



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 17 September

How To Read Bible Stories – Narrative Analysis Notes from the Discussion

Narrative Analysis or Literary Criticism is reading the Bible passage as literature (just as you would critically analyse Shakespeare). So you would look for

- Settings – When & Where
- Characters – Who, What and Traits
- Plot - Events
- How The Story Is Told
- Themes

'How to read' suggests, wrongly, that there is a 'correct' way – we bring our own ideas and contexts to our understanding. 'Interpret', which must be recognised as subjective, has a better meaning, recognising there is not one pure Christian understanding.

The 'Bible' will depend on the translation and denominational collection, which seriously impact on the interpretation before you even start to read.

'Stories' – the Bible consists of many styles and genres of writings: poetry, songs, erotic literature, history, myth, letters, discourses or sermons, gospel and apocalyptic literature, the latter two examples of particularly common styles of their time.

A better title: **How To Interpret Biblical Texts.**

It is important to 'forget' any preconditions or prior knowledge of the reading and treat this as if it was the first time you have read the text and met the characters. This was initially quite hard to do!

We started to analyse the text with regard to the headings. Here is a copy of the annotated text as far as we managed in the time:

Key

Settings

Characters

Plot

Story

Themes

Of Note

Genesis 2:4b–3:24, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Another Account of the Creation

4 In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, 5 when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; 6 but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— 7 then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,[b] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden in

Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; 12 and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." 19 So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man[c] there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

this one shall be called Woman,[d]

for out of Man[e] this one was taken."

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

The First Sin and Its Punishment

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,[f] knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

8 They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." 14 The Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals

and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

16 To the woman he said,

“I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and **he shall rule over you.**”

17 And to the man[g] he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
about which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’

cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,

and to dust you shall return.”

20 The man named his wife Eve,[h] because she was the mother of all living. 21 And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man[i] and for his wife, and clothed them.

22 Then the Lord God said, “See, the man has become like one of **us**, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and **live forever**”— 23 therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. 24 **He drove out the man**; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the **cherubim**, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Footnotes

[b] Genesis 2:7 Or formed a man (Heb. adam) of dust from the ground (Heb. adamah)

[c] Genesis 2:20 Or for Adam

[d] Genesis 2:23 Heb. ishshah

[e] Genesis 2:23 Heb. ish

[f] Genesis 3:5 Or gods

[g] Genesis 3:17 Or to Adam

[h] Genesis 3:20 In Heb. Eve resembles the word for living

[i] Genesis 3:21 Or for Adam

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2:10-14	Irrelevant to the story
2:24	Out of place and time
2:17 & 3:4	Contradiction – how was the woman to know which was true?
3:14	Written in ‘courtroom’ language
3:16	Subjugation of women justified
Headings	The translators have added in ‘helpful’ headings, but these immediately colour the interpretation. The second heading mentions ‘sin’ although this word is not within the text.