How do the Contemporary Scholars
John Barton, Gordon Wenham, and Mary Mills
Use Old Testament Narratives in Forming Christian Ethics?

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Wycliffe College
and the Graduate Centre for Theological Studies of the Toronto School of Theology.
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awarded by Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto.

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Master of Theology
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ABSTRACT

How should we live our lives and make wise decisions? We need to understand the
contemporary and scholarly views on Christian ethics, in order to comprehend the Christian ideal
of an ethical existence based on Old Testament narratives. Since Old Testament narratives have
not been featured significantly in ethical discussion, further work needs to be done to examine
the use of narratives as an ethical resource. This paper examines theories from John Barton,
Gordon Wenham, and Mary Mills on using Old Testament narratives to form ethics. The
effectiveness of these three scholars is analyzed by comparing and contrasting their models,
principles, and the visions of their arguments. The three scholars are critiqued on their arguments
on the narratives of Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel. A survey of previous works illustrates how
scholars have applied Old Testament ethics specifically to narratives, and will serve as a
foundational work for future research.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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There are numerous others behind the scenes who provided guidance and support, making the completion of this work a reality. I am grateful for Noel S. McFerran, Theology Librarian at John M. Kelly Library, University of St. Michael’s College, who diligently assisted my research into recent scholarship. I wish to thank Katherine Steiner, and Rachel Lott, who proofread my thesis, and gave me thoughtful suggestions. Lastly, and most importantly, I wish to express my deep gratitude for my friend and colleague, Leah Vetro, who made herself available to read my drafts, and to join readily into discussion as I wrestled with theological issues while writing this thesis.

It is my hope that this thesis will further the field of Old Testament narrative ethics by providing an honest assessment of contemporary scholarship, and stimulating the teaching of ethics in our Christian community.
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anv</td>
<td>Anvil Bristol</td>
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<tr>
<td>AThR</td>
<td>Anglican Theological Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<td>Chm</td>
<td>Churchman</td>
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<td>CJ</td>
<td>Concordia Journal</td>
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<td>Colloq</td>
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<tr>
<td>CurBR</td>
<td>Currents in Biblical Research</td>
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<td>CurTM</td>
<td>Currents in Theology and Mission</td>
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<td>CV</td>
<td>Communio Viatorum</td>
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<td>ESV</td>
<td>English Standard Version</td>
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<td>EuroJTh</td>
<td>European Journal of Theology</td>
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<td>EvQ</td>
<td>Evangelical Quarterly</td>
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<td>HBT</td>
<td>Horizons in Biblical Theology</td>
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<td>HeyJ</td>
<td>Heythrop Journal</td>
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<td>HS</td>
<td>Hebrew Studies</td>
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<td>HvTSt</td>
<td>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</td>
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<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
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<td>IJPR</td>
<td>International Journal for Philosophy of Religion</td>
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<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<td>JAAR</td>
<td>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</td>
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<td>JAOS</td>
<td>Journal of the American Oriental Society</td>
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<td>JETS</td>
<td>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</td>
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<td>JJS</td>
<td>Journal of Jewish Studies</td>
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<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>JSS</td>
<td>Journal of Semitic Studies</td>
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<td>JTI</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Interpretation</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
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<td>MC</td>
<td>Modern Churchman</td>
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<td>NBf</td>
<td>New Blackfrairs</td>
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<td>OTE</td>
<td>Old Testament Essays</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIBA</td>
<td>Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association</td>
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<td>RelSRev</td>
<td>Religious Studies Review</td>
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<td>ResQ</td>
<td>Restoration Quarterly</td>
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<td>ScrB</td>
<td>Scripture Bulletin</td>
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<td>SJT</td>
<td>Scottish Journal of Theology</td>
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<td>Stud Christ Ethics</td>
<td>Studies in Christian Ethics</td>
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<td>TBT</td>
<td>The Bible Today</td>
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<td>Theol</td>
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<td>ThTo</td>
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<td>TJT</td>
<td>Toronto Journal of Theology</td>
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<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies</td>
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<td>VT</td>
<td>Vetus Testamentum</td>
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<td>WW</td>
<td>Word and World</td>
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Introduction

Christian Ethics from Old Testament Narratives

Introduction

The field of Ethics, including Christian ethics, deals with how our character and conduct are shaped and influenced by numerous “sources of authority” in our lives.\(^1\) Such sources include our faith, our education, our culture, our family, and our friends in social circles. Bruce C. Birch defines ethics as “critical reflection on the moral dimension of human experience.”\(^2\) Christian scriptures contain numerous scenarios for us to reflect on to build our Christian ethics.

In Christian communities, reading scripture builds our character and constitutes our identity.\(^3\) The biblical world portrayed in scripture exhibits truth about human life. The ethical teachings demonstrate values and objectives for individuals and the faith community.\(^4\) Through reading the Bible, whether alone or in Christian community, Christians become educated and transformed into people with moral sensibilities.\(^5\)

The story of Jesus has been central to the teaching of the church tradition, and has proved effective for ethical decision making. The moral focus on Jesus Christ and the ethical teaching of Christ’s life and story form the center of the New Testament witness.\(^6\) In other words, Jesus

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\(^5\) Fodor, “Reading the Scriptures: Rehearsing Identity, Practicing Character,” 162–63.

provides an example of behaviour for Christians. Old Testament stories should also inform Christian ethics; however, several scholars have recently noted the lack of scholarship on Old Testament narratives and their role in shaping Christian ethics. Thus, we learn that Old Testament narratives have not featured significantly in the discussion of Christian ethics. Paul writes in the book of Romans concerning the reading of Scripture, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15:4 ESV). Therefore, Gordon Wenham concludes, ever since the first century CE, historical Christian and Jewish communities have been reading the Old Testament narratives for their moral principles. According to John Barton, traditional Judaism and Christianity have used events and characters from historical books to justify the rule of conduct. But, Barton argues, modern biblical scholarship has avoided such practices, leading to narrative texts being widely neglected in the studies of Old Testament ethics.

Since Old Testament narratives have not been featured significantly in discussing ethics, further work needs to be done to examine or create a theory on the use of narratives as an ethical resource. From a survey of previous works, contemporary scholarly thoughts are brought

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9 Wenham, “Reflections on Singing the Ethos of God,” 117.

10 Ibid.


12 For the latter point see Wenham, “Reflections on Singing the Ethos of God,” 117.
together to show how scholars have applied Old Testament ethics specifically to narratives. I will offer an analysis of these works to examine the effectiveness of three contemporary scholars—John Barton, Gordon Wenham, and Mary Mills. I will examine the criteria each employs in support of their arguments, but will seek to judge their effectiveness mostly in light of the extent to which each read narratives in accordance with how those narratives seemingly ought to be heard, including in their canonical context. Through this comparison and analysis, I hope to gain a better understanding of the contemporary and scholarly view on Christian ethics, in order to understand the Christian ideal of an ethical existence based on narratives from the Old Testament.

Value of Old Testament Ethics

Storytelling contributes to both the Jewish and Christian traditions. The Old Testament itself is shaped by a storytelling tradition. From generation to generation, storytelling has proven to be a frequent style of biblical influence for the church tradition. The Passover (Exod 34:18) is a good illustration for the Israelites to commemorate their ancestors’ liberation from slavery in Egypt. In the history of Israel’s culture, the Passover is the most important festival of the Jewish Year, where a young child is appointed to inquire into the meaning of the festival (Exod 12:26–27). Through this social event, the redemptive event from their early history is repeated every year. By way of highlighting the significance of the festival, their collective identity is carried down to generations. Similarly, collective identity is strengthened during Easter in the Christian tradition, where the Passion Narrative is read to commemorate Christ’s salvation.

14 Ibid.
When our Christian traditions eliminate the practice of telling bible stories, our conduct will be influenced by stories from other cultural or ethnical sources, which do not have corrective religious values. Birch claims that Old Testament stories have “moral function” and “transformative power” for the readers to confront with the testimonies. Thus, we should continually maintain the narrative traditions of the Old Testament and their ethics to influence our conduct and character formation, and use storytelling as a source for Christian ethics in the life of the church.

Narratives over Other Genres

Scholars acknowledge that genre should play a significant role in Old Testament interpretation. How do those genres of law, wisdom literature, narratives, poetry, and prophetic writings affect how ethics are formed? M. Daniel Carroll R. argues for an organizational way of handling ethics: prioritize one genre and add other Old Testament material to it. Along a similar line of thought, Birch and Wenham’s approach is to have narrative as the primary genre for Old Testament ethics.

Narrative addresses circumstances in life that cannot be presented by other forms. Narrative has the power to enable ethical and moral reflection. In other words, narrative offers unique features for ethical perception. The reader initially pays attention to characters and relationship, in order to reflect on certain aspects of one’s personal situation, and thus arrives at

15 Ibid., 79.
16 Ibid., 80.
19 Ibid.
one’s moral viewpoint. Frequently, biblical texts describe how the people of Israel interact with and experience God. From the events narrated, readers may learn how the ongoing life of Israel made them into the people God. Since these narrative texts comprise a large portion of the Old Testament, ethics in narrative is important for both the moral identity for the community and shaping of human experience for individuals. I agree with Robin Parry that “narratives play a major role in shaping individual and community identity.” On the discussion of Old Testament narrative and ethics, we learn that ethics “focus on the moral character and conduct” of communities as reflected in the canon, as Birch explains in his article “Ethics in the OT.”

For this study of how scholars discuss Christian ethics using Old Testament narratives, it is appropriate to consider work by contemporary authors. We occupy the same world as the authors. Conversely, it would be more difficult to understand scholars from centuries ago, since their pace in life and living environments differ significantly from ours. Selecting contemporary scholars also aids in comparing and contrasting their opinion as these scholars are also interacting with each other’s work. Such dialogue in biblical scholarship enriches analysis for this study.

Some Contemporary Authors

There are contemporary authors who write ethics from the Old Testament, but they are not focusing on how narratives can form ethics. Stanley Hauerwas’ *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* asserts that ethics is associated with narratives in time and space, and

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23 Ibid.
claims that peace can be found in the Christian community shaped by narratives of God’s chosen people.\textsuperscript{26} Waldemar Janzen’s \textit{Old Testament Ethics} uses paradigms to distinguish Old Testament ethical patterns for the church.\textsuperscript{27} Christopher Wright’s \textit{Old Testament Ethics for the People of God} establishes themes, such as ecology, politics, economies and the legal system for contemporary society.\textsuperscript{28} Walter Kaiser’s \textit{Towards Old Testament Ethics} bases his work on law and the theme of the holiness of God.\textsuperscript{29} John Rogerson’s \textit{Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics} discusses such topics as war, abortion, work, and family.\textsuperscript{30} Since these authors are not writing to form ethics from Old Testament narratives, their work will not be analyzed in this study of Christian ethics.

Birch contributes to scholarship by providing valuable resources on understanding ethics for the life of the church. His article “Ethics in the Old Testament” explains the meaning and foundations of ethics from the Old Testament to promote the use of the Old Testament as a resource for contemporary ethics.\textsuperscript{31} In addition, his “Old Testament Narrative and Moral Address” promotes the storytelling tradition of Old Testament narratives and the importance of the transformative power of Old Testament narratives.\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, Birch’s \textit{Let Justice Roll

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\textsuperscript{29} Carroll R., “Ethics and Old Testament Interpretation,” 221.


Down provides an easy resource to understand Christian ethics, and a reliable guide through theological and ethical readings of the Old Testament. Birch describes a comprehensive aspect of moral principles in the Old Testament, in order to be a resource for contemporary ethics. Since Birch’s intent was not to write on Old Testament ethics as a topic in itself, he does not provide any “comprehensive survey of the subject,” nor any models, or principles for forming ethics from Old Testament narratives.

Barton, Wenham, and Mills

Over the last two decades, John Barton has been contributing consistently to the discussion of Old Testament ethics. Other than Barton, Gordon Wenham’s Story as Torah focuses on the role of narrative in Old Testament ethics, by using a “rhetoric as persuasion” approach to bring out the didactic purpose of narratives. The theological and ideological opinion expressed by the narrator will gradually be established and developed into the readers’ conduct and behaviours. In addition, Mary Mills’ monograph Biblical Morality takes a rhetoric-as-persuasion approach similar to that of Wenham. These three scholars, John Barton, Gordon Wenham, and Mary Mills, each use different visions and methodologies to develop their own models and principles to form Christian ethics from Old Testament narratives. We can learn much about the current

33 Birch, Let Justice Roll Down, 18.
36 Birch, Let Justice Roll Down, 19.
37 Barton, Understanding Old Testament Ethics.
39 Wenham, Story as Torah, 3; Boda, “Poethics?,” 56.
view on Christian ethics by analyzing and comparing the models and visions of each scholar. In order to understand the contemporary and scholarly view on Christian ethics, it is imperative to see how each contemporary scholar differs in vision when exploring Old Testament characters. It is important to bring together contemporary scholarly thoughts on this subject, in order to understand the Christian ideal of an ethical existence based on narratives from the Old Testament.

A review of scholarship indicates that there has not been work done on comparing authors on their views on Christian ethics in Old Testament narratives. Thus far there have only been a few studies related to forming ethics from narratives in the Old Testament. No one has studied, analyzed, and compared current views on this topic, at least to the extent embarked upon in this paper. There are only two scholarly articles that compare the views of various authors. Although Cheryl B. Anderson examines the ethical principles of Janzen, Wright, and Barton in “Biblical Laws: Challenging the Principles of Old Testament Ethics,” Anderson only illustrates “how biases encoded in biblical texts can be reinscribed in ethical principles,” and not how ethics are formed from narratives. Since there has not been any study that compares how contemporary authors use Old Testament narratives as the basis of their ethical reflections, I propose to examine and evaluate how John Barton, Gordon Wenham, and Mary Mills approach this issue.

This study compares and contrasts each of the three authors’ use of models, principles, visions, and methodologies in analyzing the Old Testament narratives. The three authors are then evaluated on the effectiveness of their approach when applied to three Old Testament characters: Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel. These three characters are selected because the authors each have

substantially discussed and analyzed them with models and visions. Barton, Wenham, and Mills all have used Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel in their analysis of models and approaches. Barton discusses Abraham on “Obedience to God” and the moral character of God in *Ethics in Ancient Israel.* Wenham examines Abraham in the book of Genesis in *Story as Torah.* Mills analyzes Abraham as a “character” in “morality and character.” “Character,” alongside “plot” and “setting,” are the three major factors in Mills’ deployment of narrative art. For the story of Joseph, Barton comments that Joseph is presented as an ideal example of character in the book of Genesis. Wenham claims that the character of Joseph exhibits “wisdom stereotypes” in Genesis. Mills examines the construction of “plot” in the story of Joseph while exploring the concept of “morality and plot.” From the book of Daniel, Barton explores the model of “obedience to God’s declared will.” Wenham discusses holiness, food laws, and unclean food experienced by Daniel and his friends exiled in Babylon. Mills explores the “setting” in Daniel 1–7 to declare that the Daniel narrative is “a vehicle for the presentation of community values.” Daniel, as Mills claims, provides the most positive model, over other models such as Adam and

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44 Wenham discusses the story of Abraham in *Story as Torah,* chapter 2 (“The Rhetorical Function of Genesis”), 17–43.
46 Ibid., 14; Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God,* 435. Mills develops a three-layered model of person, community, and cosmos. Wright explains Mills’ two categories of person and community to be character and plot in narrative art. The third category of cosmos, as Mills views God as the central pivot of the world order, is understood as setting in a story.
47 Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel,* 28. Barton states that “the story of Joseph in Genesis does hold up Joseph as a model.”
48 Wenham, *Story as Torah,* 88.
50 Barton discusses the ethical concerns in Daniel in *Understanding Old Testament Ethics,* chapter 9 (“Theological Ethics in Daniel”), 154–61.
51 Wenham, *Story as Torah,* 137–41.
Eve, Cain and Abel, and Job. Through the exploration of the three biblical characters, together with the comparison of the authors’ models, views, and principles, I will argue which one of the three authors excels in forming ethics from Old Testament narratives with his, or her, models and approaches.

Methodology

The first part of this study will be a comparison of methods, principles, models, visions, and approaches of the three contemporary authors. The second part on the exploration of the three Old Testament characters will be conducted through various aspects of historical, cultural, sociological, and canonical criticism, which is sensitive to the way the narratives ought to be heard in the culture and the individuals’ *Sitz im Leben* (setting in life).

Since the European Enlightenment, critical methods for examining historical characters have been essential and were emphasized as normative models to study the Bible. Old Testament narratives are mostly composed from the literature of a collective culture, in which written text and oral communication were used to tell stories in order to administer state affairs and to teach its descendants. Furthermore, the meaning of words changes over time, and so do the text and written material that contains them. The historical-critical method finds the meaning of the text by reconstructing and evaluating Israelite historical events using

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54 Note that the plural form of *Sitz im Leben* is *Sitzen im Leben*.
archaeological findings and social sciences. Contemporary scholars with a historical-critical approach need to “recognize the historically and culturally conditioned character of the Bible’s ethical norms.” Due to the reason that human beings are cultural subjects, culture plays a crucial role in the interpretation of the text for ancient Israelites living in various regions and periods.

Due to the cultural nature of Old Testament narratives, “cultural historical criticism” uses the approach of cultural interpretations on the narrative text. All words, images, actions, gestures, and ideas from the Bible take meaningful forms within particular cultural contexts. Biblical texts are to be interpreted by understanding the cultural meanings of the world behind the text, because various cultural practices, with their ideas, are taken for granted by people living in that culture. In order to understand the meanings of biblical texts, it is important to “understand the cultures” which are closely associated with the Bible in the historical world. Cultural historical criticism does not replace other biblical criticism, such as source criticism, textual criticism, or form criticism, but seeks to understand cultures that produce the meanings of the biblical texts.

As Old Testament narratives convey a fundamental form of memory for individuals and communities, children are introduced into cultural memories as their living culture continually

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62 Barton, Reading the Old Testament, 107; Beal, “Cultural-Historical Criticism of Bible,” 1, 3.
64 Ibid., 1, 15.
65 Ibid., 4, 15.
Such cultural memory provides a “sense of identity and stability” within the social group. It follows that social activity encapsulates certain prescribed codes of conduct, which are closely defined in social contexts. The function of Old Testament narratives was to remind the ancient Israelites about their collective identity as the chosen people of God. Hence, the meaning of a text “depends on its historical and social context.” One good example to illustrate the cultural and sociological significance is the Exodus salvation story (Exod 1–15), which enables each generation to learn about God’s salvation.

Other than the historical, cultural, and social aspects of the text, I agree with Barton’s argument for a “canonical” approach, that the words in a text “draw their meanings from the context and setting in which they are meant to be read.” This “canonical approach” emphasizes the importance of the canonical context to focus on the text of the Old and New Testaments.

Outline of Study

The purpose of this research is to study how John Barton, Gordon Wenham, and Mary Mills use Old Testament narratives in forming Christian ethics. Chapter One is a history of scholarship on using Old Testament narratives for Christian ethics starting with the early twentieth century.

After this survey of scholars and researchers, Chapter Two starts with a comprehensive analysis of Barton, Wenham, and Mills’ models for forming ethics from Old Testament

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67 Hendel, Reading Genesis, 30.
68 Barton, Reading the Old Testament, 32.
69 Hendel, Reading Genesis, 34.
70 Barton, The Nature of Biblical Criticism, 84.
72 Barton, Reading the Old Testament, 172.
narratives. I will outline in detail their models, visions, and approaches, and compare and contrast their findings, at times drawing from other authors’ comments on and critiques of the three.

Chapter Three examines Barton, Wenham, and Mills’ exploration of the characters of Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel. Each author’s analysis of characters is evaluated by three criteria. The first criterion is how sensitive the author’s analysis is to the way the implied narrator appears to want the story to be read. The authors are critiqued on their sensitivity to the literary features of the text that specifically signal the narrator’s attitude towards the character. Secondly, since each character lived in a different historical and cultural environment, the three scholars are critiqued and evaluated on their sensitivity to context, especially historical, cultural, and sociological aspects. For example, have the scholars considered the sociological aspects of living in the character’s lifetime? Therefore, the second criterion involves historical, cultural, and sociological contexts. Thirdly, when interpreting each character’s actions and decision-making process in reading the Old Testament narratives, the canon ought arguably to play a role to establish the meaning of the text. Thus, the third criterion uses a canonical approach by asking whether the author establishes a “meaning with reference to the canon.”74 In other words, have the authors recognized similar matters somewhere in the canon relating to the same ethical issues in the narrative for the character? Although every character lives in a different *Sitz im Leben* in ancient Israel, each character as evaluated by the three authors exemplifies the models and visions they claim. Using the above three criteria, this study evaluates how effective the three authors’ approaches are to their analyses of the biblical characters.

From the comparison in Chapter Two regarding the models and visions of the scholars and the evaluations from Chapter Three regarding the Old Testament characters, I will draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the various approaches. In this paper, I intend to demonstrate that a combination of the principles from John Barton and Gordon Wenham will form an ethical model for discerning the Christian ideal based on Old Testament narratives.
Chapter 1

A Survey of Previous Works on Applying Old Testament Ethics to Narrative Texts

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to survey recent scholarship that has applied Old Testament ethics specifically to narrative texts. Scholars discussing Old Testament ethics without addressing narrative will be excluded. However, it will be of interest to know the arguments for not addressing narrative texts in their discussion of ethics. Thus, I will incorporate scholars who have expressed reasons why they omit Old Testament narrative in their discussion of ethics, or any precaution and circumstances related to this topic of applying Old Testament ethics to narrative texts.

Starting from the mid-twentieth century, scholars have exhibited various approaches to the subject of applying Old Testament ethics specifically to narrative texts.75 In addition to monographs, individual essays are assessed when relevant. The ways in which the narratives are treated are classified as follows: (1) an overarching perspective on Old Testament narrative ethics, (2) narratives as material for a specific topic of argument, (3) narratives examined from one or more books of the Old Testament, (4) narratives as a source for developing models and visions, and (5) precaution when using narrative for ethics. These classifications are charted in Appendix A (Survey on Applying Old Testament Ethics to Narrative Texts).

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Overarching Perspective

Through the decades, scholars have been applying an overarching perspective to promote the use of narratives for their ethical arguments regarding the Old Testament. Thus, James Muilenburg perceives that the story of Israel narrates how God interacts with human beings, and so reports humanity’s response of obeying or disobeying God. Furthermore, narrative is viewed as “the most representative and characteristic mode of biblical speech” because it is centered on action while moving the story forward. Muilenburg’s thorough analysis of Israel’s ethics, along with his portrayal of narrative among different literary types, has been recognized and appreciated in scholarship. After Muilenburg, Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen jointly promote using the witness of Old Testament characters as an ethical resource, since biblical narratives can help shape the moral identity for individual Christians and the church. In addition, Birch and Rasmussen argue that the canon should be the essential controlling and supporting structure for selecting and using biblical resources. In addition, John Barton utilizes two relevant essays to argue for drawing ethical guidelines from Old Testament narratives. Other than the works of Muilenburg, Birch and Rasmussen, and Barton, discussion of the relation of Old Testament ethics to narratives remained neglected during the years 1965 to 1982. Shortly afterwards, Christopher J. H. Wright became a major contributor, paving the way into the 1990s, when

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77 Ibid., 24.
79 Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Minneapolis, MI: Augsburg Pub. House, 1976), 104, 163–64. The narrative story of Jacob’s wrestle with the visitor (Gen 32) is taken as an example to yield ethical insight.
80 Birch and Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life*, 177.
interest in the topic gained a hold.\textsuperscript{83} To Wright, ethics is an overarching concern of the Old Testament starting from the Exodus when God takes the initiative to redeem the oppressed Israelites.\textsuperscript{84} Thus, ethics “becomes a matter of response and gratitude.”\textsuperscript{85} Wright extends his arguments in \textit{Walking in the Ways of the Lord} to the Old Testament as a whole, beginning from the narratives of the call of Abraham (Gen 12), to redemption and the exodus (Exod 1–15), all the while sensitive to the history of the use of the Old Testament in ethics.\textsuperscript{86} His third monograph, \textit{Old Testament Ethics for the People of God}, explores themes for contemporary society: ecology, politics, economics, the land and the poor, politics and a world of nations, law and justice, society and culture, and the way of the individual.\textsuperscript{87} Within two decades (i.e., 1983 to 2004), Wright provided a solid foundation on applying narratives from characters of Old Testament witness and various topics on ethics using the overarching perspective.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, scholarship has received more contribution on the use of narratives for Old Testament ethics.\textsuperscript{88} While Robin A. Parry restores the biblical narrative to the heart of biblical ethics, John Barton enquires into the general value of the Old Testament, such as motivation for moral conduct, ethical issues of ecology, sexual morality and property.\textsuperscript{89}

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\textsuperscript{83} Wright’s \textit{Living as the People of God} is called \textit{An Eye for an Eye} in USA. Christopher J. H. Wright, \textit{An Eye for an Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983); Christopher J. H. Wright, \textit{Walking in the Ways of the Lord} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).
\textsuperscript{84} Wright, \textit{An Eye for an Eye}, 21–24.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{86} Wright argues that such use of the Bible needs to be set within a theological framework of “creation, fall, redemption in history,” and the hope of new creation. He takes the Old Testament as a “model” or “paradigm” to apply to issues in the contemporary world. Issues addressed are ecology, human rights, attitudes towards the state and opposition to corruption, dishonesty and injustice within societies. Wright, \textit{Walking in the Ways of the Lord}, 33, 275–77.
\textsuperscript{87} Wright, \textit{Old Testament Ethics for the People of God}, 72, 155–59, 175. For example, Wright illustrates social obligation using the narrative of Nathan’s parable to David (2 Sam 12). On the subject of drawing economics ethics, various narratives are used, such as the covenant (Gen 1–11), liberation from slavery Exodus, shared access to resources (Josh 13–19), working life and conditions, and response to poverty in the narratives.
\textsuperscript{88} Of the 79 essays and monographs from 1949 to 2015, sixteen are from the forty-year period of 1950 to 1990, compared to the same number of sixteen from one decade only (1991–2000).
\textsuperscript{89} Parry uses two examples, (1) rape of Dinah in Gen 34, and (2) Nathan rebukes David’s sin in 2 Sam 12, to argue that the narrative invites the readers to enter a moral imagination. In entering into the moral life of the character, the
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Moreover, other topics such as the moral perspectives of the character of God, moral meaning from diaspora novels, and behaviour patterns are applied to Old Testament narratives. In addition, the universal nature of storytelling and several aspects of ethical perception are highlighted to address ethical questions. Thus, storytelling is a powerful tool in the interpretation of Old Testament ethics. The exploration of Old Testament narratives for ethical reflection ranges from individual character stories to subject areas such as topics of ecology, sexual issues, moral conduct and behaviour.

Furthermore, some scholars examine how narratives can be used as a source for understanding ethics from the Old Testament. In his article “Old Testament Narrative and Moral Address,” Bruce C. Birch argues that Old Testament narratives “have moral power in exposing reality, or transforming worldviews, and challenging the reader to respond.” Later, this essay is incorporated into Let Justice Roll Down to introduce a sensitive interpretation of biblical ethics. With this monograph on Old Testament and Christian ethics, Birch relates the stories and testimonies of Israel’s faith to the moral conduct and character for our modern day Christian readers are able to “identify with the characters” and “become more responsive” in their own lives. Robin A. Parry, “Greeks Bearing Gifts?: Appropriating Nussbaum (Appropriating Aristotle) for a Christian Approach to Old Testament Narrative Ethics,” EuroJTh 9, no. 1 (2000): 67–68, 70; John Barton, Ethics and the Old Testament: The 1997 Diocese of British Columbia John Albert Hall Lectures at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society in the University of Victoria (London, UK: SCM, 2002).

Mary E. Mills, “Reading the Old Testament as Story,” ScrB 36 (2006): 79, 83, 85–86. Moral perspectives are drawn from three narratives: (1) character of God established in the narrative of Ruth and Boaz, (2) find moral meaning in biblical imagination from the short novels of Esther and Daniel, and (3) exploration of behaviour pattern in the story Jacob. Gorospe argues that Biblical stories are able to stimulate the readers in the portrayal of human characters. Four features are discovered for ethical perception: (1) the readers develop ethical perception by being attentive to characters, (2) stories can draw emotions, (3) narratives tend to be less open to generalization than other genres such as the psalms and laws, and (4) biblical narratives “create ambiguity and surprise” for readers. Olojede, on the other hand, uses three examples to show that ethics is rooted principally in story: (1) the Joseph narrative from Gen 37–50, especially Joseph’s resisting seduction from Potiphar’s wife, (2) Daniel and his friends’ unwillingness to consume the king’s food and wine (Dan 1–7), and (3) narratives of several wise women (2 Sam 14, 20). Gorospe, “Old Testament Narratives and Ethics,” 27, 34–35; Olojede, “Storytelling as an Indigenous Resource in the Interpretation of Old Testament Ethics and Religion,” 5–8.

community. Other than Birch, Joel B. Green and Jacqueline E. Lapsley jointly contribute a book-by-book survey of the Old Testament with a collection of essays on the use of the Old Testament for ethical formation. In particular, three essays “Ethics of Torah,” “1–2 Kings,” and “Ethics of Exile” apply narratives from various books of the Old Testament for ethical reflection. Barton’s *Ethics in Ancient Israel* provides a historical survey of ethical approaches to show the vitality and variety of ethical thought in ancient Israel. The overarching perspective enriches the scholarship with comprehensive nuances on applying Old Testament ethics to narrative texts. However, this overarching approach merely inquires into the subject, but does not perform further analysis into various areas of ethics. In other words, this approach fails to offer an in-depth assessment on the topic.

**Narratives for Specific Topics**

More recently, scholars of this topic explore different avenues to develop specific arguments. Topics include making good or bad decisions, the subject of obedience, the ethics in the community, the relationship between ethics and law, and the ethics of ecology.

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94 Ibid., 18.
97 Barton discusses ethical teachings such as obeying the “declared will of God,” and an example of moral ambiguity, or “God’s struggles,” from the command for Abraham to sacrifice his son (Gen 22). Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 127–56, 261.
Individual behaviour such as making good or bad decisions and the virtue of obedience could be drawn from Old Testament narratives. The moral subject of “discerning good and evil” is attested to by over seventy-five occurrences in the Old Testament. The Old Testament’s desire of goodness also includes the choosing of “goodness over evil” whenever there is an option. In addition, the concept of obedience is frequently evoked as moral address in the Old Testament. Various narratives from the book of Genesis are used to argue that obedience is the “first-order moral discourse.”

Since individual ethics are community-shaped, Old Testament characters are inseparable from community life in ancient Israel. William P. Brown compiles a collection of twenty-five essays on the moral formation of communities from reading Scripture. In particular, two essays, one on David’s story as normative for shaping “the ethical character of a community,” and the other an analysis of Job’s story, examine personal and especially communal character formation in narrative ethics. Aside from Brown, M. Daniel Carroll R. also introduces some key areas of theological and canonical commitments to consider when forming Old Testament

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99 Ibid., 136.
101 Schweiker maintains that the integral part of moral life is building one’s individual and communal character from narrative ethics. William Schweiker, “Images of Scripture and Contemporary Theological Ethics,” in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation*, edited by William P. Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 40.
ethics. Several narratives from Genesis and Exodus are used to substantiate his argument concerning a community-ethical framework applicable for Christian living.

Given that law is a binding practice of a community, law also prescribes a mode of conduct or action. Law is frequently introduced in the Old Testament in a “story-law-story-law” genre starting from Exodus 12. Several scholars have examined how narrative and law are related. Terence E. Fretheim seeks to draw out the “ethical-theological dimensions” of the text and proves that “neither law nor narrative in itself is sufficient.” He argues that narratives are closely connected with law in the Pentateuch. Hetty Lalleman develops and defines basic principles of Old Testament ethics from narratives. Lalleman recognizes that ethics is part of the history of humanity and ethics is based on the grace of God, and therefore ethics is also based on community. Furthermore, Gordon J. Wenham argues that “ethics is much more than keeping the law.” Wenham observes that the law outlines God’s basic requirements for ethical

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104 Carroll R., “Ethics and Old Testament Interpretation,” 213–15. Three types of narratives are used to argue for a “community-ethical framework”: (1) the book of Genesis testifies the birth of a nation, with God as the creator of all the earth, (2) the book of Exodus has Israel established from a “covenantal society,” with God of the Exodus as the moral standard, and (3) other historical narratives reflecting on societal concerns in Israel.


107 See following discussions from Terence E. Fretheim, Hetty Lalleman, Gordon J. Wenham, and John Barton.


109 Ibid., 298. Starting from the book of Genesis, while no law concerning murder had been given, Gen 9:1–7 states that anyone who takes a human life will be punished by death. Another example is in Gen 18:25 when Abraham appeals to God’s moral standard to hold God responsible.

110 Hetty Lalleman, Celebrating the Law?: Rethinking Old Testament Ethics (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2004), 59–61. Three narratives are used: (1) ethics is part of the history of humanity because God, in the creation narrative (Gen 2), directs the course of action which will allow human beings to live in His presence, (2) Old Testament ethics is based on the grace of God, as testified when God saves Israel from Egypt, and (3) not only that ethics is about individuals, but also about community.

111 Ibid., 59–62. Ethics is based on community and concerns the whole of society, e.g. God made promises to Abraham personally, yet through Abraham blessings are extended to all the nations.

behaviour, supported with the narrative describing “the ideal of godly behaviour.”¹¹³ Similar to Wenham’s argument, John Barton proves that narratives are “examples of torah-obedience,” supported by laws “as a kind of ethical commentary.”¹¹⁴ In sum, the law functions to explain divine reaction to human action that narrative illustrates and exemplifies, because the characters in the narratives are operating within the framework of the basic Israelite ethical system.

While an interest in ecology is slowly progressing into biblical studies, scholarship is moving to a new awareness of the “influence of creation stories on shaping ethical behaviour.”¹¹⁵ From the various depictions of creation from scripture, narratives from Gen 1:1 to 3:24 bring an awareness of how the creation narrative helps to form codes of behaviour.¹¹⁶ Other than ethics of character formation, Wright suggests the ethics of the land as having four principles of stewardship: “shared access,” “right and responsibility,” the land could not be employed to make profit, and justice in sharing.¹¹⁷ Hence, narrative offers the study of ecology and land an ethic regarding the land.

I find that specific topics only started to emerge towards the turn of the twenty-first century, with the first topic of law and ethics from Wenham in 1997.¹¹⁸ After the overarching approach began in the mid-twentieth century, scholars have taken half a century to discern and

¹¹⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, “Theology and Ethics of the Land,” *Transformation* 16, no. 3 (1999): 82, 84. From Old Testament narratives (Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, 1 Kings, etc.), Wright suggests principles of stewardship in the Old Testament (i.e. Ethics of the land): (1) shared access to natural resources, (2) the “right and responsibility” for labor relations, (3) land could not be treated as a commodity to make profit, and (4) justice in the sharing and use of the products of human effort.
develop specific areas of ethical reflection. These specific areas of discernment stimulate and advance scholarship to pave the way for further innovation on ethical reflection.

Narratives from Books of the Old Testament

Not surprisingly, a majority of scholars of Old Testament ethics study and write on individual books of the Old Testament.¹¹⁹ Their contribution is synthesized and categorized in the same sequence as the books of the Old Testament.

Several scholars reflect ethically on various narratives from Genesis. In the world of human thought and action, the creation narrative (Gen 1–3) enables ethical insight to observe whether obedience is good and disobedience is evil.¹²⁰ When reading the story of Abraham’s offering of Isaac (Gen 22), it would be helpful to explain Abraham’s faith in action from the New Testament book of Hebrews.¹²¹ Sarah and Hagar (Gen 12–24), the two wives of Abraham, are studied as “models of human identity” on the issue of parenthood.¹²² The Jacob and Esau narratives (Gen 25, 27), which start from fraternal conflict and end with reconciliation, contribute to political ethics.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Of the 79 essays and monographs from 1949 to 2015, 36 are from the books of Genesis to Amos. Furthermore, out of the 36, 12 are from Genesis only.


¹²² Mary E. Mills, “The Story of Abraham and Models of Human Identity,” NBF 89, no. 1021 (May 2008): 280. The issue of parenthood in Gen 12–24 encourages the reader to explore how the tension between freedom and constraint operates as a major force in the shaping of a human being.

¹²³ Frank Crüsemann, “Domination, Guilt and Reconciliation: The Contribution of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis to Political Ethics,” Semeia 66 (1994): 67, 70. Crüsemann argues that the testimony about Jacob and Esau is associated to the “political history of their descendants.” Political ethics, or political morality, is the practice of making moral judgements about political action.
From the rape of Dinah narrative in Genesis 34, difficult ethical decisions are examined to inspire readers to “break the silence about rape” and to interpret the event in light of the entire canon.\textsuperscript{124} The narrative of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38) demonstrates the “complex relationship between ethics and culture”; hence, culture is highlighted as an important aspect in the study of Christian ethics.\textsuperscript{125} The ethics of Joseph’s story (Gen 37–50), as Theo L. Hettema argues, are able to influence human action because narrative can provide imitation of time and action for readers.\textsuperscript{126} Other than narratives on individual characters from Genesis, Matthew R. Schlimm studies twelve narratives on how human anger induces deep reflection on the complexity of the moral life.\textsuperscript{127} The narrators of Genesis portray “anger as a great threat to humanity,” but unavoidable for moral living.\textsuperscript{128} Two examples of anger are highlighted by comparing Cain (Gen 4) to Joseph (Gen 50), resulting in “two contrasting outcomes”—fratricide and forgiveness.\textsuperscript{129} Genesis equips readers with a level of imaginative experience for a better understanding of the ethics of emotion.\textsuperscript{130}


\textsuperscript{126} Theo L. Hettema, \textit{Reading for Good: Narrative Theology and Ethics in the Joseph Story from the Perspective of Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics} (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 47.


\textsuperscript{128} Schlimm, “Emotion, Embodiment, and Ethics,” 158.

\textsuperscript{129} Schlimm, \textit{From Fratricide to Forgiveness}, 4.

\textsuperscript{130} Schlimm, “Emotion, Embodiment, and Ethics,” 158; Schlimm, \textit{From Fratricide to Forgiveness}, 4–6.
negative to positive positions such as rebellion and obedience, conflict to reconciliation, anger to resolution, and fratricide and forgiveness.\textsuperscript{131}

From the book of Exodus, two narratives on Moses are examined.\textsuperscript{132} Moses’ slaying of the Egyptian (Exod 2) provides ethical resources for the people of God to reflect on particular contexts and situations.\textsuperscript{133} Also, Moses’ return to Egypt (Exod 4:18–26) shares the “pain and challenges of the contemporary world of dislocation and migration.”\textsuperscript{134} Hence, the narratives of Moses provide ethical reflection on transitions in our lives.

Other than analyzing from only one book of the Old Testament, narratives from multiple books are examined together. Using various narratives from Genesis and Exodus, readers learn how the ethical relevance of the Old Testament could be applied today.\textsuperscript{135} Since the Old Testament contains evidence on moral debates within the \textit{Sitz im Leben} in ancient Israel, the narratives provide ethical discussion on various aspects of communal life. For example, the freeing of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, as narrated in the book of Exodus, strongly

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\textsuperscript{133} Olson, “Violence for the Sake of Social Justice?,” 147.

\textsuperscript{134} Gorospe, \textit{Narrative and Identity}, 323.

\textsuperscript{135} Wright uses narratives such as the creation (Gen 1–4), promise and covenant with Abraham (Gen 11, 18), and delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exod 19) for ethical discussion. Rogerson, on the other hand, using the story of Abraham pleading for Sodom (Gen 18:23–33), argues that Old Testament narratives contribute to the process of moral formation when God and people discuss the fairness of moral decisions. Christopher J. H. Wright, “Ethical Decisions in the OT,” \textit{EuroJTh} 1 (1992): 123–40; Rogerson, ed., \textit{Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics}, 8, 10, 56.
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communicates that those whom God has freed may not enslave each other. Another example is from Exod 5, 9, and 19 where the communal life of ancient Israel is examined to illustrate “Do not accept a bribe” (Deut 16:18) as restrictions against bribery for judges. By tracing back conceptually to the narrative, Michael Goldberg argues that the ethic tends to involve following the narrative together with the rule from Deut 16:18 to understand the communal life of ancient Israel. In addition, the narratives of Genesis and Judges have compelling literary and theological themes to serve as a moral resource. The ethical behaviour from biblical characters expresses moral values through their witness and the varying portrayals of God and humanity in mutual dialogue. In sum, we can learn ethical considerations on slavery, bribery, truth telling, and warfare from discerning the character of God and His perspective on fairness.

The book of Ruth is demonstrated to have normative value and is useful for deriving ethics. Employing a social identity approach, Peter H. W. Lau highlights the social significance of the narrative to prove that “narratives can influence ethics by shaping identity.”

Narratives from Ruth 4 and Gen 1–11, explaining how the moral community is formed, show the

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138 Ibid., 22.
138 Ibid., 195.
142 Ibid., 195.
community’s relationships towards God with the covenant, within the ideal pattern of relationship in God’s world.\textsuperscript{143} The narrative from Ruth could be a means of ethical instruction on our social identity.

The history books of Samuel and Kings provide ethical and theological themes on leadership and kingship.\textsuperscript{144} The narrative in 1 Samuel 3 invites the reader to learn how to respond to God’s purpose and call.\textsuperscript{145} On the one hand, Stuart Lasine argues that the judicial narratives from 2 Sam 16 and 19 call for judgement and pronounces David as an irresponsible judge.\textsuperscript{146} On the other hand, Richard G. Smith argues David marks a turning point in establishing justice and righteousness with all his people in 2 Sam 8:15.\textsuperscript{147} The books of Samuel and Genesis provide views on moral vision, importance of justice and social ethics, and stories of forgiveness as affirmation of life.\textsuperscript{148} Douglas A. Knight studies how “literary traditions” communicate ethical values during the Davidic and Solomonic generation in Israelite history.\textsuperscript{149} From the succession narrative of David coming to power (2 Sam 9–20) and David making Solomon king (1 Kgs 1–2), Knight analyzes the different roles played in the formation of tradition and the formation of


\textsuperscript{146} Ruffin, “1 Samuel 3:1–20,” 175, 177.

\textsuperscript{147} Smith, \textit{The Fate of Justice and Righteousness during David’s Reign}, 4, 70.


values to influence moral conduct.¹⁵⁰ Other than David’s story, the story of Josiah is used to propose an ethical reading of Old Testament narratives in the two books of Kings.¹⁵¹ Unlike some scholars who draw principles or moral insights from narratives, S. Min Chun’s approach to Josiah does not extract general rules of the story.¹⁵² Ronald E. Clements proves that “tora-instruction [sic],” provided in the Old Testament, is very versatile and can be applied to a wide range of “human social and political systems.”¹⁵³ The Old Testament contains a “richly viable source of social and moral teaching” from “dramatically different economic and political societies.”¹⁵⁴ Hence, we can examine various narratives in order to discern the ethical standards for the ancient Israelites. Lastly, from the books of Genesis to Kings, Stuart Lasine studies biblical narratives involving Moses, Elijah, David, and Zedekiah, to examine ethical issues and post-critical interpretations to evaluate these characters from related Old Testament narratives.¹⁵⁵ These history books invite leaders to sharpen their moral vision to recognize their human existence before God.

The diaspora novellas of Esther and Daniel describe the dispersion of the Jews beyond the land of Israel. Mary E. Mills examines the “crossing of cultural and social boundaries” in the books of Daniel and Esther.¹⁵⁶ For example, Daniel has to cross the social boundary when he

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¹⁵⁰ Knight, “Moral Values and Literary Traditions,” 15.
¹⁵¹ Chun, Ethics and Biblical Narrative, 2.
¹⁵² Ibid., 1.
¹⁵³ Ronald E. Clements, “Christian ethics and the Old Testament,” MC 26, no. 3 (1984): 14, 22. Clements maintains that the Old Testament is a book of “Law,” or “tora,” declaring Israel’s obligation towards God, with regard to the covenant between God and Israel. The Old Testament have a completely consistent ethical standard, as Clements argues from three narratives: (1) Achan’s sin (Josh 7:1–26), (2) David’s murder of Uriah and marriage to Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:1–12:23), and (3) acquisition of Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1–24).
¹⁵⁶ Mary E. Mills, “Household and Table: Diasporic Boundaries in Daniel and Esther,” CBQ 68, no. 3 (July 2006): 408, 410, 416.
refuses to consume food prepared by foreign hands and conforming to foreign ways (Dan 1).\textsuperscript{157} Greg Goswell repeatedly discovers the ethics of loyalty to God as King from the book of Daniel.\textsuperscript{158} Daniel L. Smith-Christopher discusses “Diaspora ethics,” which is a sub-cultural ethics deeply concerned with values relating to issues of social order.\textsuperscript{159} Cultural messages are explored in the narratives between home community and host in the setting of the kings’ courts in Babylon and Persia.

Through a literary and exegetical study from the book of Amos, Sungkoo Lee discusses the function of the patriarchal election tradition and the moral and religious life of the Israelites.\textsuperscript{160} In all, ethical reflections from the books of Genesis to Amos give a moral vision on making wise decisions, similar to how the ways of the wicked and the righteousness are described in Psalm 1. Drawing from various books definitely develops a solid foundation for Old Testament ethical formation.

Models and Categories

A few scholars use critical reflection to produce systematic accounts of the Old Testament ethics to develop models and categories. In his two articles “Ethics in Isaiah of Jerusalem” and “Basis of Ethics in the Hebrew Bible,” John Barton argues that the prophet Isaiah had a developed

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 416.

\textsuperscript{158} Greg Goswell, “The Ethics of the Book of Daniel,” \textit{ResQ} 57, no. 3 (2015): 142. Three narratives support the ethics of loyalty to God: (1) Daniel and his companions refuse to take the king’s rich food (Dan 1), (2) The three Jewish youths refuse to worship the golden “image” that the king set up (Dan 3), and (3) Daniel’s practice of prayer shows his persistent devotion to his God (Dan 6).


\textsuperscript{160} Sungkoo Lee, \textit{Election and Ethics: Ethical Basis of the Prophecy of Amos} (Seoul, Korea: Dongbang, 2005).
understanding of the basis of morality; hence, Barton formulates three ethical models of “obedience to God,” the “conformity to a pattern of natural order,” and the “imitation of God.” Later, these two essays are incorporated into *Understanding Old Testament Ethics* to explore the ethical legacy of the Old Testament and the ways in which the storytellers of ancient Israel exhibited their visions of God’s goodness. After presenting his three ethical models as the basis for ethics in Old Testament narratives, Barton explores how the ethical advice and the consequences of human behaviour are grounded in Amos, Isaiah, and Daniel. Compared with Barton’s distinctive approach to Old Testament ethics on narratives, Mills explores Old Testament narratives to draw various views on morality. Mills discerns that the identity of the ancient Israelites was bound by their relationship with God. She explores nine sections of Old Testament narratives to categorize them into three levels of “character, plot and setting.” From their distinctive approaches to ethical reflection, scholars apply Old Testament narratives to illustrate their visions of models and categories. Models and categories have certain advantages of drawing common guidelines from narratives, but they may also be inadequate due to the reason that they are not able to address specific circumstances.

162 Barton provides a suggestive phrase of “conformity to a pattern of natural order” for the term ‘natural law’. Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 29.
163 Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*.
165 Mills, *Biblical Morality*.
166 Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 435. Wright reviews Mills’ exploration of the first level of character from the stories of Abraham, David, and Esther; the second level of plot from the stories of Ruth, Jonah, and Joseph; the third level of setting from Gen 1–11, Dan 1–7, and the book of Job.
Precautions When Using Narratives

All along in this study, most scholars claim to apply Old Testament narratives for ethical reflection, with various tools and methods such as employing overarching perspectives, developing specific subject areas, or even designing models to express their discernment on the ethical life of ancient Israelites. However, some have reservations about applying Old Testament ethics to narrative texts. Even though Janzen selects Old Testament narratives to demonstrate ethical impacts for the paradigmatic approach, Janzen also cautions us against reducing “vivid stories” to “abstract principles.”  

Similarly, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart discourage the readers from “drawing moral points from biblical stories.”  

Furthermore, John Goldingay warns against the use of narratives ethics because readers would “risk turning the faith into something we do rather than something God has done.”  

In addition, Sidney Greidanus warns against “moralizing or spiritualizing of a narrative text,” which means drawing moral speculation and spiritual analogy from Bible passages. In order to avoid “reading subjective opinions into the text,” readers should go back to “the original intention” of the biblical author in conveying the message to the original audience.  

With an overall negative tone, Cyril S. Rodd claims that because of numerous inconsistencies within Israel’s story, it is impossible to obtain a “whole

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167 Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 20. Janzen’s five paradigms are from narratives such as “familial” (Gen 13), “priestly” (Num 25), “sapiential” (1 Sam 25), “royal” (1 Sam 24), and “prophetic” (1 Kgs 21).


thrust” of biblical revelation—“unifying theme of Old Testament ethics.”¹⁷² As narratives are close to the history they retell, there is a cultural gap between the ancient biblical world and our modern world.¹⁷³ Rodd warns us not to read more into “the text than is actually given,”¹⁷⁴ lest we read our own ethical agenda back into the Old Testament in a distorting and implausible way.

In addition to Rodd’s warning against using Old Testament narratives for ethical discussion, a few other scholars forward their objections. For example, Wright rejects Rodd’s view that the Old Testament comes from such a different world that it cannot have anything to say to our modern world.¹⁷⁵ In all, the various schools of thought discussed in the scholarship are similar to a multi-voice choir exhibiting various approaches to this subject of applying Old Testament ethics to narrative texts.

Conclusion

This survey has seen the subject of discerning ethics from Old Testament narratives as it began in the mid-twentieth century with only a handful of ethical reflections. Various points of view started to evolve towards the end of the twentieth century from overall discernment to approaches using an overarching perspective. After a decade or so of neglect, authors began to develop new ideas like law, ecology, anger and emotions, as insights and visions emerged from changes in their contemporary social environment. As living environment progresses, new insights and thoughts trigger scholars to discern issues from different viewpoints.

¹⁷² Rodd, Glimpses of a Strange Land, 282, 313; Lalleman, Celebrating the Law?, 54.
¹⁷⁴ Lalleman, Celebrating the Law?, 55.
I have already witnessed a trend of continual growth in scholarship around the turn of the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{176} I would project that adventurous scholars will contribute new ideas and construct new moral proposals on topics such as ethics on ecology and green politics, bioethics, and ethics related to LGBT communities, as scholars gain insight and awareness in their contemporary society and desire to draw ethical ideas from Old Testament narratives.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{176} The number of contributions to the scholarship during the decade after the turn of the twenty-first century doubled that of the decade before the turn of the decade, i.e. 1991 to 2000 has 16 verses 2001 to 2010 has 31.

\textsuperscript{177} Bioethics discusses ethical issues in biological and medical research such as assisted suicide, or mercy killing. LGBT is an initialism that stands for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered persons.
Chapter 2

Approaches and Models from Barton, Wenham, and Mills

Introduction

How should we live our lives and make wise decisions? In other words, how should a well-lived life be conceived? We need to understand the contemporary and scholarly views on Christian ethics in order to understand the Christian ideal of an ethical existence based on narratives from the Old Testament. In this chapter I am going to draw from the best of what Barton, Wenham, and Mills find in order to answer this question, based on how they forge ethics from the Old Testament narratives. First, I will start with an overview of contributions from these three contemporary scholars. Then I will give a comprehensive view of each scholar’s approaches, models, and principles of forming ethics. I will identify the methodologies they use for their school of thought. I will summarize the arguments leading to their research findings, and see how the authors locate themselves within the literature, with the focus relating to my research in this study. I will compare and contrast the findings of each of these three scholars, at times drawing also from other authors’ comments and critiques of their work.

Contributions from Barton, Wenham, and Mills

John Barton’s three basic models for Old Testament ethics are “obedience to God’s declared will,” the “conformity to a pattern of natural order,” and the “imitation of God.” After his short article “Understanding Old Testament Ethics,” Barton wrote the essay “Approaches to

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Ethics in the Old Testament.” 179 Finally, he produced the short monograph *Ethics and the Old Testament* to recapitulate his understanding and viewpoints as they had developed from previous years. 180 Barton continued to establish these ideas and published another monograph, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, incorporating two earlier written essays as chapters in his book. 181 Other than ethics from the Old Testament, Barton also explores the relationship between law and narratives in the Pentateuch. 182 More recently, his *Ethics in Ancient Israel* discusses the moral character of God and moral order in ancient Israel. 183 To learn about moral life, Barton considers reading Old Testament narratives by analyzing how the Old Testament characters “wrestle with everyday joys, tragedies, and pressures.” 184

Alongside Barton’s contribution to Christian ethics using narratives, Gordon Wenham believes that narratives have recently become the primary literary type considered for Old Testament ethics. 185 Moreover, Wenham argues that ethics is closely associated with laws—“ethics is much more than keeping the law,” as he discusses in his article “The Gap between Law and Ethics in the Bible.” 186 The article’s foundational argument is incorporated into a “comprehensive treatment of Old Testament ethics” in his monograph *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically*. 187 Wenham argues that Old Testament narrative is closely connected with theological ethical values; hence, narrative is instructive for readers to pursue as

183 Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*.
184 Carroll R., review of *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 70.
187 Chun, *Ethics and Biblical Narrative*, 63; Wenham, *Story as Torah*. 
goals. Using the books of Genesis and Judges, Wenham inquires into the patterns and beliefs expressed in the Old Testament narratives. In his article “Reflections on Singing the Ethos of God,” Wenham reflects on the lack of scholarship on Old Testament narratives and presents various views on shaping Christian ethics. All of the above leads to the conclusion that Wenham has made a significant contribution to the discussion of ethics using Old Testament narratives as the basis for ethical reflection.

Besides these publications from Wenham and Barton, Mary Mills’ Biblical Morality is included in a list of monographs which “use different textual methodologies” to explore the possible relevance of biblical texts for modern life. Rather than looking at more traditional approaches to categories and issues of ethics such as marriage, sexuality, social justice, war, or human rights, Mills focuses on the moral vision of ethics from the creation narrative in Genesis 1–11 and selected characters from the books of the Old Testament. After her monograph, Mills contributes three articles to draw moral perspectives from Old Testament narratives, to explore cultural messages between home community and hosts in Babylon and Persia, and to study the female characters Sarah and Hagar as models of human identity.

189 Wenham, Story as Torah, 5; Bruce C. Birch, review of Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically, by Gordon J. Wenham, Int 57, no. 2 (2003): 200.
191 Carroll R., “Introduction to the Ethics of John Rogerson,” 1–2; Mills, Biblical Morality.
The Research of John Barton

The most important approach for understanding how to live our lives ethically based on the Old Testament is that of John Barton. He has provided three valuable models to derive the Christian ideal from Old Testament narrative ethics. For the last few decades, John Barton has been an important contributor to ethical studies by emphasizing the “emerging role of narrative” in the Old Testament. He has been valued as one of the “foremost critical” thinkers on Old Testament ethics and has “set the course for a new direction” in the research of Old Testament ethics. I find his ethical reflections on the three basic models very convincing due to the reason that these three models set forth the overarching values for Old Testament narrative ethics.

Although Barton does not state his methodology explicitly or directly argue for his ethical viewpoints in *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, he uses the methods of historical, sociological, and cultural criticism to explore the ethical abundance of the Old Testament narrative tradition. Initially, he develops ethical reflection by drawing on the work of other scholars such as Martha C. Nussbaum and Eckart Otto. Barton places himself firmly in the historical-critical tradition to present an overview of Old Testament ethics as a whole.

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Obviously, he is sufficiently acquainted with the “historical-critical issues of biblical scholarship.”

In his historical-literary reading of the text, he also argues for a solid sociological analysis of ethics in ancient Israelite society. Since the Old Testament assembles events and people from different cultural settings (*Sitzen im Leben*) demonstrating a wide range of human ethics, he reconstructs the diversity of ethical thought by acknowledging the sociological plurality of ancient Israelite morality. Barton argues for the need to discern the “people of which period,” “people of which class,” and “people in which social situation” for his ethical reflection. Hence, I see how Barton deals with the sociological culture that constituted the Old Testament.

The first ethical model concerns “obedience to God’s declared will.” Obedience is often described as “flowing from gratitude for benefits conferred.” To obey God, interpreted as a “deontological,” or moral obligation, is the only appropriate response to God. One motive of obedience in the Israeli mind comes from perceiving God as “a teacher persuading his students to do the right thing by reminding them of how much they owe him, and of what good things will come to them if they do it.”

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201 Applegate, review of *Ethics and the Old Testament*, 199.


206 Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 144; Wiele, review of *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 106.
The second model is that of conformity to a pattern of natural order, also explained as natural morality. Natural morality is based on three aspects: (1) the realities of the way the world works, (2) “what is apparent on the basis of the nature of human life in society,” and (3) the human nature of knowing what is right and wrong. In other words, all people are able to discern certain natural norms, or right conduct, to fit their life to the natural “patterns and order” in God’s created world. The model of natural morality is inscribed by, or “brought under the rubric of,” obedience to God.

The third basis of Old Testament ethics is the notion of the imitation of God. To imitate God, as Kelly explains, is a “motivating principle” that accompanies the first model of obedience. This imitation involves humans taking “God’s character as the pattern of their character and God’s deeds as the model for theirs.” Therefore, the imitation of God provides a firm basis for sustaining the ethical value of obedience to God’s declared will. Barton explores natural morality in the three prophetic characters of Amos, Isaiah, and Daniel.

Barton’s work on Old Testament narrative ethics has been influential in scholarship. Similar to other contemporary writers, he argues for the “relevance and the centrality of story for ethics” in the treatment of Old Testament ethics. With his three basic models, Barton discusses how narratives can exert formative power in the modern context to form us ethically. He supplies

the readers with materials to recognize how to live a life in the presence of God.\textsuperscript{215} The concept of conformity to a pattern of natural order not only “illuminates prophetic thinking on moral issues,” but also stimulates the recognition of moral order in creation and human nature.\textsuperscript{216} Moreover, Schlimm finds Barton’s discussion of the use of the Bible in ethics helpful for understanding various episodes involving anger in Genesis.\textsuperscript{217} However, Anderson disputes Barton’s models from the perspective of “marginalized groups”—women, the poor, and non-Israelites.\textsuperscript{218} She observes that Barton’s principles of Old Testament ethics do not consider the implications for these marginalized groups.\textsuperscript{219}

All in all, from critical reflection on ethical practise and awareness in ancient Israel, Barton convincingly emphasizes that narratives are a suitable and precise form of expressing ethics.\textsuperscript{220} This is because it is “only through the richness of storytelling that we come to understand what it means to be human and to make informed choices” for a well-lived life.\textsuperscript{221}

**The Research of Gordon J. Wenham**

Gordon Wenham also helps us to understand and complement the Christian ideal with Old Testament narrative ethics concerning the notion of obedience and the imitation of God. In *Story as Torah* Wenham recognizes “patterns of behaviour” in Old Testament narratives.\textsuperscript{222} He argues

\textsuperscript{216} Carroll R., “Introduction to the Ethics of John Rogerson,” 1; Carroll R., “Ethics and Old Testament Interpretation,” 212.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{222} Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 3.
that it is not enough for the righteous just to observe a set of rules, although principles of
behaviour vary during different periods in the Old Testament.” In other words, law only
defines a minimum standard of behaviour. The ethical ideal is to imitate God, because Israel, as
the covenanted people of God, is to be holy because God is holy. Thus, obedience to the law is
not the only standard, and so cannot “entail the entire sum of ethics” in the Old Testament.
Wenham explores narratives from the books of Genesis and Judges to search for principles of
ethics.

In ancient Israel, story was the principal method of sending ethical instructions. Stories
were verbally communicated, recalled, evolved, and replicated through generations. These
stories were further developed and adjusted to produce the narratives in the form we see today.
From the stories we understand how Israel was experiencing God’s will and involvement in their
lives. These stories are added as narratives to the Torah to become the “ethics of Israel,”
thereby explaining Wenham’s title, Story as Torah. It follows that Old Testament narratives have
an instructive objective to establish “theological truths” and “ethical ideals” in their readers.
Wenham uses the methods of historical, literary, and rhetorical criticism to investigate the ethical
values embodied in the narratives. The tool of rhetorical criticism is persuasive due to the way
narratives inform and instruct “ideological points of view,” with the aim of shaping the reader’s

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223 Ibid., 4.
224 Ibid., 4, 104, 105. “You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:45 ESV).
225 Wenham, Story as Torah, 79; Birch, review of Story as Torah, 200; Robert Reed Lessing, review of Story as
226 Wenham, Story as Torah, 2; Wright, Old Testament Ethics for the People of God, 438.
228 Giles Hibbert, review of Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically, by Gordon J. Wenham, NBf 83,
229 Hibbert, review of Story as Torah, 201.
230 Similarly, a few scholars share the same view of didactic purpose as Hibbert. Stephen James Walton, review of
Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically, by Gordon J. Wenham, Chm 116, no. 2 (Sum 2002): 170;
Lessing, review of Story as Torah, 441.
231 Wenham, Story as Torah, 3.
perspective and conduct. Wenham’s approach is also sensitive to questions of historical meaning and context because Old Testament narratives communicate Israel’s cultural and political history in their journey of faith. Wenham draws inspiring conclusions on how laws and stories are related in the study of ethics. For Wenham, the most important contribution to this study is that he helps us to discern obedience in a new way that is related to law. The law only outlines the minimum of acceptable behaviour required from God, while the narratives describe the ethical “ideal of godly behaviour.” He further explains that a “gap exists between the law’s demands and the writer’s ideals.”

Wenham also discusses a number of other aspects from the Old Testament that have supporting value for this study. From the book of Genesis, Wenham argues regarding marital ethics that monogamy is the objective from God. Wenham argues that the ideal of “life-long monogamy” in ancient Israel is the highest marital objective introduced in Genesis 2. The author of Genesis presents models of behaviour that “define true virtue and vice.” The reader is encouraged to act like the virtues in order to receive blessings from God. Therefore, having

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232 Boda, “Poethics?,” 56.
233 Walter Moberly, review of Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically, by Gordon J. Wenham, Anv 19 (2002): 52; Lessing, review of Story as Torah, 441.
234 Wright, Old Testament Ethics for the People of God, 438.
235 See Story as Torah, chapter 5 (“Ethical Ideals and Legal Requirements”), 73–107; Wenham, Story as Torah, 104; Wenham, “The Gap between Law and Ethics in the Bible,” 17–29; Lau, Identity and Ethics, 194.
237 Beyond Story as Torah, Wenham has also written exegetical studies on Genesis, including the flood and the biblical characters of Aaron, Cain, and Seth. He also writes articles on sexual issues such as homosexuality, marriage, and divorce. All these publications complement Wenham’s understanding of the Christian ethical ideal, based on narratives from the Old Testament. Wenham, Story as Torah, 152; J. G. McConville, “Bibliography of the Writings of Gordon J. Wenham,” in Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham, edited by J. G. McConville and Karl Möller (New York, NY: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 297–302.
238 Wenham argues that God created only one woman for Adam; hence, a man having one wife is God’s intent (Gen 2:22–24). Wenham, Story as Torah, 152; H. G. M. Williamson, review of Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically, by Gordon J. Wenham, VT 53, no. 2 (2003): 280.
239 Rooke, review of Story as Torah, 88.
240 Ibid.
more than one wife is an indication to decline the monogamous marriage model proposed in
Genesis. Every case of polygamy is depicted negatively and is generally shown to lead to
undesirable consequences, because biblical authors imply the need to strive for higher and more
positive standards. Another ideal is that since human beings are made in the image of God,
humanity should preserve creation and also love their fellow human beings. Moreover,
Wenham argues that the author of Genesis urges the readers to follow the good examples of
heroes and heroines illustrated in the book of Genesis. Human beings made in God’s image
must behave in a godly fashion: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2
ESV). The creation of man and woman in God’s image implies that human beings are counted
on to mirror godly attributes. Furthermore, God desires a “wholehearted imitation of
himself.” A key principle of biblical ethics, according to Wenham, is “the imitation of
God.”

In his final chapter, Wenham explores the interrelationships between the Old Testament
stories, not only to exhibit the “theological continuity” between the two testaments, but also to
extract the ethical significances of the Old Testament for New Testament Christians. Wenham

242 Wenham, Story as Torah, 152. Wenham gives the example of the unhappy relationship of Esau and Jacob (Gen 4:23–24; 26:34–35; 29:30–30:23).
243 Ibid., 4.
244 Ibid., 104.
246 Wenham, Story as Torah, 152.
247 Ibid., 154; Walton, review of Story as Torah, 171.
249 Wenham, Story as Torah, 4. See Story as Torah, chapter 7 (“New Testament Perspectives”), 129–49.
250 Wenham, Story as Torah, 130; Philip Peter Jenson, review of Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically, by Gordon J. Wenham, EvQ 76, no. 1 (January 2004): 70.
claims that New Testament readers were very knowledgeable about Old Testament narratives and related ethical teachings. New Testament readers are frequently reminded that they belong to the “one people of God, sharing one story of salvation.” In sum, the New Testament is in continuity with the basic principles of Old Testament law and ethical standards.

Wenham’s contribution has been acknowledged; and therefore, his name has been cited alongside scholars such as Birch, Wright, Barton, and Mills. These scholars contribute to the growing number of studies that apply different approaches to argue for their opinion on the biblical text in modern life. *Story as Torah* demonstrates a fully expressed investigation to show how narrative contributes to the writing of Old Testament ethics. Wenham’s ethical reading of the Old Testament narratives exhibits the moral values of characters in the discussion of the social and historical experiences of life. Combining the methods of literary criticism and rhetorical analysis, Wenham’s methodology displays the strength of analyzing the biblical text within the ancient world’s historical setting. Although Wenham contributes very important work on biblical ethics, his observations on the Joseph novella (Gen 37:2–50:26) are criticized as failing to encapsulate the complexities of the text. In addition, I find that Wenham’s writing has not been gender inclusive. For example, “heroes and heroines of Genesis” should be used instead of “heroes of Genesis.” Furthermore, Wenham writes that every “man made in the

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252 Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 134; Walton, review of *Story as Torah*, 171.
253 Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 130.
257 Chun, *Ethics and Biblical Narrative*, 64.
259 Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 104.
image of God” should imitate his creator and love his fellow man.\textsuperscript{260} Does it mean that woman, whom God also made in His image, does not imitate her creator and love other human beings? Furthermore, some scholars have opposite views about Wenham’s practice of inferring ethical principles from Old Testament narratives.\textsuperscript{261} Chun disagrees with establishing broad principles for application in narrative ethics.\textsuperscript{262} Janzen warns against “distilling ethical virtues” from narratives.\textsuperscript{263} During the process of extracting “abstract principles,” the vivid complexity of moral life would be diminished, and the “genre-characteristics” of the narrative is neglected.\textsuperscript{264} In other words, extracted principles would take away the readers’ real-life contemplation from the complication of moral life.\textsuperscript{265} Another shortcoming is that Wenham does not practise literary criticism to its full extent.\textsuperscript{266}

Nevertheless, Wenham’s monograph \textit{Story as Torah} not only shows an influential and strong association that stories are added to the Torah,\textsuperscript{267} but it also contributes a new perspective to complement this study of Barton’s obedience and imitation models to discern narrative ethics from the Old Testament.

The Research of Mary E. Mills

Mary E. Mills develops another approach to understand how to live our lives ethically based on Old Testament narratives.\textsuperscript{268} I find that her approach lacks an emphasis on historical, cultural,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[260] Ibid., 4.
\item[262] Chun, \textit{Ethics and Biblical Narrative}, 26n71, 85.
\item[265] Chun, \textit{Ethics and Biblical Narrative}, 85.
\item[266] Ibid., 65.
\item[267] Hibbert, review of \textit{Story as Torah}, 201.
\item[268] Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}.
\end{footnotes}
and sociological aspects that are crucial for the interpretation of Old Testament texts. In *Biblical Morality*, Mills develops a three-layered model for studying Old Testament morality. The title of the book is misleading due to the reason that the term “biblical” indicates both Testaments, Old and New, but the content confines itself only to Old Testament morality. A more appropriate title would be “Discerning Morality from the Old Testament.”

According to Mills, the “interpretative methods of narrative criticism” can be used to read narratives. It is difficult to follow how she transforms the narrative criticism method into her three aspects of a narrative work. Initially, Mills describes the three areas as (1) the text itself, (2) the story, which includes events as objects of the narrative, and (3) the act of narrating with its context in space and time. However, it is not clear on how each of these three aspects differs from the others. Mills fails to supply prior explanation of narrative criticism for her readers before using technical terms. For Mills, these three major aspects of the narrative correspond to the narrative elements or narrative art of character, plot, and setting. With these three elements of stories, Mills illustrates the moral vision of stories from nine Old Testament narratives. Regarding the methodology used, Mills lacks in providing a comprehensive view on narrative criticism. She also lacks in explaining the reasons for choosing narrative criticism over other methodologies, along with a list of benefits employing this method for her research.

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269 Ibid., 9–12.
270 Ibid., 21.
273 Ibid., 14.
274 Ibid., 14–19.
I agree with Randall Heskett that historical-critical methods, which Mills does not use, are useful for describing the fundamental and Ancient Near Eastern traditions in the interpretation of biblical testimonies.\textsuperscript{278} Mills’ moral vision focuses on the narrative, which is different from other study of traditional ethical subjects such as war, social justice, abortion, worker relations, and family.\textsuperscript{279} Yet it is a challenge to draw together multiple narratives on various characters from across the entire Old Testament. For one thing, not all the qualities of every character can fit into the model that the author claims. Most likely, every biblical character would live in a drastically different \textit{Sitz im Leben} from the other character.\textsuperscript{280} Therefore, in order to extract a common moral vision, it is necessary to be sensitive to the cultural and historical setting to complement the use of narrative criticism.

With her narrative criticism methodology, Mills discusses a moral vision across the three levels of character, plot, and setting.\textsuperscript{281} Mills’ study “allows Old Testament stories to stand in their own right as relevant sources” in order to examine moral perspectives in Old Testament narratives.\textsuperscript{282} Mills’ theory is built upon the ancient Israelite idea that a person’s identity was closely tied to their relationship with God in association with the family, community, and society.\textsuperscript{283} For the first level of the character, Mills examines the concept of a “moral person.”\textsuperscript{284}

A person, as Mills defines it, is a human being who is self-aware and is capable of being

\textsuperscript{278} Heskett, review of \textit{Biblical Morality}, 703.
\textsuperscript{279} Here are examples of scholars writing on ethical subjects and categories. Rogerson discusses such topics as “war, abortion, work, and family,” whereas Janzen examines “familial, priestly, wisdom, royal, and prophetic” paradigms. Rogerson, ed., \textit{Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics}, 81, 88, 100, 121; Janzen, \textit{Old Testament Ethics}.
\textsuperscript{280} Consider that Solomon (2 Sam) lives in a monarchy in the land of Israel, whereas Daniel lives in diasporic dynasty in Persia.
\textsuperscript{281} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, i.
\textsuperscript{282} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{283} Jenkins, review of \textit{Biblical Morality}, 104.
\textsuperscript{284} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 18.
accountable for “individual actions.” Mills explores this concept of the person through the narratives of the three characters of Abraham, David, and Esther. For the second level of plot, or community, she examines moral perspectives from the stories of Ruth, Jonah, and Joseph in their communities. For the third level of setting, or time and place, Mills inspects the narratives from Genesis 1–11, Daniel 1–7, and the book of Job. In total, she investigates each broad context for communal and personal moral dimensions. In these respects, Mills’ approach differs strongly from Barton’s and Wenham’s models of obedience and imitation.

Mills’ interesting narrative critical approach has been referenced among scholars interested in the discussion of how narratives reflect and highlight the complexities of life. Such scholars are involved in the growing research that uses various methods to analyze the moral points of view, or morality of people from the ancient world. Although Mills assesses Old Testament ethics with care and purpose to discern various moral perspectives, she does not apply divergent interpretations for critical comparison or evaluation. In addition, she does not closely analyze the biblical texts; therefore, the “ethical depths of the texts” should be examined further. Stan Nickerson also objects to a simplistic transfer of moral values to modern-day ethics. Also, a canonical approach is lacking when Mills assesses biblical characters from Old Testament narratives. For example, regarding Abraham’s obedience in sacrificing his son Isaac, there is no reference to the book of Hebrews to assist in explaining Abraham’s act of faith.

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285 Ibid.
286 Ibid., 21.
291 Nickerson, review of Biblical Morality, 65.
292 Mills, Biblical Morality, 25–47.
Heskett comments that Mills does not refer to other evidences, e.g., arguments in the New Testament’s gospel, in God’s revelation.\textsuperscript{293}

Despite these shortcomings, I echo Wright’s appreciation of how Mills observes the various moral complications encapsulated in the narratives, along with a handy digest of opinion from multiple scholars in the field of Old Testament narratives.\textsuperscript{294} All in all, Mills’ \textit{Biblical Morality} is an insightful proposal for ethical reflection and has “challenged traditional thinking” on Old Testament narrative ethics.\textsuperscript{295}

A Comparison of Approaches from Barton, Wenham, and Mills

As I attested in Chapter 1, three important Old Testament scholars in the last three decades have written extensively on applying Old Testament ethics to narrative texts. After thorough analysis, however, it appears that Barton, Wenham, and Mills each hold distinct perspectives on ethical formation. They develop their individual approaches and models by applying different methodologies. I will compare and contrast their methodologies, procedures, assumptions, principles, New Testament perspectives, and their interactions from various schools of thought.

Barton uses historical, sociological, and cultural criticism; Wenham uses historical, literary, and rhetorical criticism; and Mills uses narrative criticism. Barton’s and Wenham’s methodologies are more convincing than Mills’ narrative criticism. Due to the fact that the Old Testament texts originated from an ancient world, a historical method is crucial for interpreting the various \textit{Sitzen im Leben} of ancient Israel. Apart from using historical criticism, Barton also deals with the different cultural settings that produced the Old Testament and argues that the Old

\textsuperscript{293} Heskett, review of \textit{Biblical Morality}, 704.
\textsuperscript{295} Heskett, review of \textit{Biblical Morality}, 704.
Testament narrative texts function to establish the ethical environment of the Old Testament. As for Wenham, other than using historical criticism, he also emphasizes the rhetorical function of narratives because reading scripture builds our character and constitutes our identity in Christian communities. As a thoughtful exegete doing his literary criticism, Wenham is able to argue that an “obedience-to-the-law ethic” is not the only kind of ethic, and he guides the readers to the “importance of virtue, community values, and the imitation of God.” One of the strengths of Wenham’s methodology, according to Chun, is a combination of literary criticism and rhetorical analysis, which amounts to analyzing the biblical text within the ancient world’s historical setting. Compared with Barton and Wenham, Mills’ use of narrative criticism alone lacks the social and cultural aspects needed when she discusses the social and historical experiences of human beings in the historical world. These social and culture aspects are some of the essential elements of interpretation for the ancient Israelite living environment. Thus, the methodologies used by Barton and Wenham are more convincing than Mills’.

Beyond identifying methodologies, I also need to analyze the procedures and assumptions used by each author to draw out his or her ethical reflection from the text. Initially Barton starts looking for the moral vision of the Old Testament because Bible stories and related inferences have had an intense influence on the “ethical behaviour of Jews and Christians of each era.” Then, focusing on some defined moral convictions, Barton studies with an “epistemological claim” that those beliefs can be recognized and morally agreed upon by people

296 Chen highlights Barton’s interest to reconstruct the diversity of ethical thought, or the sociological analysis of ethics. Chen, review of Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 621; Ounsworth, review of Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 118; Applegate, review of Ethics and the Old Testament, 199.
297 Fodor, “Reading the Scriptures,” 159.
298 Wenham, Story as Torah, 79; Birch, review of Story as Torah, 200.
299 Chun, Ethics and Biblical Narrative, 64.
300 Hroboň, review of Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 336.
in the biblical world. In the Old Testament, only the “narrative genre has the ability to address the whole person” in ethical decision-making, whereas “law and wisdom appeal mostly to reasoning.” This is how Barton approaches Old Testament narrative ethics for his basic models. On the other hand, Wenham studies narrative ethics to focus on biblical text we see today in order to identify patterns of behaviour. He emphasizes the various viewpoints from the storyteller over how each character behaves in the narrative. Whereas Barton and Wenham identify ethical principles, Mills merely focuses on the actions of the biblical characters. Morality, according to Mills, is “understood as the context within which ethical discourse takes place.”

Mills applies the term “moral” to the “overall profile of a biblical character, or to the narrative frame of an overarching theme.” From within this setting she makes “ethical” assessments. Thus, it becomes clear that Mills concentrates more on the moral aspect of the actions of human beings, and not ethics, which is the set of principles on which human beings base their decisions. A convention followed by some ethicists, according to Knight, is that “morality” designates the actual realm of human conduct according to principles of good or right, while ‘ethics’ refers primarily to the philosophical or theological inquiry of the good and the right, with the capacity of humans to act morally.” In other words, morality is living according to the knowledge of what is right and wrong, whereas ethics is the philosophy that

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301 Carroll R., review of Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 72. Note that epistemology is the philosophical theory of knowledge.
302 Hroboň, review of Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 338; Dozeman, review of Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 422.
303 Wenham, Story as Torah, 3, 7.
304 Birch, review of Story as Torah, 200; Wenham, Story as Torah, 15.
305 Mills, Biblical Morality, 8.
306 Ibid.
307 Knight, “Moral Values and Literary Traditions,” 22n5.
drives the decision-making process. In sum, Barton and Wenham are forming Christian ethics from Old Testament narratives, while Mills is identifying morality in Old Testament characters.

Barton explicitly proposes three basic models: “obedience to God’s declared will,” the “conformity to a pattern of natural order,” and the “imitation of God.”

Although Wenham does not explicitly construct any model in his ethical reflection, his major arguments are three-fold: (1) in the Old Testament “much more is expected than merely keeping the law,” (2) human beings are to imitate God because God is holy, and (3) obedience does not constitute a “sufficient definition of Old Testament ethics.”

Essentially, Wenham agrees with Barton’s model of obedience to the divine will. Although Wenham endorses obedience to the divine will as central to Old Testament ethics, this model of obedience is not the only standard. Wenham also argues that the Bible takes an interest in the character of individuals and their actions in the community in the call to imitate God’s character. Wenham claims that a key principle of biblical ethics is the imitation of God.

Looking at Barton’s three models and Wenham’s three major arguments, there are differences and similarities in their approaches. First, both Wenham and Barton agree on the two models of obedience and the imitation of God. However, Wenham argues for a new perspective to show the relationship between obedience and the imitation of God. Obedience is often accompanied by “motivating principles,” which are “concerns expressed in motive clauses.”

The imitation of God is one motivating principle, because “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2 ESV)—human beings made in God’s image “must act in a godlike

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309 Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 4, 79.
310 Ibid., 79.
312 Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 107.
way.”314 In other words, to imitate God is a motive of obedience to God’s declared will. Second, Wenham provides an enhancement to Barton’s obedience model by adding an insightful argument regarding obedience and the law—“obedience to the Torah does not entail the entire sum of ethics” in the Old Testament because there are gaps “between the law’s demands and the writers’ ideals.”315 According to Wenham, the “law is intended to set a realistic floor for behaviour” with the view that the “ethical ceiling is as high as heaven itself.”316

The third difference between Barton’s models and Wenham’s arguments lies in how they explore their approaches. Barton applies prophetic exploration for his ethical models while Wenham shows the ethical ideals of biblical writers. After presenting his three basic models as the basis for Old Testament narrative ethics, Barton explores three prophets in his second model: natural morality.317 Unlike Barton’s study of the prophets, Wenham focuses on the books of Genesis and Judges to investigate and establish principles.318 Wenham believes that narrative books comprise ethical ideals, which are closely linked with the theological objectives of the biblical authors.319 The book of Genesis prescribes models of behaviour which encourage imitation, and in which the imitator experiences God’s blessing.320 Thus, Barton and Wenham each use different characters and prophets to explore their models in ethical formation.

Apart from looking at methodologies, procedures, approaches, and models for ethical formation from Old Testament narratives, how do Barton, Wenham, and Mills reference the New Testament to establish the meaning of the text? I find that the New Testament perspective of

318 Wenham, Story as Torah, 3.
319 Ibid., 3; Rooke, review of Story as Torah, 87.
320 Rooke, review of Story as Torah, 88.
Wenham is more convincing than that of Barton and Mills. Barton references Rom 13 during the discussion of theological ethics in Daniel.\textsuperscript{321} His quotation is from Rom 13:1–7, to the effect that Christians should submit to the authorities and obey the powers of the world (ESV). Besides the book of Romans, the New Testament is not mentioned in the ethical reflections from the three basic models of Barton.\textsuperscript{322} Compared with Barton, Wenham has much better New Testament perspectives. Initially, Wenham establishes principles for the analysis of Old Testament narrative ethics in ways that are sensitive to the Israel’s culture which is bound by intimate social ties.\textsuperscript{323} Then, Wenham argues that the New Testament writers regularly refer to Old Testament stories not only to show that theological thoughts continue between the two testaments, but also to highlight the ethical meanings of the Old Testament for the New Testament believers.\textsuperscript{324} By doing so, Wenham proves that the New Testament is continuing the basic principles from the Old Testament, and he concludes his ethical reflection by exemplifying a “basic unity in the biblical perception of the good life.”\textsuperscript{325} Mills’ three-layer model is totally lacking in New Testament perspectives. For example, in the study of Abraham as a savage parent who would have sacrificed his son Isaac, Mills only comments that Abraham is the “man of faith” but does not consider an explanation from Heb 11:17–19 that Abraham was offering Isaac by faith.\textsuperscript{326} Hence, it becomes clear that Wenham is superior to Barton and Mills in the New Testament perspectives.

\textsuperscript{321} Barton, \textit{Understanding Old Testament Ethics}, 156.
\textsuperscript{322} Although Barton references Eph 5:1 while discussing the imitation of God, he means God as revealed in Christ. (Eph 5:1, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” [ESV].) Barton, \textit{Ethics in Ancient Israel}, 263n49.
\textsuperscript{323} Lessing, review of \textit{Story as Torah}, 441.
\textsuperscript{324} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 130.
\textsuperscript{325} Jenson, review of \textit{Story as Torah}, 70.
\textsuperscript{326} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 41–43; Mills, “The Story of Abraham and Models of Human Identity,” 281. Mills does not mention Heb 11:17–19 to explain Abraham’s offering of Isaac, in that Abraham has faith that God could even raise his son from the dead.
In this study of bringing together the thoughts of three contemporary scholars on forming ethics, research analysis and comparison will benefit from their interacting with each other’s work. A dialogue between Barton and Wenham contributes to the understanding of the relationships among obedience, law, and wisdom.\(^{327}\) Initially, Wenham argues that “the laws in the Pentateuch represent the floor of acceptable behaviour” and the ethical ideal is “as high as heaven.”\(^{328}\) In Barton’s investigation on the motives of obedience, he agrees with Wenham’s argument that the laws in the Old Testament mostly represent a minimum requirement for acceptable behaviour, “rather than a practical guide to how one ought to live.”\(^{329}\) Barton further comments that the laws do not lay down ideals, and that the ideals are related to “the characteristics of wisdom.”\(^{330}\) In other words, one would need wisdom in order to strive towards the ideals. Thus, Barton concludes that the motives of obedience “certainly bring law and wisdom closer together.”\(^{331}\) Thus, from the exchange of ideas between Barton and Wenham, I have enriched my understanding of how wisdom assists in the motives of obedience.

Regarding ethical discussion relating to Old Testament law, Barton and Wenham analyze and consider how law is associated with obedience, conduct, wisdom, and ethical ideal in their ethical reflection. Conversely, while Mills identifies morality from Old Testament characters, her analysis is lacking reference to Old Testament law. The absence of law in her ethical discussion is strongly contrastive with Barton’s comment that law does not lay down ethical ideals, and especially with Wenham’s argument of law as the base of acceptable behaviour.

\(^{330}\) Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 144.
\(^{331}\) Ibid.
A Summary on Findings of Comparison

In order to understand the Christian ideal of an ethical existence based on narratives from the Old Testament, I have found that the methodologies used and ethical reflection drawn from the text by Barton and Wenham are more convincing than Mills’. Both Barton and Wenham are strong from the historical perspectives whereas Mills does not use historical criticism. Between Barton and Wenham, Barton’s social and cultural criticism are moderately stronger than Wenham’s literary and rhetorical criticism. Both Barton and Wenham focus on drawing basic model and principles from moral beliefs and pattern of behaviour whereas Mills only focuses on identifying morality from the actions of the biblical characters. In addition, Mill’s lack of reference to Old Testament law is strongly contrastive with Barton, and especially with Wenham. Thus, Barton and Wenham excel over Mills on their methodologies, procedures, assumptions, and using Old Testament law to form ethics from Old Testament narratives.

When comparing Barton’s three models and Wenham’s major arguments, Barton is a “foremost critical thinker” and has set “the course for a new direction in the study of Old Testament ethics.”

Wenham’s argument of the law as the “floor for behaviour” and an “ethical ceiling is as high as heaven” contributes to the understanding of the Christian ethical ideal. Barton is moderately stronger than Wenham because his three categories constitute the overarching basis for ethics in Old Testament narratives. In other words, Barton provides the foundation of ethical categories, whereas Wenham’s law, ethical ideal, and the imitation of God build on and enhance this foundation to forge a comprehensive approach.

For the New Testament perspectives, Wenham excels strongly over Barton and Mills. In the dialogue exchange between Barton and Wenham on the relationships among obedience, law,

and wisdom, both Barton and Wenham excel over Mills. Based on these findings, Barton and Wenham excel over Mills. Furthermore, between Barton and Wenham, each scholar’s contribution is equally significant as they complement one another in this study of forming ethics from Old Testament narratives.

Conclusion

In order to fulfill the quest of forging an ethical model to discern how a well-lived life should be conceived, the initial step is studying three basic models from Barton. Then, Wenham provides a stronger connection between the model of obedience to the divine will and the model of the imitation of God so to enhance the understanding of these models. I also learn from Kelly’s discussion on “the function of obedience in Hebrew Bible ethics” that both the models of imitation and natural morality could also be understood as “motivating principles” to accompany the obedience model. From Mills’ study of a three-layered moral perspective, it becomes clear that morality focuses more on the human conduct whereas ethics refers to the philosophical framework for “humans to act morally.” With this basic understanding on approaches and models from Barton, Wenham, and Mills, it is a good timing to investigate how these three authors explore their individual approaches to the three Old Testament characters of Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel.

334 As previously discussed, Barton’s three basic models are “obedience to God’s declared will,” the “conformity to a pattern of natural order,” and the “imitation of God.” Barton, Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 47–54.
336 Knight, “Moral Values and Literary Traditions,” 22n5.
Chapter 3

Exploration of Old Testament Characters: Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel

Introduction

Regarding how to make wise decisions in our lives, in addition to learning from contemporary scholars, I can also search for messages from Old Testament characters to see how these narratives contribute to ethical formation. Even though the actual characteristics of morality described in the Old Testament narratives are from various periods of time in ancient Israel, as a modern reader I can reflect on the characters’ motives and intentions in their *Sitzen im Leben* so as to relate them to our own consideration of ethical matters.  

Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel

Barton, Wenham, and Mills have substantially discussed, analyzed, and applied their models and visions to three Old Testament characters. The first is Abraham, who listens to and obeys God’s call, leaves his father’s country, and migrates to a foreign land (Gen 12). This character’s situation could easily be identified as migration, a common experience in the life of the church. The next character, Joseph, is a model for seeking wisdom and righteousness even for today. In the Joseph novella, Joseph was sold as a slave to Egypt (Gen 37:36) and later was removed from power in Potiphar’s house and imprisoned (Gen 39). Even though slaves are less common in our modern Western world, Christians today can still temporarily or permanently lose their freedom of mobility, be confined due to accusations, be held as prisoners of war, or be hospitalized. The Joseph story provides an encouragement for modern readers. The third character of Daniel, who lived in exile, demonstrates to Christians how to trust God while living in a foreign land and

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337 Birch argues that the Old Testament, as the “received scripture of the church,” can be considered “as a resource for the church in its theological and ethical understanding.” Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 35–36.
while possibly being persecuted under foreign rule (Dan 1–12). These three biblical characters have been used to demonstrate the models and approaches of Barton, Wenham, and Mills.

How do these three contemporary scholars interpret the Old Testament narratives of Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel? I evaluate each scholar’s analysis of the characters by three criteria as explained in the Introduction in this study. The first criterion is how sensitive the author’s analysis is to the way the narratives ought to be heard, or how the narrator wants the story to be read. The second criterion is the author’s sensitivity to context, especially its historical, cultural, and sociological aspects. The third criterion uses a canonical approach to see if the authors recognize similar matters elsewhere in the canon relating to the same ethical issues in the narrative for the character. Using these three criteria, this study evaluates how effective the three scholars’ approaches are to their analyses of the biblical characters. Inevitably, there could be situations when arguments from the scholars overlap among the three criteria. I will make judgments regarding the placement of each argument into the most appropriate criterion, with relevant reasons supporting these decisions.

I will compare and contrast their findings, along with other authors’ comments and critiques of their work on Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel. Each scholar has contributed a variety of discussions regarding each biblical character. For the discussion of the Daniel narratives, my study has found that Wenham only discusses the Law of Moses in relation to Daniel’s dietary decision. Other than this contribution of a canonical approach to the Daniel story, there is no other analysis on the book of Daniel by Wenham, relating to the first and second criteria, within the scope of this research. All in all, the total discussion of Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel by each of the three scholars is approximately the same.

For example, Barton explores Daniel more than Abraham, whereas Wenham discusses Abraham more than Daniel. Wenham, Story as Torah, 134, 140.
The varied quantity of analyses offered by each scholar will not affect how their
discussion is evaluated in comparison with the others, but judgment will be based on the quality
of their contribution. I will evaluate their effectiveness using the three criteria in order to benefit
from the best of the three scholars’ explorations. In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate that each
scholar surpasses the other two scholars in evaluating one of the Old Testament characters.

Exploration of Abraham

I will begin by using the first criterion to see how Barton analyzes the way in which the narrator
wants the story of Abraham to be read. When Abraham intercedes for Sodom, his question to
God exemplifies a good example of the “world order” in ancient societies. Abraham asks God
“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen 18:25 ESV). This enquiry could be
interpreted as Abraham having trouble agreeing with the world order if he sees that God puts the
righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare the same as the wicked. Barton
reflects on the moral order in ancient Israel to show that this world order contains both “cosmic
order” and trustworthy relationships among human beings, like a natural morality established “in
the order of the world.” On Abraham’s question to God, Barton further argues “that there
exists some standard of goodness against which even divine decrees can be measured.” Barton
points out that the Old Testament recognizes a universally accepted ethical standard, named
“moral realism.” This “moral realism” is an ethical common sense that stresses the
significance of God’s command as a moral foundation in ancient Israel. Apart from what God
commands, there is a built-in moral or ethical standard that guides behaviour and decision

340 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 99.
341 Ibid., 99–100.
342 Ibid., 156.
343 Ibid.
344 Ibid.
making. By analyzing Abraham’s challenge to God’s standard of justice and goodness, Barton highlights the moral worldview of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{345}

Barton further argues that some Old Testament texts vary from the moral teaching of his first basic ethical model of “obedience to the declared will of God.”\textsuperscript{346} One example mentioned is the passage on God’s command for Abraham to kill his own son (Gen 22), which is “full of moral ambiguity.”\textsuperscript{347} Barton explains that such ambiguity reflects one of “God’s struggles.”\textsuperscript{348} In his discussion of the moral character of God, Barton argues that some biblical texts depict God as “having a dark side.”\textsuperscript{349} but he does not discuss any further implication of this dark side to explain the struggle or moral obscurity.

Whereas Barton analyzes Abraham’s moral worldview and obedience, Wenham highlights the moral understanding with which the reader ought to approach the story of Abraham. Wenham strongly believes that the author of Genesis does not approve, or think highly, of the actions performed by the characters.\textsuperscript{350} Not all the behaviours demonstrated by heroes and heroines are commendable.\textsuperscript{351} The first evidence is the narrator’s description of Abram’s lies, as Wenham argues, when he places his wife Sarai in danger (Gen 12:10–20).\textsuperscript{352} Not only is Sarai Abram’s wife, she is also his half-sister. When Abram sojourns to Egypt due to a severe famine in the land (v. 10), he directs his wife to claim to be his sister (v. 13). He fears that the Egyptians will kill him in order to take his beautiful wife (v. 12). Here I get a glimpse of Abram’s deceptive nature regarding his wife. Wenham states that perceptive observations about

\textsuperscript{345} Ibid., 99–100, 156.
\textsuperscript{348} Barton, \textit{Ethics in Ancient Israel}, 261–62.
\textsuperscript{349} Ibid., 262.
\textsuperscript{350} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 75.
\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., 76. Note that the names of Abram and Sarai are changed to Abraham and Sarah in Gen 17:5, 15.
early Israelite attitudes do not necessarily represent those of the author of Genesis.\textsuperscript{353} Thus, according to Wenham, the narrator is not disturbed by Abram’s lies even though he does not approve of the action. The second evidence is that the narrator purposefully demonstrates that monogamy as God’s plan in Gen 2:24, which states that having one wife is natural.\textsuperscript{354} Hence, the narrator intentionally disapproves of Abraham’s taking Hagar as his second wife (Gen 16:3). Furthermore, the author strongly suggests that the son from the second wife “slows down the fulfilment of the promise” of Isaac, who is “a real son to Abraham” by the true wife Sarah.\textsuperscript{355} From Wenham’s analysis of early Israelite attitudes and social practices, I can attest to Wenham being sensitive to the narrator’s attitude towards all the deeds of Abraham.

After seeing how Barton and Wenham analyze the narrator’s attitude from literary features, it is observed that Mills also studies the characterization of Abraham in the narrative. Initially, Mills expresses approval of Abraham’s actions, not only taking Yahweh as his only god, but also faithfully awaiting “God’s promise of a son.”\textsuperscript{356} The Genesis text, as Mills argues, implicitly emphasizes that Abraham moves from polytheism to monotheism.\textsuperscript{357} Her claim is debatable, for Mills does not provide further details to prove Abraham’s commitment to monotheism. From the text, one can only testify to Abraham’s first explicit worship of God when he built two altars and “called upon the name of the Lord” (Gen 12:7–8 ESV). This only proves that Abraham obeys this single God who calls him, but there is no explicit mention of Abraham worshipping a multiplicity of gods. Next, in her opinion regarding the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22), Mills maintains that readers are given an opportunity to “separate out the nature of God”

\textsuperscript{353} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., 85–86.
\textsuperscript{355} Ibid., 85; Wenham, “The Gap between Law and Ethics in the Bible,” 24.
\textsuperscript{356} Mills, “Reading the Old Testament as Story,” 75.
\textsuperscript{357} Ibid., 75.
represented by “the two faces of God.”\(^\text{358}\) For the reason that the final form of the Genesis texts came from individual traditions using two terms for God (Elohim and YHWH), Mills argues that it was Elohim who tests Abraham, whereas it is YHWH who stops the killing of Isaac.\(^\text{359}\) Hence, such usage of divine names provides more than one nuance of discerning the two faces of God in the Abraham story. Mills’ argument regarding the nature of God from two faces of God is not convincing. She does not provide evidence or adequate support, other than citing the work of another author.\(^\text{360}\) In addition, I would have to disagree that the narrator intends to divide the nature of God using two faces of God in the Abraham narrative. For the overall interpretation of Abraham’s character, Mills proposes several possible moral readings that demonstrate a variety of ways to understand Old Testament narratives.\(^\text{361}\) Mills presents the moral person of Abraham “in a more negative light” than the usual picture of a character who is a “model of faith, self-possessed, silent, and resourceful.”\(^\text{362}\) Mills identifies Abraham under six captions of a “pious man, comic character, trickster, tragic character, savage parent, and unworthy husband.”\(^\text{363}\) For example, Abraham is both “a saint in his piety and a savage in his parenting.”\(^\text{364}\) In all, for the characterization of Abraham in the Genesis narratives, Mills proposes a perspective on Abraham as a moral person who demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses common to human beings.

After looking into the first criterion about literary features, the second criterion is about historical, cultural, and sociological aspects. Barton analyzes and interprets two incidents where

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\(^{359}\) In Gen 22, the binding of Isaac narrative starts with the name of Elohim to test Abraham (vv. 1, 4, 8, 9). The use of YHWH begins when the angel stops Abraham from killing his son (vv. 11, 14, 15, 16).


\(^{361}\) Nickerson, review of *Biblical Morality*, 66; Jenkins, review of *Biblical Morality*, 106.

\(^{362}\) Nickerson, review of *Biblical Morality*, 66.


\(^{364}\) Nickerson, review of *Biblical Morality*, 66.
Abraham claims his wife Sarah as his sister (Gen 12, 20). These offences committed by Abraham against Pharaoh and Abimelech are taken as a breach of conduct against ethical customs and not “transgressions of actual laws.” Given that Pharaoh and Abimelech are foreign kings, it is hard to tell how the two kings understand the offenses because they are entirely outside the experience of Israel’s covenant laws. Aside from discussing Abraham’s claims of his wife as his sister, Barton evaluates Abraham’s marital situation of having more than one wife, and declares that nowhere in the Old Testament “condemns polygamy.” Also, Barton suggests that earlier stories in ancient Israel “are often more complex and ambiguous,” while later stories appear morally simpler. For example, the moral story of Abraham is more complicated, with multiple meanings, whereas the story of Daniel is morally simpler since Daniel appeared later in ancient Israel. Thus, this is how Barton analyzes the cultural and sociological aspects of Abraham’s behaviour in the narratives.

In a way similar to Barton, Wenham also studies Abraham in the historical and cultural environment of ancient Israel. Initially, when Wenham begins analyzing the structure of the book of Genesis, he investigates the conceivable situations for Genesis in the history of Israel. He is sensitive to the concepts in Genesis, as they would be understood in various periods and conditions, before he starts the discussion of the life of Abraham. Furthermore, Wenham analyzes the marital ethics for men living in ancient Israel from a cultural and sociological

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366 Ibid.
367 Ibid.
370 Ibid.
372 Ibid.
Wenham indicates that although it was acceptable for men to have multiple wives, the author of Genesis claims that God desires and plans that men have one wife only. In other words, the divine plan in ancient Israel is monogamy, and not polygamy. Wenham argues that the narrative descriptions of the bigamist’s life discourage having a second wife while still legally married to the first. He further supports his argument by stating that Abraham’s bigamous situation “causes great tension between Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham.” The other descriptions of bigamy in the rest of Genesis are all depicted in a non-favorable light.

Similarly to Wenham’s argument about Abraham’s polygamy, Mills demonstrates her sensitivity to the historical aspect by associating the “inter-cultural relationship” of the Jews with the Arabs from the reading of the Abraham story. In the patriarchal text, God promises Hagar that her son Ishmael will found a nation (Gen 21:13, 18). History has shown that Islam has chosen to “favor Ishmael in its cultural traditions.” Hostility has been displayed between the descendants of Ishmael and the Israelites, the sons of Isaac; thus, it follows from the Genesis narrative that the descendants of Ishmael will be hostile to Sarah’s sons. The cultural history from the narratives of Hagar and Ishmael in the Abraham story, as Mills argues, proposes an explanation for the conflict between Jews and Arabs even to our modern day.

On the third criterion of referencing the canon to establish the meaning of narratives, Barton refers to other Old Testaments books to understand Abraham’s situation.

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373 Ibid., 19, 31, 84–87.
374 Wenham indicates “Genesis sets out monogamy as the divine plan” by telling us positively that God creates “one Eve for Adam.” Also note that Gen 2:24 signifies only one wife. Wenham, Story as Torah, 31, 85.
375 Wenham, Story as Torah, 84–87; Rooke, review of Story as Torah, 89.
376 Wenham, Story as Torah, 32.
377 Rooke, review of Story as Torah, 88. The bigamy of Jacob with Leah and Rachel is portrayed as problematic.
378 Mills, Biblical Morality, 46.
379 Ibid.
380 Ibid.
381 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 230, 266.
was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless” (Gen 17:1 ESV). Barton explains the meaning of “be blameless” or “walk perfectly” before God by arguing that to walk perfectly is an example of the ethical obligations outlined by the Priestly Code, which works towards glorifying the name of Yahweh. The prophets summarize ethical responsibilities in a precise form, “partly by selection and partly by summary.” For example, a relevant text for “walking perfectly” can be found in Amos 5:14: “Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord will be with you” (ESV). Abraham’s later question “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen 18:25 ESV) could be interpreted to mean that Abraham is finding fault with God for his failure to show justice, as human beings expected. This attitude towards God is also illustrated in the Psalms, according to Barton, where the psalmists reasonably expect that God will demonstrate moral awareness and share these insights. It follows that the psalmists frequently plead to God to have “mercy and compassion.”

Whereas Barton draws from the prophets and the psalmists on Abraham’s action, Wenham references the canon to establish the meaning of certain specific features about Abraham. In the final chapter of Story as Torah, Wenham echoes Paul’s theology on the importance of the Old Testament story. For Paul, there is only one story of God’s redeeming work, which begins with the call of Abraham, leading to Christ. In addition, Wenham explains some of Abraham’s virtue of generosity—Abraham prepares a feast for his three visitors (Gen

\[\text{\footnotesize 382 Ibid., 230.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 383 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 384 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 385 Ibid., 266.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 386 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 387 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 388 Wenham, Story as Torah, 92, 129–30, 133–34.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 389 Ibid., 130.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 390 Ibid.}\]
18:6–8)—the “wealthy patriarch” is described as generous and positive.\textsuperscript{391} Such a model of generosity from the wealthy is announced frequently in the Psalter and wisdom literature.\textsuperscript{392} For example, Ps 112:5 anticipates that “It is well with the man who deals generously and lends” (ESV). Abraham is also described as “an effective and persistent negotiator” in his plea for Sodom (Gen 18:25–32) and his “negotiating skills” are further demonstrated when he buys a piece of land to bury Sarah.\textsuperscript{393} The book of Proverbs helps to explain why “persuasiveness in speech” is admired—“With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone” (Prov 25:15 ESV).\textsuperscript{394} In addition, Abraham’s faith is referenced several times in the New Testament.\textsuperscript{395} The book of Matthew records an incident where a centurion appeals to Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant who is at home (Matt 8:5–11). He requests Jesus just to say the word and believes that his servant will be healed, without having Jesus go to his home. Jesus praises the centurion’s faith by citing Abraham’s faith for his contemporary audience (v.11).\textsuperscript{396} Besides the gospel, the book of Hebrews also cites Abraham as one of the Old Testament characters who, by faith, struggled through obstacles and prevailed in difficult circumstances (Heb 11:8).\textsuperscript{397} In explaining the certainty of God’s promise, it is said that Abraham, “having patiently waited, obtained the promise” (Heb 6:15 ESV).\textsuperscript{398}

Besides Barton’s and Wenham’s analyses of the life of Abraham across the canon, Mills also explores theological ideas regarding Abraham in the New Testament. Mills agrees with Paul

\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., 88, 92.  
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid., 92.  
\textsuperscript{393} Ibid., 93–94.  
\textsuperscript{394} Ibid., 93.  
\textsuperscript{395} Ibid., 129, 133–34.  
\textsuperscript{396} Ibid., 129.  
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid., 133–34.  
\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., 133.
that Abraham is a “man of faith” (Rom 4:2–3). Abraham founded a nation because of his faithfulness to God. Mills further explains that Paul is not focusing on Abraham as “a person of observant practice,” but as one who trusts in God as narrated in the Genesis narratives. In other words, “it is not his works that make Abraham a model,” but rather it is by his faith that Abraham is made a model of faith. Thus, Mills argues that Paul highlights Abraham’s inner qualities of patience and perseverance to educate his contemporary followers of Christ.

A Critique of the Exploration of Abraham

How do Barton, Wenham, and Mills discuss and apply their models and visions of Abraham, who obeys God and migrates to a foreign land? The first criterion is their sensitivity to the literary features of the narratives, which signal the narrator’s attitude towards the character. Regarding Abraham’s question to God—“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen 18:25 ESV)—Barton studies Abraham’s challenge to God’s standard of justice so as to demonstrate that the Old Testament has a universally accepted ethical standard, and also to explore his second ethical model of natural morality, which is conformity to a pattern of natural order. In addition, Barton explores his first model of obedience in the narrative of the binding of Isaac (Gen 22). Barton accepts that the Old Testament does contain texts that exhibit moral obscurity, and concludes that such ambiguity reflects “God’s struggles.”

400 Ibid.
401 Ibid., 282.
402 Ibid.
403 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 99–100, 156.
404 Ibid., 261–62.
405 Ibid.
With regard to Wenham, I find that he has effectively used rhetorical criticism in his approach to the Abraham narrative. Wenham claims that Abraham is an example who is inadequate to meet the ethical ideals. The evidence provided includes Abram’s claims of his wife as his sister, his bigamous situation after taking Hagar, and his delay in the fulfillment of God’s promise by the birth of Ishmael. By claiming that all the deeds of Abraham are not consistently commendable, Wenham repeatedly points out that such events from the Abraham story are patterns used to express beliefs of ethical ideals. As I explained in the earlier chapters of this study, the tool of rhetorical criticism is persuasive due to the way narratives inform and instruct ideal ethical beliefs with the aim of shaping the reader’s perspective and conduct. Thus, Wenham effectively applies rhetorical criticism to the literary features of the narratives.

Mills explores the Abraham story through the concept of a “moral person,” which is defined as a human capable of being accountable for his or her conduct. The moral person of Abraham, as Mills argues, is described with disapproval. Mills proposes a perspective on Abraham in which he has both strength and weakness that are common to all human beings. However, I find Mills’ presentation on Abraham to focus more on weakness than strength, which does not seem to correspond with the narrator’s attitude towards the character. Given that Abraham is revered as a patriarch, the narrator’s intention would not be to present the patriarch in a negative light. Thus, for the first criterion among the three scholars—a sensitivity to literary features—Wenham is superior to Barton and Mills.

406 Wenham, Story as Torah, 3.
407 Ibid., 31, 74–76, 85, 104.
408 Ibid., 31, 76, 85.
409 Ibid., 74–75.
410 Ibid., 104.
411 Boda, “Poetics?,” 56.
412 Mills, Biblical Morality, 18.
413 Nickerson, review of Biblical Morality, 66.
Regarding the second criterion, I should evaluate the three scholars’ sensitivity to the historical, cultural, and sociological context of the Abraham story. Barton claims that earlier stories are morally more complicated and contain multiple meanings than later stories in ancient Israel. Such an observation, although interesting, remains to be confirmed. Barton’s analysis differs from Wenham’s on the topic of marital ethics. Barton states that the Old Testament does not disapprove polygamy, which is contrary to Wenham’s belief that Abraham’s bigamous situation is discouraged from the narrator’s point of view. I find that Wenham’s view is more convincing than Barton’s. One piece of evidence, as Wenham argues, is the marital ideal expressed in Gen 2 when God made male and female. The narrator of Genesis reveals the divine plan positively by depicted how one Eve is only made for Adam; thus, having one wife is natural. Thus, Wenham is superior to Barton on the point of polygamy from the book of Genesis.

Meanwhile, Mills argues for the historical significance of Hagar’s son Ishmael founding a nation (Gen 21:13, 18). The narratives of Hagar and Ishmael are used to explain the eventual conflict between Jews and Arabs. I might not disagree with this argument, due to the reason that the rivalry exists today. However, it is debatable whether only a few verses from the Genesis texts are sufficient to explain events that have evolved throughout world history. Hence, for the second criterion of the three scholars’ sensitivity to historical, cultural, and sociological context, Wenham is superior to both Barton and Mills.

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414 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 28.
416 Wenham, Story as Torah, 32.
417 Ibid., 85.
418 Ibid.
419 Mills, Biblical Morality, 46.
420 Ibid.
With respect to the third criterion, I will compare how the three scholars reference the canon to establish the meaning of the Abraham narratives. Barton explains the meaning of Abraham’s walking perfectly before God using other prophetic texts and the psalmists’ common practice of appealing to God for “mercy and compassion.” Wenham establishes the value of Abraham’s generosity and negotiating skills from the wisdom literature. Regarding Abraham’s faith, Wenham illustrates how such faith is attested in various books of the New Testament. Mills uses Paul’s explanation of Abraham as a model of faith. In all, Wenham’s canonical approach to the Abraham narratives is more extensive and thorough than the other two scholars. Consequently, Wenham is superior to Barton and Mills on the third criterion of the canonical approach.

Using these three criteria for the three scholars’ analyses of the Abraham narratives, Wenham represents the best approach. The strengths of Wenham’s methodology, combining literary criticism and rhetorical analysis within the Abraham cycle, has proven to be very effective in demonstrating that narratives describe the ethical “ideal of godly behaviour.” Wenham strongly believes that Genesis repeatedly shows that not all the deeds of Abraham are commendable. As Wenham has illustrated, Abraham is deficient in ethical ideals, regarding the deception about his wife as his sister and especially his polygamous situation. On the other hand, Wenham also discusses Abraham’s strengths in areas such as generosity, negotiation, and

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421 Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 230, 266.
422 Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 88, 92–94.
423 Ibid., 129, 133–34.
426 Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 74–75.
427 Ibid., 31, 76, 85.
having faith that prevailed in difficult circumstances.\textsuperscript{428} Both the strengths and weaknesses of Abraham’s actions inform and form the reader’s perspective and conduct.

Furthermore, Wenham’s New Testament approach and overall canonical approach are very convincing when applied to the Abraham narratives. Barton uses Abraham’s challenge to God’s standard to argue that the Old Testament has a universally accepted ethical standard, which supports his ethical model of natural morality.\textsuperscript{429} When he explores the binding of Isaac for his model of obedience, Barton accepts that there could be texts that are full of moral obscurity in the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{430} Between Wenham and Barton, Wenham’s exploration of the Abraham story is more extensive than Barton’s. In Wenham’s argument that Abraham is inadequate to meet the ethical ideals, his claim is supported by Abraham’s deception about his wife as his sister.\textsuperscript{431} In addition, Wenham provides in-depth analysis on Abraham’s polygamous situation, further explained with another text from Gen 2.\textsuperscript{432} Furthermore, Wenham presents a thorough canonical approach to establish various meanings of the Abraham narrative.\textsuperscript{433} Whereas Barton’s analysis of Abraham’s challenge to God and his ethical model of natural morality is less conclusive when compared to Wenham’s presentation of Abraham’s actions to shape the reader’s perspective and conduct.\textsuperscript{434} Mills’ presentation of the moral person of Abraham is too negative, without the counterweight of Abraham’s positive actions. In addition, some of Mills’ arguments are not convincing. For example, the claim that Abraham moved from polytheism to monotheism needs more supporting evidence.\textsuperscript{435} Other features, such as her explanation of the rivalry

\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 88, 92–94, 133–34.
\textsuperscript{429} Barton, \textit{Ethics in Ancient Israel}, 99–100, 156.
\textsuperscript{430} Ibid., 261–62.
\textsuperscript{431} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 76, 85.
\textsuperscript{432} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{433} Ibid., 92, 129–30, 133–34.
\textsuperscript{434} Boda, “Poethics?,” 56.
\textsuperscript{435} Mills, “Reading the Old Testament as Story,” 75.
between Jews and Arabs and her implication about the two usages of God’s names, are inadequate.  

However, her reference to Paul’s “man of faith” (Rom 4:2–3) to explain that Abraham is a model because of faith, and not because of works, is a valuable contribution to apprehend the Abraham narratives.

Exploration of Joseph

Having looked at the Abraham narratives, I now turn to the scholars’ analyses of the Joseph narratives. The first criterion measures how sensitive the three writers’ analysis is to the way the Joseph story ought to be heard. During Barton’s discussion of Old Testament characters who undergo a transformation of their personality and nature, he notes that Joseph starts as an “irritatingly clever little boy” who gets more of his father’s love than all his brothers (Gen 37:4). While he initially behaves in line with his natural motives, Joseph seems to mature gradually to become wise and compassionate. Barton observes the changes that take place in Joseph’s character, but Barton does not attempt to account for them. Even though Barton presents Joseph as a good moral example to follow, the narratives in Genesis also exhibit shortcomings in his moral behaviour, such as pride and some definite craftiness. In the end, Joseph pardons his brothers for the evils they have done to him (Gen 50:19–20). Barton further comments that Joseph’s brothers get a lot more than what they are entitled to. Instead of

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436 Mills, Biblical Morality, 36, 46.
438 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 161.
439 Ibid.
440 Ibid., 28; Barton, Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 172; Barton, review of Story as Torah, 168. Barton’s comment regarding “Genesis does hold up Joseph as a model” does not provide further details as to which events in the life of Joseph constitute his being made a model. It would be interesting to discern how and what changes develop, or account for, Joseph as an exemplar in the book of Genesis.
441 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 221.
suffering from famine in their homeland, they are able to live in Egypt with a good food supply, and later go back to Israel as wealthy people.\textsuperscript{442}

Whereas Barton discusses Joseph’s character for its literary features, Wenham analyzes the literary themes of promise and reconciliation with which the reader ought to approach the Joseph story.\textsuperscript{443} Wenham argues that the narrator expresses one of the themes of Genesis in the story-line of Gen 12–50, which could be summarized as “the gradual and partial fulfilment” of God’s promises.\textsuperscript{444} After God promises Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation, Jacob’s family has seventy people, denoting a “significant clan” (Gen 46:27).\textsuperscript{445} Furthermore, the Joseph novella (Gen 37:2–50:26) is a “story of family reconciliation,” or of “reconciliation between brothers.”\textsuperscript{446} The assertive announcement by Joseph in Gen 50:19–21 reaffirms that his brothers are generously pardoned, notwithstanding all the evils they have done to him.\textsuperscript{447} This reconciliation suggests to the readers “that they too should forgive even their long-term enemies, if they show sincere contrition.”\textsuperscript{448} Genesis illustrates that even longstanding and firmly held hatred can be subdued.\textsuperscript{449} Hence, Wenham is sensitive in his analysis to the possibility that the author of Genesis wants to present a stance on moral issues to communicate related views within the narration.\textsuperscript{450}

Being sensitive to the narrator’s attitude, Wenham also studies the personality and inner life of Joseph by making a number of observations on Joseph’s behaviour.\textsuperscript{451} First, when he

\textsuperscript{442} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{443} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 22.
\textsuperscript{444} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{446} Ibid., 37, 148.
\textsuperscript{447} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 38.
\textsuperscript{448} Ibid., 38; Schlimm, “Emotion, Embodiment, and Ethics,” 155n25.
\textsuperscript{449} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 38.
\textsuperscript{450} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{451} Ibid., 27, 39, 90, 93, 97.
works in Potiphar’s house, Joseph sees God’s power influencing his future.\textsuperscript{452} Second, Joseph’s faith is demonstrated when he attributes his “gift of dream interpretation” to God.\textsuperscript{453} Third, Joseph is depicted not only as a capable interpreter of dreams, but also as an effective consultant.\textsuperscript{454} After he interprets Pharaoh’s dreams about seven plentiful years followed by seven years of famine, Joseph proposes to appoint a wise man to store food from the plentiful years to keep as a reserve for the years of famine (Gen 41:33–36). Depicted as an effective consultant, Joseph presents recommendations that Pharaoh promptly approves.\textsuperscript{455} Fourth, Joseph testifies to his brothers that he fears God (Gen 42:18).\textsuperscript{456} In all, the Joseph narrative does not reject “Joseph’s marriage to an Egyptian.”\textsuperscript{457} Ultimately, Wenham comments on Joseph’s contribution that he “saved not only the Egyptians from famine, but surrounding people” as well.\textsuperscript{458} From Wenham’s analysis of promise, reconciliation, and the inner life of Joseph, I can attest to Wenham being sensitive to the narrator’s attitude towards the Joseph novella.

Along with Wenham’s analysis of Joseph’s inner life, Mills also explores the issues of self-identity, community, and God’s intervention in the Joseph narratives, sensitive to how the narrator wants the story to be read.\textsuperscript{459} In her exploration of the biblical narratives, the characterization of Joseph represents two ethnic identities, specifically that of the Israelite and Egyptian cultural traditions.\textsuperscript{460} Similarly, the theme of “self-identity” among Jews and Gentiles is

\textsuperscript{452} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{453} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{454} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{455} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{456} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{457} Ibid., 27, 39. When Joseph has risen in power, Pharaoh gives the daughter of an Egyptian priest to him in marriage (Gen 41:45). Wenham comments that, interestingly, the narrator of Genesis does not disapprove this marriage.
\textsuperscript{458} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{459} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 16, 117; Mills, “Reading the Old Testament as Story,” 87.
\textsuperscript{460} Mills, “Reading the Old Testament as Story,” 87.
also attested to elsewhere in the Old Testament, such as the narratives of Esther and Daniel.\textsuperscript{461} Furthermore, Mills investigates the concept of community in the Joseph narratives.\textsuperscript{462} In the Old Testament, as Mills emphasizes, the concept of community is attached to the identity of being an Israelite.\textsuperscript{463} The existence of a person in ancient Israel is not only concerned with the individual alone, but with the individual belonging to a social group sharing the same values.\textsuperscript{464} Any person living in the community has the duty to further “its growth and well-being.”\textsuperscript{465} Thus, any investigation of Old Testament characters ought to consider the community aspect of that character’s way of life. Besides investigating human existence, Mills argues that the Joseph narratives show that the “hand of God” intercedes for people in their lives.\textsuperscript{466} Such intervention is not by any spoken words or apparent deeds, but by providing a “ready-made interpreter” in Joseph.\textsuperscript{467} On the other hand, God also orchestrates events by delivering dreams to major character like Pharaoh.\textsuperscript{468} Mills highlights the ethnic identities of Joseph serving God in his community, being sensitive to the first criterion about the narrator’s attitude towards the Joseph story.

Regarding the second criterion of historical, cultural, and sociological aspects, Barton is sensitive to the context of Old Testament narratives about cultural and sociological boundaries. He indicates that narrative texts “recognize ethical obligation beyond the bounds of Israel.”\textsuperscript{469} In other words, the people of Israel are not only ethically obligated towards their kinsmen, they also have the same obligation towards people from other nations. A few narratives “take it for granted

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{461} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{462} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 21.
\item \textsuperscript{463} Ibid., 16.
\item \textsuperscript{464} Ibid., 16; Nickerson, review of \textit{Biblical Morality}, 65.
\item \textsuperscript{465} Nickerson, review of \textit{Biblical Morality}, 65–66.
\item \textsuperscript{466} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 117.
\item \textsuperscript{467} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{468} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{469} Barton, \textit{Ethics in Ancient Israel}, 52.
\end{itemize}
that Israelites owe foreigners proper moral conduct." An example occurs in Gen 39:10, where Joseph resists seduction from his master’s wife. Joseph handles his Egyptian master Potiphar similar to how he handles his Israelites kinsmen, that is, with respect. On the overall characterization of Joseph, Barton expresses the view that although Genesis presents Joseph as a moral example to follow, yet the narratives also exhibit certain shortcomings in his character. Even though he forgives his brothers’ evil deeds towards him, Joseph cannot be considered a saint. The evidence allows the readers a glimpse of his arrogant nature towards his brothers while he is a governor in Egypt (Gen 44:1–14). He plays a “cat and mouse game” with them so as to “keep them in suspense,” and further leaves them in distress.

Furthermore, on the second criterion of sociological aspects, Barton illustrates the concept of forgiveness in the Joseph story by arguing that forgiveness plays an important role for Old Testament narratives in the ancient Israelite society. First of all, the Old Testament teaches sparingly on the explicit “need for forgiveness among human beings.” It seems that the characteristic to forgive is only found in God. For humanity, forgiveness demonstrates “the dignity of the human person.” The Joseph story carries a very clear example, and illuminates the idea, although the narrative seldom uses the term “forgiveness.” Joseph’s forgiveness is

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470 Ibid.
471 Ibid., 52–53.
472 Ibid., 28; Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 172; Barton, review of *Story as Torah*, 168.
474 Ibid.
475 Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 6–7; Barton, *Ethics and the Old Testament*, 105–106. Barton’s various discussions on forgiveness in the Joseph story are considered in both the second criterion of historical, cultural, and sociological aspects and the third criterion of canonical approach. Arguments regarding the role of forgiveness in society are included with the sociological aspects of the Joseph narrative. Further discussions on establishing meanings of forgiveness from the canonical approach are presented in a later section of this chapter.
477 Ibid.
crucial to prepare for the unity of Jacob’s family and to preserve the lives of the Israelite clan in Egypt during the famine.\textsuperscript{480} Ultimately, the story concludes with a positive result—the entire nation is saved through Joseph’s achievement and prosperity in Egypt.\textsuperscript{481} Hence, forgiveness is one of the themes in the Old Testament, to complement other teachings in the law and wisdom literature for the ancient Israelite society.\textsuperscript{482} This is how Barton analyzes boundaries and forgiveness regarding the cultural and sociological aspects in the Joseph narrative.

Similarly to Barton, Wenham is also sensitive to the historical and sociological aspects in the narratives of Joseph.\textsuperscript{483} As mentioned previously in the study of the Abraham cycle, Wenham analyzes the structure of the book of Genesis before he inquires into the settings for Genesis in the history of Israel.\textsuperscript{484} Wenham highlights “God’s sovereign control of human affairs” in history, stating that “God meant it for good” even though Joseph’s brothers determined to do evil against him (Gen 50:20 ESV).\textsuperscript{485} Wenham also indicates the significance of “the future tribes of Israel” when Jacob blesses his sons as his last will (Gen 49).\textsuperscript{486} Wenham also discusses the importance of the two tribes of Joseph and Judah, as a proof that the book of Genesis is “a claim to the land” and a request to restore peace among the tribes.\textsuperscript{487} Thus, Wenham argues that the Joseph narratives contribute to an explanation of some of the history of God’s people.

Whereas Wenham analyzes the history of Israel, Mills demonstrates her sensitivity to the cultural and sociological aspects of the Joseph narratives.\textsuperscript{488} Mills comments that Joseph’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{480} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{481} Barton, \textit{Ethics and the Old Testament}, 105.
\item \textsuperscript{482} Barton, \textit{Understanding Old Testament Ethics}, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{483} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 19, 24, 40–41.
\item \textsuperscript{484} Ibid., 19.
\item \textsuperscript{485} Ibid., 24.
\item \textsuperscript{486} Ibid., 40.
\item \textsuperscript{487} Ibid., 40–41.
\item \textsuperscript{488} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 122, 128.
\end{itemize}
luxurious coat contributes to “anti-social behaviour” in Gen 37:3. This luxurious “robe of many colors” (Gen 37:3 ESV), given by his father, underscores Joseph’s isolation. In other words, the gift of the coat creates an obvious division among the brothers. The young Joseph’s shallow thoughts lead to “a negative moral vision of impending social disunity.” In addition, Mills makes another point on the significance of Joseph’s clothing. In the ancient world, meaning and significance are attached to clothing, which indicates “a person’s social and political role in a community.” Issues of clothing are mentioned several times in the Joseph story. His luxurious coat is stripped from him when his brothers throw him into a pit in his homeland, Israel (Gen 37:23). Later in Egypt, Joseph’s garment is caught and left with Potiphar’s wife when he escapes and flees his master’s house (Gen 39:12). Clothing, or the lack of it, provides “structural elements” contributing to social aspects in the narrative. Ultimately, royal garments symbolize his authority as an important assistant to Pharaoh (Gen 41:42). Among these occurrences associated with clothing, the two most significant events form “an inclusio” in the narratives. The inclusio of clothing begins when Joseph gets his coat from his father Jacob, with the end of the inclusio when Pharaoh clothes him in garments of fine linen during his appointment as manager of food supplies for the upcoming years of famine (Gen 41:42).
Hence, this is how Mills’ observes the social significance of clothing in the Joseph narratives.

In addition to clothing, Mills discusses “social rivalry” in the Joseph story. In Genesis 4 the problem of social rivalry emerges, specifically the “fraternal rivalry” between Cain and Abel. Since then, the book of Genesis mentions several discussions of fraternal conflict. From the beginning of the Joseph narratives (Gen 37), the rivalry in Jacob’s family is explored in depth. The last scene between Joseph and his brothers, after they bury their father Jacob (Gen 50:7), highlights Joseph’s resolution of the fraternal rivalry. Joseph’s promise to his brothers comforts and settles their fears of revenge at the end of the patriarchal history (Gen 50:19–21). Besides issues within the family, Mills discusses culture in the social world. Joseph has been integrated into a host culture politically and economically with two identities. On the one hand, Joseph is capable of dwelling in a foreign culture in the land of Egypt, and performing an important role within Egypt’s culture and its leadership (Gen 42:6). Yet on the other hand, “domestically, he remains an Israelite” as indicated by how he names his two sons (Gen 41:51–52). With this dual identity, not only that Joseph contributes to the well-being of his own Israelite kinsmen, but he also supports his group’s “religious and social values” with his governor status in the foreign land. In the historical perspective, Joseph illustrates “good

498 Ibid.
500 Ibid., 119.
501 Ibid.
502 Ibid., 120.
504 Ibid., 125.
505 Ibid.
507 Ibid., 117.
relations between the social worlds” of two nations: Egypt and Israel. Thus, the Joseph narratives highlight the hero’s contribution to save his people “from famine and starvation.” From Mills’ analysis of clothing, social rivalry, and dual identity, I can attest to Mills being sensitive to the historical, cultural, and sociological aspects in the Joseph narratives.

Regarding the third criterion of recognizing similar matters elsewhere in the canon, Barton establishes further meanings of forgiveness from various books of the canon. When Joseph’s brothers ask him to forgive their sin because they did evil to him (Gen 50:17), Barton explains that to “take away the burden of their sins” could also mean to “remit the debt of the sin of his brothers.” The forgiveness of debt is comparable to the pardon of sins, similar to the model of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23–35), where the master forgives his servant his debts. Similarly, the master expects the servant to forgive his fellow servant’s debts. The action of forgiveness is further explained in two other books of the Old Testament. “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against each other, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18 ESV). In addition, Exod 23:4–5 insists that one has a duty to save a fallen animal, or to bring back a lost donkey, “even if it belongs to one’s enemy.” Thus, several texts recommend acts of “interpersonal forgiveness.” Genesis 50:20 teaches about “human morality,” as Joseph reassures his brothers by announcing, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people may live” (ESV). Hence, Barton

508 Ibid.
509 Ibid.
511 Ibid., 209.
512 Ibid.
513 Ibid., 210.
514 Ibid.
515 Ibid.
captures different nuances of forgiveness not only in the Joseph narrative, but also from various
texts elsewhere in the canon.

Wenham also references the canon to explain certain virtues of Joseph.\textsuperscript{516} In the study of
biblical wisdom literature, he comments that declarations in Proverbs concerning the wise person
and the fool can be collected in order to present a portrayal of the ideal person.\textsuperscript{517} The depiction
of Joseph might be one of the “wisdom stereotypes” in the building of the ideal person.\textsuperscript{518}
Besides having wisdom, the ideal person also helps the poor. “Whoever has a bountiful eye will
be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor” (Prov 22:9 ESV).\textsuperscript{519} When Joseph comes to
power in Egypt, he becomes a typical example of helping the poor in his “famine-relief
measures.”\textsuperscript{520} When the Egyptians are starving in a severe famine, Joseph supplies them with
food in exchange for their livestock, such as horses and donkeys (Gen 47:17). They have
gratefully exchanged their goods to ensure a supply of food to save their lives (Gen 47:25). Other
than helping the poor, the ideal person also has faith. When the author of the book of Hebrews
explains what faith entails, Joseph is listed as an example of one who by faith struggled through
obstacles and prevailed in difficult circumstances (Heb 11:21–22).\textsuperscript{521}

Besides Wenham’s studies on Joseph’s virtue by establishing meaning across the canon,
Mills also studies Joseph’s emotions and laments by referring to the wisdom literature.\textsuperscript{522} When
Joseph relates to the cupbearer how he was put into prison, Joseph calls the prison a pit (Gen
40:14–15).\textsuperscript{523} Joseph’s feelings in the prison could be interpreted as being similar to his pain and

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{516} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 88, 92, 133–34.
\textsuperscript{517} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{518} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{519} Ibid., 92.
\textsuperscript{520} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{521} Ibid., 133–34.
\textsuperscript{522} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 123.
\textsuperscript{523} Ibid., 123.
\end{footnotes}
fear when his brothers threw him into the first pit (Gen 37:24). From Joseph’s point of view, he has now been placed in the pit twice for “no good reason.”\textsuperscript{524} Joseph’s feelings can be echoed with the lamenting verse, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand” (Prov 19:21 ESV).\textsuperscript{525} Mills argues that Joseph turns to God as a “source of hope,” and ultimately trusts that God will redeem him from dangerous situations.\textsuperscript{526}

A Critique of the Exploration of Joseph

I will see how the three scholars fare under the three criteria regarding the Joseph novella. For the first criterion on the literary features, Barton only makes a few comments on Joseph’s personality by stating that Joseph is a good moral example to follow, but with defects.\textsuperscript{527} However, he supplies no further details to explain how Joseph has some definite craftiness. Barton only mentions that the reader can get a glimpse of Joseph’s pride and devious nature towards his brothers in Egypt (Gen 44:1–14).\textsuperscript{528} With regard to Wenham, the themes of promise and reconciliation are highlighted through the Joseph narratives.\textsuperscript{529} In addition, Joseph’s personality and inner life contribute to Wenham’s rhetorical method to illustrate the virtues of an Old Testament character.\textsuperscript{530} The narrator uses the portrayal of Joseph’s virtues to encourage the readers to follow the good examples.\textsuperscript{531} For Mills, the moral perspective on Joseph illustrates her second level of moral vision, which is plot or community. Mills explores the self-identity of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{524} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{525} Ibid., 123n15. Note that Mills cites Ps 19:21 instead of Prov 19:21.
\item \textsuperscript{526} Ibid., 123.
\item \textsuperscript{527} Barton, \textit{Ethics in Ancient Israel}, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{528} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{529} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 22.
\item \textsuperscript{530} Ibid., 27, 39, 90, 93, 97.
\item \textsuperscript{531} Ibid., 104.
\end{itemize}
Joseph, his community, and God’s intervention in the communities of Israel and Egypt.\textsuperscript{532} In her exploration, she relates Joseph’s self-identity to his community for moral perspectives. Mills claims that the idea of community is attached to the identity of being an Israelite.\textsuperscript{533} In the ancient world, any individual belonging to a social group not only shares the same values, but also, more importantly, has the duty to further “its growth and well-being.”\textsuperscript{534} In her exploration using the Joseph story in proving her vision of community, I echo Mills that any investigation of Old Testament characters ought to consider the community aspect of that character’s way of life. The characterization of Joseph demonstrates her second-level vision of community especially well; therefore, I find her argument very convincing. Mills clearly brings out the community aspect from the Joseph narratives. Hence, regarding the first criterion of the three scholars’ sensitivity to literary features, Mills surpasses Barton and Wenham.

Regarding the second criterion of historical, cultural, and sociological context in the Joseph story, Barton brings out the theme of forgiveness in ancient Israelite society to enhance his three basic ethical models. The theme of forgiveness plays an important role in Old Testament ethics, to complement the law and wisdom literature.\textsuperscript{535} As for Wenham, the Joseph narratives contribute to the explanation of some historical background of the tribes of Israel.\textsuperscript{536} In his analysis of the historical setting of the book of Genesis, Wenham argues for the historical significance of Joseph’s contribution as a request for restoring peace among the tribes.\textsuperscript{537} From Mills’ point of view, Joseph’s promise to his brothers (Gen 50:19–21) solves the problem of

\begin{itemize}
\item[534] Nickerson, review of \textit{Biblical Morality}, 65–66.
\item[536] Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 40–41.
\item[537] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
rivalry that began earlier in Genesis. By analyzing Joseph’s dual identity as both an Israelite and Egyptian leader, Mills ties together these two identities to illustrate how Joseph brings about good relations between the two communities of Israel and Egypt. Furthermore, Mills connects the social rivalry with the significance of clothing by explaining that clothing indicates “a person’s social and political role in a community” in the ancient world. Together with highlighting this role of clothing in the Joseph narratives, Mills convincingly explores the Joseph novella in support of her moral vision of community. Therefore, as with the first criterion, Mills surpasses Barton and Wenham regarding the criterion of historical, cultural, and sociological aspects.

Regarding the third criterion—the canonical approach in the Joseph narratives—Barton establishes various nuances on the meaning of forgiveness in the two Testaments. Wenham explains the meaning of Joseph’s virtue to support his claim that the depiction of Joseph might be one of the “wisdom stereotypes” in the building of the ideal person. The canonical perspective of Wenham can be considered as a rhetorical measure to demonstrate that the portrayal of Joseph’s virtues is used to encourage the readers to follow the good examples. Hence, Wenham is superior to Barton in the canonical approach. Meanwhile, Mills analyzes and interprets Joseph’s feelings in the prison through a verse from the wisdom literature. First, it is debatable whether one verse from the book of Proverbs is appropriate and sufficient to speculate on such emotions on the part of biblical characters. Furthermore, Mills needs to improve her

538 Mills, Biblical Morality, 120.
539 Ibid., 117, 125.
540 Ibid., 128.
541 Wenham, Story as Torah, 88.
542 Ibid., 104.
editing work with her publishing team, given that Ps 19:21 does not exist as she quotes it.\textsuperscript{544} Psalm 19 has fourteen verses only. Guessing that there might be an editing error, I have to assume that the book of Proverbs is what Mills is actually referring to.

Using these three criteria for the three scholars’ analyses of the Joseph narratives, I can conclude that Mills is moderately superior to Wenham and Barton. Mills makes good use of the characterization of Joseph in both its literary features and the historical, cultural, and sociological context for her second layer of morality (vision of community). The strength of Mills’ analysis is that Joseph, as an individual belonging to a social group, and is a member of his community, with a duty to further the growth and welfare of the community.\textsuperscript{545} In the case of Joseph, the community’s welfare requires the provision of food due to the famine in the land, and Joseph’s wisdom is attested to with the survival of seventy people in Jacob’s family (Exod 1:5). The community’s well-being could not be maintained without Joseph’s contribution. Furthermore, Joseph furthers the growth of this Israelite clan into a nation for the next journey in Egypt. Under the first and second criteria, Mills concludes that Joseph provides an example of resolution to “social rivalry,” and that he benefits his community by his dual identity of Israelite and Egyptian.\textsuperscript{546} Mills also analyzes the social and political significance of clothing.\textsuperscript{547} Even though the canonical approach to the Joseph story is not convincing, the excellent exploration of the first two criteria compensates for the weakness of the third criterion.\textsuperscript{548} Mills is strong in the community model of her three-layered vision using the Joseph story. As for Barton, only the theme of forgiveness is discussed to complement his other three basic models. Similar to what is

\textsuperscript{544} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{545} Ibid., 16; Nickerson, review of \textit{Biblical Morality}, 65–66.
\textsuperscript{546} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 119–20; Mills, “Reading the Old Testament as Story,” 87.
\textsuperscript{547} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 122, 128.
\textsuperscript{548} Ibid., 123. For the criterion of canonical approach, Mills only uses one verse from the Wisdom Literature to discuss Joseph’s feelings.
discussed for Abraham, Wenham continues to discuss the “ethical ideal” relating to the themes of promise and reconciliation, and to Joseph’s forgiveness.\textsuperscript{549} However, Wenham’s analysis of Joseph is not as extensive and in-depth as Mills’ analysis of Joseph under the first two criteria.

Exploration of Daniel

Now I come to the scholars’ analyses of the narratives about Daniel. Being sensitive to the narrator’s attitude towards the character of Daniel, Barton illustrates his model of “obedience to God’s declared will” from Daniel 1–6.\textsuperscript{550} The book of Daniel narrates many situations concerning the “obedience and faithfulness of the Jews” to the God of Israel when facing oppression under foreign rule.\textsuperscript{551} Obedience could be expressed in actions such as persistence in prayer (Dan 6:10) and “refusal to worship any other gods” (Dan 3:17).\textsuperscript{552} The consequence of all endeavors of humanity, Barton reminds us, is to recognize that God achieves his purpose in the world.\textsuperscript{553} Human beings are to “avoid hindering,” but to assist in advancing God’s purpose by obeying his law.\textsuperscript{554} In order to collaborate with God’s purpose, it becomes clear that human beings are to submit to his will.\textsuperscript{555} In addition, submission to God’s power implies the acknowledgment that God “changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings” (Dan 2:21 ESV).\textsuperscript{556} The theme of “absolute submission” is rarely so clearly insisted on in the Old Testament as the narratives in the book of Daniel.\textsuperscript{557} In all, the book of Daniel emphasizes theological ethical themes such as prayer, loyalty to God, the supremacy of God, humanity’s

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{549} Wenham, \textit{Story as Torah}, 22, 104.  
\textsuperscript{550} Barton, \textit{Understanding Old Testament Ethics}, 29.  
\textsuperscript{551} Ibid., 29.  
\textsuperscript{552} Ibid., 155, 159–60.  
\textsuperscript{553} Ibid., 159.  
\textsuperscript{554} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{555} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{556} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{557} Ibid., 160. 
\end{flushright}
consequent submission to God, and the observance of the food laws.\textsuperscript{558} Hence, Barton is sensitive to the first criterion—the literary features of the narratives on Daniel.

In her study of time and place in relation to morality, Mills analyzes the character of Daniel within the “relationship between world powers, God, and the end time” in Daniel 1–7.\textsuperscript{559} The first chapter of the book of Daniel, which narrates Daniel’s own attitudes toward food, essentially presents a “social identity” for Daniel.\textsuperscript{560} The decisive representations associated with this identity are “food and table,” which present a border-crossing between two social boundaries: an exiled Jew subordinated to a foreign culture.\textsuperscript{561} Mills also claims that Daniel provides a “positive model” for diaspora Jews, for Daniel is faithful to God and maintains his Jewish identity.\textsuperscript{562} Mills compares the characterization of Daniel to Joseph in the book of Genesis.\textsuperscript{563} Just like Joseph who can render the meaning of Pharaoh’s dream by the power of his God, Daniel is also a dream interpreter in the Babylonian and Persian courts.\textsuperscript{564} The narration about Daniel resembles the depiction of Joseph in the aspect of dream interpretation.\textsuperscript{565} Thus, this is how Barton and Mills discuss the literary features of the Daniel narratives.\textsuperscript{566}

Regarding the second criterion of historical, cultural, and sociological aspects, Barton highlights the fact that the historical, cultural, and social settings often motivate Daniel to involve himself mostly with the well-being of his Jewish kinsmen, while faithful Israelites are

\textsuperscript{558} Ibid., 154–61.
\textsuperscript{560} Mills, “Household and Table,” 415.
\textsuperscript{561} Ibid., 415.
\textsuperscript{562} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 239; Heskett, review of \textit{Biblical Morality}, 703.
\textsuperscript{563} Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 192.
\textsuperscript{564} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{565} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{566} Mills discusses the character of Daniel regarding his attitudes toward food, his preserving Jewish identity in a foreign culture, and his faithfulness to God. Even though such analysis could possibly be considered for the second criterion of historical, cultural, and sociological aspects, her discussion focuses principally on the character of Daniel. For this reason, this analysis on the characterization of Daniel is considered for the first criterion of literary features.
distressed under foreign rule.567 The rulers, with their contemptuous behaviour towards the God of Israel (Dan 4:30–31), are clearly responsible for the ways they treat the Israelites, such as compelling them to worship the “gods of wood and stone” instead of Yahweh.568 In addition, Barton analyzes the ethical concerns of the prophet Daniel as found in the prayer of lament and confession (Dan 9:4–19).569 The Israelites have not listened to the prophets (v. 6), they have failed to obey the commandments (v. 5), and they have committed treachery (v. 7) and rebelled against God (v. 9).570 In sum, the fault of God’s people is their disloyalty to God. Contrary to these faults of the Israelites, Daniel is presented as a model of loyalty to God.571

Whereas Barton studies Daniel’s piety, Mills analyzes the historical and sociological background of the book of Daniel. Mills argues that the names of the kings mentioned do not correspond to the dates of non-biblical historical events pertaining to the Babylonian and Persian Empires.572 Therefore, the Daniel narratives cannot be taken as “straight historiography.”573 Hence, Mills posits that the story of Daniel should be read as a number of “court tales,” which are identified as a type of “literary fiction” to study the basic features of society in a royal court setting.574 Furthermore, Mills indicates that the book of Daniel is in the “post-Exilic setting” of the Old Testament.575 Within this historical context, the Jewish community has experienced “invasion, military defeat, and deportation.”576 The Daniel narratives are drawing from such a community experience to demonstrate the “significance of ancestral religious traditions” in

567 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 52.
568 Ibid.
569 Barton, Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 156; Goswell, “The Ethics of the Book of Daniel,” 139.
571 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 52; Barton, Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 156.
572 Mills, Biblical Morality, 193.
573 Ibid.
574 Ibid.
575 Ibid., 200.
576 Ibid.
foreign nations. Ultimately, these court tales prove that God continues to be in control of all nations. Mills further explains that the Daniel narratives have a “plot and characterization” which exhibits life and death. In this setting, Daniel is at the crossroad of two options: the “toward home” option is to maintain his Jewish way of living, whereas the “toward host community” option is to conform to the royal court’s practice. The conformity to royal practice has the danger of eroding the Jewish community’s social identity. Therefore, Daniel decides to take the “toward home” option to sustain the Jewish way in order to seal the boundary “against cultural erosion.” The result is to preserve life with the God of Israel, which means “prosperity for the marginal group”; thus, Daniel eventually gains the reward of preserving himself for the spiritual “values of a greater life.” The book of Daniel narrates a balance between life and death within the framework of border-crossing between political and social boundaries.

Furthermore, Mills points out that the dialogue structure in the Daniel narrative is an appropriate reading approach to examine and evaluate cultural messages in the court narratives. Through this dialogue, the readers can understand how Daniel experiences a “cultural divide” through making a determination regarding choice of food in preserving his Jewish identity. Within the conversation, readers can discern how Daniel experiences the
cultural and social struggles in this historical setting.\textsuperscript{587} In all, the Daniel narrative describes constructive and encouraging aspects of survival in a foreign land with boundary crossing.\textsuperscript{588} Notwithstanding numerous obstructions, the story of Daniel encourages people to “remain true to their identity,” and stay faithful to the God of Israel, while preserving their personal and cultural virtues.\textsuperscript{589}

For the third criterion of establishing meaning with reference to the canon, Barton analyzes subjects such as loyalty, submission, worship, and idols in ancient Israel.\textsuperscript{590} Barton indicates that loyalty “takes the form of complete submission to God, a submission that comes to include total adherence to all the divine ordinances.”\textsuperscript{591} In the book of Daniel, the Israelites need to submit to God in three ways: by “worshipping the true God alone,” by “keeping divine laws,” and by waiting for God to take action for them.\textsuperscript{592} The prophet Isaiah illuminates God’s command (“In returning and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and in trust shall be your strength” Isa 30:15 ESV), which could encapsulate the ideals for the book of Daniel.\textsuperscript{593} With the king’s decree which demands worship of his golden image (Dan 3:10), the Israelites are forced to worship idols, or the “gods of wood and stone,” instead of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{594} Barton illustrates various meanings of idols from three other locations in the canon.\textsuperscript{595} First, idols are made from casts with wood, gold, and silver (Isa 40:19).\textsuperscript{596} Second, the wrath of God is revealed toward the unrighteous: although they knew that God had made all things, they did not honor God, but

\textsuperscript{587} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{588} Ibid., 420.
\textsuperscript{589} Ibid., 412, 420.
\textsuperscript{590} Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 52, 133.
\textsuperscript{591} Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{592} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{593} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{594} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{595} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{596} Ibid.
worshipped human-made images and idols (Rom 1:18–23). Third, as a human being made by God, I should not think that the divine is like gold or silver or stone, or any image formed by the art and imagination of human kind (Acts 17:29).

Barton also explains the custom of prayer and prophecy in Daniel’s time. Daniel’s confession exemplified ancient Israel’s “penitential customs” of urging God for mercy, with garments torn and falling on their knees (Dan 9:3). Similar to Daniel, Ezra prays regarding the faithlessness of the returned exiles: “At the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to God” (Ezra 9:5 ESV). From Daniel’s prayer for his people, readers can learn how people prayed in ancient Israel (Dan 9:4–27). Some post-exilic prayers are laments having multiple objectives: not only to express desperation initially, but also to bring about hope, such as the hope for God to turn their situations around after hearing their devout requests. Barton further mentions two examples of prayer in ancient Israel: (1) the people of Israel confess their sin (Neh 9:6–37), and (2) after Hezekiah recovers from his sickness, he laments, but also praises God for his recovery (Isa 38:10–20). Concerning Daniel’s terrifying vision of a man (Dan 10:1–3), Barton describes the vision as an experience that would prepare him to prophesy, similarly to Ezekiel. Ezekiel is instructed to prophesy against the city of Jerusalem after his vision symbolizing the siege of

597 Ibid.
598 Ibid.
599 The custom of prayer and prophecy in Daniel’s time could alternatively be considered with the second criterion of historical, cultural, and sociological aspects. Barton uses other texts from prophetic books, such as Ezra’s prayer, Hezekiah’s recovery, and prophesies from Joel and Ezekiel to establish the meaning of Daniel’s practices of piety in ancient Israel. Therefore, such analysis on Daniel’s activities should be considered as the third criterion of canonical approach.
600 Ibid., 180.
601 Ibid.
602 Ibid., 183.
603 Ibid.
604 Ibid.
605 Ibid., 184.
Jerusalem (Ezek 4:4–8). Thus, the next chapter (Dan 11) narrates that Daniel prophesied that Persia would defeat the kingdom of Greece. In sum, Daniel is presented as a prophet, and “is called a wise man.” “God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh; people will prophesy, have dreams and visions” (Joel 2:28 ESV). According to Joel, this prophecy is about the future when the knowledge of God will be spread out to all Israelites, and to all people. This is how Barton draws from a number of prophetic books to establish meaning relating to practices of piety in ancient Israel.

Beyond Barton’s establishing meaning elsewhere in the canon, Wenham also references another Old Testament book to explain the reason behind certain behaviours of Daniel and his three friends when exiled in Babylon. The four young men are reluctant to consume the king’s food and drink because of their concern for the dietary law (Dan 1:8). After negotiation, they are permitted to eat only vegetables (Dan 1:16). The Law of Moses classifies living creatures as clean and unclean, where clean animals may be eaten, but unclean may not (Lev 11). Such a diet reminds the Israelites of their obligation to be a holy nation. Thus, the food laws contain concepts such as uncleanness and holiness. Wenham clarifies the Old Testament understanding of uncleanness as opposite to the concept of holiness in the ritual system.

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606 Ibid.
607 Ibid., 168.
608 Ibid.
609 Ibid.
610 Ibid., 168, 180, 183–84.
611 Wenham, Story as Torah, 140.
612 Ibid.
613 Ibid.
614 Ibid., 135.
615 Ibid., 140.
616 Ibid., 134, 137.
617 Ibid., 134–35, 137, 140.
Mills argues that the book of Proverbs helps to explain Daniel’s choice of food.618 When he refuses to take the food and drink from the king’s table (Dan 1), Mills comments on Daniel’s decision by reference to an offer from the Lady of Wisdom, “Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mixed” (Prov 9:5 ESV).619 The Lady of Wisdom’s banquet of life encourages the reader to prefer food for life instead of death.620 Thus, the theme of food is associated with wisdom in the biblical tradition.621 Concerning Daniel’s dream interpretation, Mills compares the characterization of Daniel to Joseph in the book of Genesis.622 Similar to Joseph who can explain the meaning of Pharaoh’s dream by the power of his God, Daniel is also a dream interpreter in the Babylonian and Persian courts.623 The narration about Daniel resembles the depiction of Joseph in the aspect of dream interpretation.624

A Critique of the Exploration of Daniel

I will evaluate how the Daniel narratives are analyzed under the three criteria. As explained in the Introduction of this chapter, my research has found a relatively small amount of Wenham’s analysis regarding Daniel, other than some law considerations concerning Daniel’s dietary decisions.625 Thus, for the first and second criteria, the comparison is mostly between Barton and Mills. For the first criterion regarding literary features, Barton is strong on using the characterization of Daniel to illustrate his first basic model of “obedience to God’s declared

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619 Mills, “Household and Table,” 416.
620 Ibid.
623 Ibid.
624 Ibid.
will,” along with the notion of “submission to God.” Furthermore, Barton analyzes how Daniel demonstrates an insistence on prayer, observance of the food laws, and refusal to worship any other gods. Thus, Barton’s argument corresponds convincingly to the narrator’s attitude toward how the Daniel story “ought” to be heard. Meanwhile, Mills analyzes expressed social identity in relation to food, and the positive model of faith for diaspora Jews. I find that Barton is superior to Mills for the first criterion of literary features.

Regarding the second criterion of the historical, cultural, and sociological context of the Daniel story, Barton reminds the reader of the fault of God’s people in their disloyalty to God, in contrast to Daniel’s model of loyalty to the God of Israel. Barton also analyzes Daniel’s concern for the ethics of faithful Israelites from the perspective of a prophet. For Mills, the book of Daniel applies to her third-level vision of setting, which is time and place. Mills offers an in-depth discussion of how Daniel decides between a polarity of life and death, to explain how Daniel strives to set the boundary “against cultural erosion,” and preserve his Jewish identity and spiritual life. Furthermore, Mills analyzes how Daniel handles border-crossing between two social boundaries in order to survive in a foreign land. Mills is strong on her time and place model regarding the historical, cultural, and sociological aspects of the Daniel narrative; thus, Mills is superior to Barton in the second criterion.

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627 Ibid., 154–61.
629 For the discussion of the Daniel narratives, my study has found that Wenham only discusses the Law of Moses in relation to Daniel’s dietary decision. Other than this contribution of a canonical approach to the Daniel story, I have found no other analysis on the book of Daniel by Wenham relating to the first and second criteria within the scope of this research.
631 Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 52.
633 Ibid., 412, 420.
Regarding the third criterion of establishing the canonical meaning of the Daniel narratives, Barton conducts a thorough analysis on the subjects of loyalty, submission, worship, idols, the custom of prayer, the prophets in Daniel’s time, and the practices of piety in ancient Israel. Mills studies the banquet of life (Prov 9:5) when Daniel negotiates the social boundary regarding choice of food, and the dream interpretation of Daniel compared to that of Joseph in Genesis. Wenham uses Lev 11 to analyze cleanness and holiness in the ritual system, in order to explain Daniel’s decision regarding food intake. Due to his extensive analysis, drawing from several prophetic books to explain the Daniel narratives, Barton surpasses Mills and Wenham in the third criterion of canonical approach.

Using the three criteria in the three scholars’ analyses of the Daniel narratives, Barton is superior to both Mills and Wenham. Although Mills effectively uses the time and place model to analyze the Daniel story for its cultural and sociological aspects, Barton has convincing arguments about the model of obedience and submission to God, which corresponds to the narrator’s attitude in the Daniel story. With his extensive analysis of the canonical approach to explain elements of worship, idols, and practices of piety, Barton is superior to Mills in regard to the Daniel narratives.

Conclusion

I have found that the three scholars exhibit their strengths in different areas of this research. Wenham emphasizes the historical and rhetorical aspects of the Sitzen im Leben of the Abraham and Joseph narratives. This is demonstrated in how Story as Torah explores the book of Genesis.

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634 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, 52, 133, 168, 180, 183–84.
635 Mills, Biblical Morality, 192; Mills, “Household and Table,” 416.
636 Wenham, Story as Torah, 134–35, 137, 140.
637 Barton, Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 155, 159–60.
to illustrate how Old Testament narratives are added to the Torah to shape the reader’s attitudes and behaviour. 638 Whereas Wenham studies the patriarchal narratives, Barton examines prophetic texts. Barton’s strength lies in how he uses the ethical aspects of the Daniel narratives to illustrate his model of obedience to God’s declared will. 639 From the book of Daniel, Barton demonstrates that obedience also involves submission to God and loyalty to God. 640 For Mills, the Joseph novella encapsulates the community aspect for her second-layer vision of community. 641 In addition, by analyzing how Daniel experiences border-crossing between two social boundaries in order to survive in a foreign land, Mills illustrates her third-level vision of time and place. 642 Furthermore, Mills contributes a border-crossing analysis of the dual identities of Joseph and Daniel. 643 The dual identity for Joseph is both Israelite and Egyptian. 644 Similarly, the dual identity for Daniel is both his status as a devout Jew and his surviving in the foreign royal courts of Babylon and Persia. 645

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638 Boda, “Poethics?,” 56; Hibbert, review of Story as Torah, 201; Lessing, review of Story as Torah, 441; Walton, review of Story as Torah, 170.
639 Barton, Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 155, 159–60.
640 Ibid., 154–61.
643 Mills, Biblical Morality, 239; Mills, “Household and Table,” 415.
644 Mills, “Reading the Old Testament as Story,” 87.
645 Mills, “Household and Table,” 412, 420.
Conclusion

In my opening chapters, I responded to the lack of Old Testament narratives in ethical discussions by examining theories from contemporary scholars on the use of narratives as an ethical resource. I brought together contemporary scholarship to illustrate how people have applied Old Testament ethics specifically to narratives. From 1949 to 2015, various authors engaged diverse approaches such as using an overarching perspective, developing specific topics of argument, utilizing one or more books of the Old Testament, and developing models and principles. This survey has attested to how the three contemporary authors—John Barton, Gordon Wenham, and Mary Mills—have contributed to and located themselves within the literary landscape.

I further analyzed the effectiveness of Barton, Wenham, and Mills by comparing and contrasting their models, principles, and the visions of their arguments. Moreover, I applied three criteria to study how the three writers support their arguments regarding three Old Testament characters—Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel. From this comparison and critique, I evaluated the strengths of the three authors in applying Old Testament ethics specifically to narratives. Thus far, we have gained a better understanding of the contemporary and scholarly views of Christian ethics, and have discerned the Christian ideal of an ethical existence based on narratives from the Old Testament.

In order to forge an ethical model for a well-lived life, I have established a theory on the use of Old Testament narratives as an ethical resource. My ethical model originates from a combination of principles from Barton and Wenham, and each scholar’s contribution is equally significant. More importantly, they complement one another. Barton provides the foundation of

646 For the 79 surveyed items of this research, see Appendix A (“Survey on Applying Old Testament Ethics to Narrative Texts”).
ethical categories, whereas Wenham’s law, ethical ideal, obedience, and the imitation of God build on and enhance this foundation to construct a comprehensive approach.

To derive the Christian ideal from Old Testament narrative ethics, I formed a base using Barton’s three valuable models and their overarching values. The model of “obedience to God’s declared will” is the first and foremost foundation, supported by the other two models of “natural morality” and the “imitation of God.” These latter models are the “motivating principles,” which accompany the obedience model. To supplement the foundational model of “obedience to God’s declared will,” Wenham connects this model of obedience with the model of the “imitation of God.” According to Wenham, this connection is supported by the key biblical ethical principle—“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2 ESV). Hence, the first point about deriving a Christian ideal from Old Testament narratives is that imitating God is a motive for obeying God, because human beings made in God’s image should behave like God’s character. In addition, since a “gap exists between the law’s demands and the biblical authors’ ideals,” Wenham argues that the “law enforces a minimum standard of behaviour.” The second point about the Christian ideal is that the law is a “realistic floor for behaviour,” and the ethical ceiling is so unreachable that only “saints might aspire.” And the third point, as Barton argues, is the necessity of having wisdom in order to strive towards the ideal.

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651 Ibid.
652 Ibid., 26; Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 80.
653 Jenson, review of *Story as Torah*, 69.
654 Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 144.
Moreover, I have enhanced the understanding of the term “ethics” by differentiating ethics from morality. From Mills’ study of a three-layered moral perspective, I have discerned that ethics refers to the philosophical framework for “humans to act morally,” whereas morality focuses more on human conduct. In practical terms, morality is living according to the knowledge of what is right and wrong, whereas ethics is the philosophy that drives the decision-making process. Thus, I have explained how these three contemporary writers use Old Testament narratives to form Christian ethics.

I applied three criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the three writers when they explore the three Old Testament characters to support their arguments. The first criterion is sensitivity to the literary features of the text that specifically signal the narrator’s attitude towards the character. The second criterion is sensitivity to the historical, cultural, and sociological content of the narrative. The third criterion is the canonical approach to establishing the meaning of the text with reference to the canon. Using these three criteria, I examined the narratives of Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel to judge the effectiveness of the three writers’ models and principles. Each writer exhibits his or her strengths in different areas of this research. Barton is superior in the Daniel narrative; Wenham is superior in the Abraham narrative; and Mills is superior in the Joseph narrative. Each author surpasses the other two in evaluating one of the Old Testament characters.

I have learned from contemporary writers to analyze how Old Testament narratives contribute to ethical formation. Wenham reminds us that Old Testament narratives have a didactic purpose “to instil both theological truths and ethical ideals into their readers.” For the three Old Testament characters under discussion, there is a need to consider different “periods of

655 Knight, “Moral Values and Literary Traditions,” 22n5.
656 Wenham, Story as Torah, 3.
rapid social and economic change.” Such change undoubtedly leads to “a diversity of ethical standards and ethical viewpoints from one period to another” when examining the ethics of the Hebrew Bible. For any comprehensive study, the ethical perspective needs to be “broad enough to include all of the central and distinctive moral insights” covering the environments for all groups in all periods. For the scope of this research, three Old Testament characters are studied: Abraham from an earlier period in ancient Israel, Daniel from the diasporic period approaching the end of Israelite history in the Hebrew Bible, and Joseph as the clan of Israel transitions into a nation located in two lands—Israel and Egypt. In all, these three characters cover different points in time of the ancient Israelites. I echo Barton’s argument for the need to discern the “people of which period,” “people of which class,” and “people in which social situation” for ethical reflection. Therefore, I find Barton’s model of obedience convincing, not only in the Daniel narratives, but also in the other two narratives of Abraham and Joseph. Old Testament narratives from various periods of Israelite history include both didactic and ethical aspects.

This study has seen the best of three contemporary thinkers—Barton, Wenham, and Mills—regarding their models, visions, and approaches to three Old Testament characters. In addition, the survey from the mid-twentieth century illustrates where these three authors are located within the landscape of Old Testament ethics. These three contemporary scholars have developed models and principles concerning “how the Israelites did behave in practice, or how they believed they ought to behave in principle.”

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659 Ibid.
661 Davies, “Ethics of the Hebrew Bible,” 47.
The analyses of the three authors and the witness of the three Old Testament characters have illuminated our Christian perception of living in the world today. From Mills’ vision on community, the analyses of identity and community from the Joseph and Daniel narratives have been helpful and encouraging, especially for today’s immigrants living in a foreign land. In particular, Daniel’s maintaining his Jewish way of living, by being faithful to God even under foreign rule, is a model for contemporary Christians. As discussed in the Exploration Chapter, Joseph models moral behaviour for Christians.\(^{662}\) The Joseph narrative encapsulates a model for seeking wisdom. Hence, we “may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Tim 3:15 ESV). This research on how contemporary authors form Christian ethics from Old Testament narratives will be the foundational work for scholars in the future, when they ask related questions on Christian ethics.

Now that we have seen how a well-lived life should look, what is the next step? As the world turns, we know that today’s environment is different even from that of the twentieth century, when our three scholars wrote on their topics. Looking forward, I would speculate that people will turn to the Old Testament narratives to discuss contemporary issues responding to the rise of gender theory, transgenderism, intersexuality, and LGBT topics. Other topics could be environmental issues such as energy saving, ecology, and how to save the earth. For social issues, scholars will contemplate responses towards marginalized groups such as the poor and the homeless. After all, ethics is an ever-evolving topic for Christians from all eras.

\(^{662}\) Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 28; Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 172; Barton, review of *Story as Torah*, 168.
Appendix A

Survey on Applying Old Testament Ethics to Narrative Texts

Legend: Monograph is a book with detailed written study of a single specialized subject. Essay includes journal articles, or a chapter in a book with multiple essays.

Classification: (1) Overarching perspective on Old Testament narrative ethics, (2) narratives as material for specific topic of argument, (3) narratives examined from one or more books of the Old Testament, (4) narratives as a source for developing models and visions, and (5) precaution when using narrative for ethics.

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