humility and exploitation are missing, but their absence does not change the core message. The reader can go a step further and draw application based on contextual parallels. When God accepts the

⁵⁸ In 1 Kings 19, Yahweh promised to judge Israel through the sword of Hazael the Syrian. Chapter 20 records two Syrian invasions and Ahab’s rash covenant with Ben-Hadad the Syrian. In 1 Kings 22, Ahab dies attempting to take back Ramoth-Gilead from the Syrians.

⁵⁹ Elijah called down fire from heaven on the altar (1 Kings 18) and on the bands of fifty (2 Kings 1). Micaiah correctly prophesied of Ahab’s death if he went up to Ramoth-Gilead. Elisha healed Jericho’s waters (2 Kings 2), cursed Bethel (2 Kings 2), prophesied of victory (2 Kings 3), and raised the Shunammite’s son to life (2 Kings 4).

enemy of his people because the enemy obeys in faith (like Naaman), God's people must embrace the enemy (like Elisha) rather than seek their own desires (like Gehazi).

Jesus' use of Naaman the leper in Luke 4:22–30 complements this message and application. When the crowd refused him as a prophet (4:22), Jesus quoted a proverb (4:23) and cited two Old Testament examples of non-Israelites who believed in God and were blessed: the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:15, 24) and Naaman (2 Kings 5:14–15). The Jews hearing Jesus were so angry that they tried to kill Jesus (Luke 4:28–29). Just like Gehazi, they refused to acknowledge God's hand at work because of their pride.

Conclusion

In 1 Corinthians 10:6–11, Paul provided a different type of type for later readers: a straightforward and devout hermeneutic characterized by three controlling principles. He utilized a normal interpretation of historical events, drew out both primary and secondary themes of the narratives, and made appropriate theological connections and applications between the texts' settings and his readers. Interpreting narratives ought not to be a free-for-all where the text means whatever it means to you. The reader must recognize the nature of narratives, hold basic presuppositions, and utilize a handful of literary analysis fundamentals, which can be done innately or with some instruction. The case study on 2 Kings 5:1–27 compares a deeper scholarly approach with a Paul-like, straightforward, devout hermeneutic. While some nuances might be missed without the scholarly approach, the messages inferred by both approaches agree. Praise the Lord for the academy that serves the church by deepening our understanding, but also praise the Lord that any believer can read, understand, and know him more!