

OpenTheo

Q&A#19 Tips for Reading Your Bible Better

July 28, 2018



Alastair Roberts

Today's questions: "How do you go about noticing intertextual links? Is it mostly intuitive based on large exposure to the Bible? Do you do particular searches? Is it just checking cross-references (is there a similar apparatus for the BHS like there is for the NA28, for instance)? Any insight is appreciated." and "Do you have any set notetaking when it comes to Scripture in order to remember insights, intertextual links, important points on tricky passages, etc.? If yes, how do you go about it and organize it?"

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account:
<https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these videos, please consider supporting me on Patreon:
<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>.

My new Soundcloud account is here: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes:
<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2#>.

Transcript

Welcome back. Today I'm answering two questions, presumably by the same person, as they were given pretty much directly after each other and they're closely related. The first is, how do you go about noticing intertextual links? Is it mostly intuitive, based on a large exposure to the Bible? Do you do particular searches? Is it just checking cross-references? Any insight is appreciated.

And then the second question, do you have any set note-taking when it comes to Scripture, in order to remember insights, intertextual links, important points on tricky passages, etc.? If yes, how do you go about it and organise it? Now, at the beginning of answering this question, I want to just say that you need to find something that works for you. I'm going to discuss what works for me, and many of these things will be more general, but you need to find something that works for you, according to your habits of

reading, according to the things that help you read the text well. Now, I think a number of the patterns that I use are things that will work for everyone, and that everyone should be doing to some extent or other.

But others are just things that work for me, according to the way that I think and remember things, and the way that I process information. So, first of all, find something that works for you, but here's some tips. And some of these things are more general, things that you really have to do for it to work.

So, first of all, you need to know your Bible really well, and you need to know all of it, not just focusing upon a little section that you want to study. The whole thing about intertextuality is that much of the meaning of a text is not directly contained within it. Rather, it's the way that that text is opened up by the wider body of biblical material that you bring to it.

And so you won't see what you need within the text itself often. Often you need to have that information there, and the text triggers that information, or that knowledge and insight. And so if you're reading the Bible and just dealing with it in atomized sections, you will miss most of what's... a lot of what's there, because you're not bringing to it the knowledge that will enable you to see what really is taking place.

It's like a joke. The meaning of a joke is seldom contained within the joke itself. The thing that makes you laugh is mostly the relationship between the cultural information that you bring to the joke and the actual content of the joke itself.

And the way that those things play off against each other is humorous. There's also... it's how irony works. It's knowing something that is not necessarily present within the text itself, but the text presumes that you are bringing to it.

Many of the other things that we have within our culture, if you watch a film and you see playing off other film scenes, and the humor in such a scene... For instance, if you see a montage in a film, and it's supposed to be humorous because it's playing off the Rocky montage, these things help you to understand what's going on. You can miss the joke if you do not have the wider body of knowledge to bring to that. In the same way with scripture, if you do not know your Bible well, all of your Bible well, then you will miss a lot of the things that are going on because you're not bringing to the text what the text needs in order for its meaning to come across.

The other thing is the more that you recognize patterns, the easier it becomes because patterns connect information together, connect stories together. And that's the best way to remember. When you're not remembering lots of isolated pieces of information, bits over here and bits over here, but things that cluster in meaningful chunks, then it's so much easier to remember.

I've given a lot of thought to how you remember things well because of word games and other things like that that I used to be obsessively involved in. Learning to connect what you know is often far more important than just taking on a large amount of information. What really helps is being able to clump that information together in meaningful clusters.

And you do that by recognizing patterns, by recognizing larger themes, by recognizing the way that certain of the things that are distinct for a passage are playing off other things. So, for instance, if you listen to a musical theme and you hear that musical theme in two different locations within a piece, the recognition of that theme helps those two different occasions to come into a greater salience. You're recognizing something that they have in common, but also their distinct features play off that common theme.

And so they have a distinct significance because they stand out from the theme. And so recognizing these underlying themes and commonalities will really help you to know the text, will really help you to remember things and connect things together. And it makes it a lot easier when you have in your mind a whole set of these different themes and motifs that you're bringing to every passage.

Not trying to force them upon the passage, but just having your ears open for them. And when they appear, you can hear them and you can work with them. The problem is if you don't have those, you're just remembering lots and lots of bits of information that it just makes it difficult for you.

Get familiar with some of the most important patterns in scripture. Creation and Fall, for instance, or Exodus. These are some of the root themes and they appear many, many different times within the Old and New Testaments.

And once you're familiar with them, you'll be able to read other passages better because you'll see these themes beneath them and the way that they are playing off those themes. So the point is not that a theme is rigidly recycled in each location and we're having the same thing playing over and over again. The significance is that you have a consistent theme, but all these different variations on it.

And the significance is in those variations. How is this text using that theme in a way that's distinct to itself? And so both the uniqueness of texts and their commonality and connections come into great, sharper relief as you start to think thematically. Reading passages closely and attentively.

Maybe for me, I find sometimes just reading a passage seven times over, putting all my questions to the background, not thinking about my questions, just listening. What is the text saying and what are some of the things that emerge from the text? Where is the text placing its emphasis? What are some of the common details that seem to be foregrounded within this text? What are some of the odd details that seem to call for explanation? Just listen to the text. Don't come to it with your questions.

Because before questions, we must have attention. Because if we do not have attention, our questions will be the wrong ones. They'll be ones that force our concerns and our values upon the text rather than listening to what emerges from the text.

And so much of good Bible study is about learning to get away from our concerns and listen to the text. And you'll find once you do that, a lot of your concerns take a different shape. You realize that the big questions of the text are not the big questions that you had to begin with.

And the more that you focus on the big questions of the text, your big questions will often become smaller or they will take a different shape. You'll begin to realize that your questions frame the text in an unhelpful way. And your questions also frame your situation in an unhelpful way on many occasions.

So be attentive. Listen very carefully. Give it time.

Don't rush things. I mean, this is a very important thing. When I'm reading passages, often I just don't have a clue what's there.

I'm still thinking about it. And there are a lot of things just in the background of my mind simmering away. And they'll be there for months, sometimes even years.

Issues that I'm chewing over that have not settled. And just give it time. These things arise in time.

And don't be afraid of exploring a bit, of throwing out some possibilities and seeing where they lead you. But be wary of rushing to things, of trying to force parallels, of trying to force themes. Just listen and be open and receptive.

And if you're patient and attentive and receptive, often these things come to you in time. You don't need to rush it. Know how much weight to give things.

Many of the connections that I see, they're not 100% certain. Sometimes they're not even 50% certain. Generally, they would be maybe 80%, something like that certain.

But just realize how much weight to put on things. We are dealing with a vast root system of biblical symbolism. And also maybe this tree that rises from that.

And not every branch will take the same weight. That doesn't mean it's not part of the tree. That doesn't mean that it's not something to be noticed.

It just means you can't put as much weight on it. And so know the amount of weight to put on things. And that's just, that's something that comes with you.

It comes with experience and time and skill. Don't be afraid to change your mind. And that is related to the previous point.

That just be patient and know how much weight to put on things. And when you realize that, you'll be less afraid of changing your mind. There are certain things that just do not bear as much weight.

And other things that do. And much of the weight of scripture is born cumulatively. Not from just one thing that everything depends upon.

Or single connections. Each one stands and falls by itself. But it's a root system of connections.

And one particular part can be broken off without losing much of the strength of the whole. So realize how much weight things take. Don't be afraid to change your mind.

And part of that is just being open to new things. Being open to the text in ways that you're not constantly on guard against it. Pay attention to the details.

Again, coming back to this point. This is so important. Because the details are often where the important things lie.

There will be strange and unusual details in the text. And they seem odd. And when they seem odd, often they are there to prompt you to think about things.

To ask certain questions. And those questions will lead you in helpful directions. So pay attention to those details.

Read in larger chunks as well. So look at the details. But also see bigger frameworks in which things exist.

Don't focus just on isolated verses. That's one of the dangers if you're just depending upon cross references. Cross references are often just shallow relationships between the wording of two different verses.

But what we're looking for are deeper shared patterns. And you get that generally by thinking about the Bible in larger chunks. In books.

In passages. In larger stories. For instance, the story of Abraham.

Not just a particular chapter within that. And even when you're thinking about verses, think about them within the argument of the text within which they're found. Within the wider narrative of the text within which they're found.

Pay attention to the literary ordering of passages and books and their larger structures. And that gives you a lot of clues. For instance, it helps you to see when things are juxtaposed.

If you're reading through the book of Genesis, you'll see a lot of things are juxtaposed

with each other. And the more you pay attention, the more you'll realise these things are juxtaposed in a way that seems to do violence sometimes to the chronological order of the passage. But the important thing is that you see in that literary structure that things are being connected.

And those connections help you to find the meaning. It's one of the things with chiasms. So many things that have brought forward as examples of chiasms I find just tenuous.

I don't think they're there really. But when you see a good chiasm, for instance, it helps you to recognise a larger structure. And when you recognise a larger structure, you can connect things.

Details within the text start to make more sense in terms of their environment, the larger textual environment within which they're found. And that context is hugely important for understanding things. Now I found this particularly when thinking about the issue of gender.

So much of what people do is focused upon individual texts. And those texts get battled down into single words. So we end up talking about what does head mean? What does the woman as helper mean? What does the woman's desire mean? What does authority mean in 1 Timothy 2? And in each of these cases, those arguments seldom lead to much illumination.

Eventually we reach a point where we just throw up our hands. It's very unclear. We can't really decide.

But when you start to look at the broader context and the broader narratives and arguments of epistles, this sort of thing, many more things make sense. Because these details are not intended to be accounted for or understood in isolation from everything else, but in the larger framework. So if you want to understand what help means, read the chapters very thoroughly.

Don't just think about how do men and women relate and what does it mean to be male and female in terms of the isolated text of men and women created in the image of God and the woman being created as the helper of the man from his side. That is just not going to take you very far. You will not understand these things until you read those chapters as whole units and read them very, very closely, paying attention to the details.

The details that surround and the textual connections. I mean, why is it that the name of the man and the woman are connected at the end of chapter two? Why is it that the name of the man is connected to the name of the earth? There are things to learn from that about the relationship between man and woman. And these things are developed within the text if you're paying attention.

But if all you're looking for is an explicit text that answers those questions and you're not

looking for the larger patterns, you're not looking for how male and female relate to God's creative work in Genesis one, for instance, you're going to miss most of what's there. And most people do because they're not attentive. They're looking for an answer to their questions.

And so they latch on particular verses and miss the broader structures. And then when you're reading through larger books and look at structures and you look at themes and these things that recur, it helps you to it helps you to understand any particular passage because you will understand a lot of how this fits into the whole. So, for instance, if you're reading the story of Judah and Tamar, it really helps to understand how that is related to other stories to the story of Lot and his daughters to the story of Eve and the serpent to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife.

It's playing off all of these stories or Joseph being lost. Every single one of these stories will help you to read that story because it's connected to it thematically and struck in terms of the literary structure of the text of Genesis. These things are all bound up together.

Pay attention to books that are more closely related and the sort of relationships that are developed. So a good example is Luke and Samuel. The connections between those two books are quite strong.

And the more you pay attention to those connections, the more connections you will see. And so just be alert to those sorts of things. Get to know how an author, a particular biblical author uses material, how he goes about in a distinct way using symbolism, typology, things like that.

John writes in a very different way from the synoptics, but then also the synoptics write differently from each other. And they each use typology and symbolism, prophecy in different ways. A good book on this recently is *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* by Richard Hayes.

Just helping you to see how the gospels differ. And the more that you get to know particular authors, the more you'll see what works with them, what does not. The sort of connections that are foregrounded, the sort of connections that are not.

And you'll be more wary of just eliding authorship. And you'll be more attentive to the specific theological arguments that the different gospel authors and the different authors of other biblical books are making with their texts. That these texts are not just to be flattened out.

Luke is doing a rather different thing from Matthew. And paying attention to those differences helps. The themes and juxtapositions that I mentioned again are very important.

So particularly in a book like 1 Samuel, seeing the connections between Samuel and Saul. Those are very significant connections and juxtapositions. Or between Saul and David and how they play off each other.

And then how these characters are juxtaposed with other characters. So how Saul is juxtaposed with Laban or with Pharaoh or with the men of Jericho. And how David is related to Jacob.

All these connections will help you. Likewise, if you're coming to a book like 1 Kings, it will help you to understand when Solomon is related to Adam. Adam both in his good behaviour and also in his fall.

In his situation within the garden and how things should go there. But also in relationship to the fall. And these themes will enable you to understand that the type, the Adam type, Solomon is a particular... He's working with that template but taking it in a distinct direction.

So it's like knowing a particular genre. When you see someone doing unusual things with the genre, it helps that you know the genre. But also recognise the way that that particular work is using the genre in a distinct way.

The variations are significant. The unique characteristics of that text play off against the genre. But if you do not have an understanding of what's taking place at the beginning.

The themes and the characters, the sort of type types that lie beneath. It's very difficult to see what's happening at the surface. So if you're reading the story of David and you're thinking in terms of the character of Jacob.

It will help you to understand what's happening with David. How he's playing off that in significant ways. Because David is always a variation upon themes.

Likewise, spend a lot of time with people who are gifted readers of scripture. Read a lot of their work. Read widely.

There's so much material out there that you just need to dig into. And there's no replacement for just reading dozens of books and articles. And paying attention to people who are really good readers.

There really is not a replacement for that. Read every day and read a lot. The other thing is think about how best to use your time.

So listen to the Bible, for instance, when you're on your commute or when you're working in the kitchen. Just spend your time engaging with the text. And hearing it is very good because you tend to hear things in larger chunks.

And you tend to hear things differently from the way that you read them. Often when

you're reading a text, you're instantly in judgment mode. And learning how to, you're bringing all your questions and things like that.

When you're hearing, it's easier to place yourself at the disposal of the text. And so I've listened through the Bible on audio a number of, several times. And I find it's a very good way to get a sense of the deeper themes of the patterns and things like that.

And what's taking place. Check verbal parallels. So do look at the original languages if you can.

But the original languages, if you do not have the original languages, it will prevent you from learning certain things. But there's so much else you can learn. It's not going to stop you as much as you think.

There is a lot within the text that you can see simply by being attentive to the English. And checking those things out. And listening.

Listening to see where things seem similar. Even just the pattern of the stories. This story is a familiar sort of story.

Use good tools. I find Bible works very helpful for my purposes. And I almost always have it open in the background.

And I refer to it several times within a day. It's, even when I'm not studying it, using it for intensive study. I will just go to it to check a particular set of parallels.

Regular cross references often won't take you very far. They are atomized resemblances often. And often they miss the big parallels.

The big parallels that you tend to see within the broader structure of texts. Then, along a similar line, if you're going to be thinking intertextually, do not just go straight to Jesus. That really is something that people do an awful lot when they think about typology.

It's about how does this relate to Jesus? And immediately jump straight to Jesus. So you see this particular character in the Old Testament. How is Jacob like Jesus? Well, it helps to understand how Jacob is like Abraham and Isaac.

Think about that first. Think about how Jacob is like David. Think about how Jacob foreshadows the experience of Israel more generally.

He is named Israel. And then when you've thought about that whole musical structure of the Jacob theme and things like that, and how that's developed in scripture, then you can move through that and you'll find yourself led to Christ. But if you jump directly from that, sort of airlift yourself from Jacob to Christ, you actually miss the connection for the most part.

And those connections are often very tenuous and questionable. And they're neat. The sort of patterns that people have in the homiletical context where they'll, in a sermon, they'll say, oh, this is neat, this poetic type of parallel between these two characters.

And it maybe has some devotional, gives you some sort of devotional kick, but doesn't actually show you the deepest structure of the text itself. And that is what I really want us to be alert to, to think about what's going on in the text itself. How is Christ, when you're reading the Gospels, for instance, thinking about how the Gospels are using these patterns.

So how is Jesus presented as a Moses type figure? Don't just jump directly from reading the story of Moses and say, oh, this is like Christ. Think about the text themselves, how they are drawing upon these themes. And think about the passage of the Moses, of the themes of Moses through the Old Testament and how that leads to Christ.

So think about the connections less in terms of a direct one to one correlation and more in terms of developing and varying themes and motifs and how those move over history. Follow the threads of redemptive history. Don't just jump from A to B. And often that jumping to A to B is a result of the fact that you just have people have islands of knowledge within a sea of general biblical ignorance.

We need to know the whole of our Bibles. And as we know the whole of our Bibles, the other connections will become clearer and we'll be able to connect Joseph to Jesus, for instance. Or we'll be able to connect David to Jesus without just this direct jump from one to the other.

Rather, we'll be seeing a matrix of themes and connections and the way that those are mobilized by the New Testament and also set forth within the Old in ways that will enable us to understand Christ when we come to him. And often people lack a deep grounding in that. And so they're looking for these neat one to one parallels that really are often very forced and don't carry the sort of weight that we really need them to carry.

How do I remember some of these things? Well, getting back to the point I made earlier, the more connections you make, the more you connect your information together and your understanding together, the easier it will become to remember. I write a lot. The other thing that helps is actually using the knowledge as you get it, write about it or speak about it, talk about in your conversations.

So I meet with certain people on a regular basis and I'll talk about what I've been reading and I'll have Skype calls with certain people just to keep that material in use, because otherwise it just stagnates and it will dry up very quickly. I forget a huge amount of stuff. And the way I remember what I do remember is by writing about it.

And that has the added benefit of being able to search back through what you have written, because often I know that I've written on the subject a particular point somewhere and I can look back and see what I said in the past and then work with that. That really helps. And also just having constantly bringing these things into your conversations.

If you're speaking on a subject, try and use the information that you've just taken in. Write a lot of notes in the margins of your books. That's something I do a lot.

I never write in my Bible ever, but I write a lot of notes in the margins of my books. When it comes to intertextual parallels, often I can reconstruct them. I forget intertextual parallels all the time, but I can reconstruct them once I know the patterns.

So in many ways it's like you don't need to remember everything. You just need to remember the key details and processes and the patterns by which you could reconstruct what you once knew. And once you've got the fundamental keys for perceiving things within texts, it doesn't really matter that much if you forget a lot.

Well, that's what I tell myself at least. Because you can reconstruct it very easily. Because once you've learned how to see a text and to be attentive to a text, when you forget the information, you can always put it back together again.

It's not something that once lost, it's always forgotten. Sometimes it might be, but much of the time it isn't. And I've often found that I've come to a reading again that I once had in the past, but I'd forgotten I had that reading in the past.

And then I've come across some occasion where I wrote about it and think, ah, I thought I'd never seen that before. But obviously I had seen it before. There are a lot of occasions like that that I find.

And again, you do not need to remember these things. The most important thing is that you remember how you came to them. You remember the recipe more than you remember the specific form of the result when you followed that.

So maybe it might help to look at a particular passage just as an example of some of these things. So something like, I'm thinking 1 Kings 21, read out the passage of Ahab and Naboth. Or if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money.

And Naboth said to Ahab, the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers to you. So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him. For he had said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.

And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food. But Jezebel, his wife, came to him and said to him, why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?

So he said to her, because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, give me your vineyard for money or else. If it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.

And he answered, I will not give you my vineyard. Then Jezebel, his wife, said to him, you now exercise authority over Israel. Arise and eat food and let your heart be cheerful.

I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters saying, proclaim a fast and seat Naboth with high honor among the people.

And seat two men scoundrels before him to bear witness against him, saying, you have blasphemed God and the king. Then take him out and stone him that he may die. So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them.

As it was written in the letters which she had sent to them, they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. And two men scoundrels came in and sat before him. And the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth has blasphemed God and the king.

Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones so that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel saying, Naboth has been stoned and is dead. And it came to pass when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive but dead.

So it was when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it.

You shall speak to him, saying, Thus says the Lord, have you murdered and also taken possession? And you shall speak to him, saying, Thus says the Lord, in the place where dogs lick the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours. Then Ahab said to Elijah, Have you found me or my enemy? And he answered, I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring calamity upon you, I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free.

I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Bashar the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked me to anger and made Israel sin. And concerning Jezebel, the Lord also spoke, saying, The

dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field.

But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up. And he behaved very abominably, in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. So it was, when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, See how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the calamity in his days, but in the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house. So there's a lot of things going on in this passage, and this passage may just seem to be an isolated sequence within the book of 1 Kings. But the more attention you pay to it, the more you'll recognize certain underlying themes that help you to make more sense of what's going on.

So, for instance, noticing verbal parallels, or connected terms. That Ahab wants a vineyard, the vineyard of Naboth, the vineyard that is his inheritance, and that should be preserved by him, unless in extreme situation he should not sell it. Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden.

Now, why a vegetable garden? Why does the text give us this detail? Why this focus upon a vineyard being turned into a vegetable garden? What is that about? Paying attention to that detail will help you to interpret the text, because the only other occasion that we have a reference to a vegetable garden in Scripture is in Deuteronomy 11. It says, And Israel is described as a choice vine. And Israel is defined as this vineyard that has this wall built around it, and a watchtower, and all these other sorts of things.

And God being the vine dresser that established, or God being the vineyard owner who establishes this. And so these are, first of all, there's a common detail, that recognising that, whether that's just having it in your mind, you paid attention to the text, and you think, that's an interesting way to describe Egypt, and let's think about what that connection teaches us. Then, the vineyard theme is a very pronounced one in Scripture.

That's different from vegetable garden, that's just a single verbal parallel, or textual parallel. Whereas the vineyard theme is a very developed one. And so the significance of Ahab wanting to convert a vineyard into something else is one that should ring bells for us.

We should think, something's going on here. So when you read this story, you hear about the vineyard, and you think, okay, there's something going on here. The vineyard presumably stands for something more.

It's like details like the woman who has an issue of blood, and then Jairus' daughter. These two stories are directly connected to each other. And in the case of the woman with the issue of blood, it's for 12 years, and Jairus' daughter is 12 years old.

Again, why does the text give us those details? What might be going on? Why are we told that Anna is 84 years old, 7 times 12? Again, these are details that it would not seem necessary to give them in the text, but once they're given, they help you understand. Why is the man at the sheep gate waiting to enter the city someone who's been in that condition for 38 years? Again, 38 years is a very significant time. That's how long they wandered in the wilderness after the original rebellion.

So these details are things to be attentive to, and here it's the vineyard. The inheritance of his father's is associated with the vineyard. So Israel is this land of inheritance, and here is Ahab, this wicked king, who wants to turn the land of the inheritance into an Egypt-like place.

Then we see throughout these stories of Ahab that Ahab is a pharaoh-like figure, a pharaoh-like figure who's persecuting the Moses-like figure of Elijah. Elijah is a prophet of the wilderness who leads to a prophet of the land, Elisha, who's like Joshua, and even their names are connected in certain ways. These two characters are related to each other.

Moses, Elijah, and then the characters of Pharaoh and the character of Ahab. Again, these characters are connected to other characters. So Herod, Herodias, and John the Baptist are another triad that are related to Jezebel and Ahab and Elijah the Tishbite.

So Elijah is connected directly to John the Baptist. They both wear camel skin. They're associated with the wilderness.

They're desert prophets. Whereas the connection between Herod and Herodias, they're both persecuting the faithful prophet, and it's the wife that instigates the husband to wicked action in both of these cases. So that helps us to read this particular story.

It helps us to recognize another connection, the connection between the original full story and Eve and Adam playing off against each other, and the relationship between Jezebel and Ahab. Now, that might be a loose connection by itself, but the more you pay attention to the text, there are certain things that emerge as you pay attention to that. So you see the man who's told to give food by his wife and told to rise and eat, the man who just follows meekly the command of his wife, even though he has a charge by God, and he just does not take any action.

He does not oppose what she says. The relationship between the suggestions of Jezebel and the actions of the people, the men of the city, the elders and the nobles, there's a direct connection between them. Ahab doesn't even seem to mediate between those two

things.

Everyone just meekly follows Jezebel. And in the same way, we see that within the story of Genesis, where Adam just meekly follows after Eve in eating of the fruit when he should stand up and say no. Other things that we see here, that it's wanting that one thing that he can't have.

He's the king. He owns vast tracts of land. He has a vineyard already, and he's willing to exchange that for Naboth's vineyard.

But he wants that particular vineyard, and he can't have it. And he's sullen and displeased because he can't have it. And that vineyard, it's similar to the fruit, that one thing he's not allowed to have.

Now, we've seen already a vineyard connected with fruit that has consequences as people eat it. In the story of Noah, Noah plants a vineyard, drinks wine from its fruit and becomes intoxicated and naked. And there's a playing out of a full theme as his son Ham sins, and then there's a punishment for him.

And so these are, again, familiar themes. And the vineyard is connected with the garden. So when does God confront Ahab? Confronts him in the garden, in the vineyard, as he sends his messenger Elijah to say, to challenge Ahab in his sin.

Like Adam in the garden, Ahab is challenged in his garden, in his vineyard. And this is a very similar theme playing out. There is also themes from Genesis 4, Cain and Abel.

So you have this man who's, first of all, sullen and displeased because he does not get what he wants. And he does not think of rectifying his behaviour. And so we have this connection between the story of Genesis 3 and Genesis 4, as the woman acts in relationship to the Cain-like figure.

So Ahab is like Cain, the one who takes the life of his brother. He's sullen and displeased by his brother not getting what he wants relative to his brother. And so he hatches a plot against his brother, and then God has to confront him.

So we see, again, similar themes, but then the woman playing a role in the character of Jezebel. Ahab is one who, like Cain, takes the blood of his brother, and that blood calls out and leads to consequences. Now, just as Cain talks about the severity of his judgment and God mitigates it by placing a mark upon him, so there's a mitigation of Ahab's judgment as a result of his limited repentance at the end of this chapter.

So again, we are seeing similar patterns and connections, and that helps us to read what's going on. That Ahab is an Adam-like figure. Ahab is a Pharaoh-like figure.

Ahab is a character like Herod, and Jezebel is like Herodias, and John the Baptist is like

Elijah the Tishbite. And these connections all help us to read that passage, this particular passage, better. Now, how much weight do we put on these things? In many cases, something like the connection between the vineyard and Israel, that's probably an 80% connection, certainty.

When we're talking about the vegetable garden, I'd say that's about 70% connection. When we're talking about the Cain connection, I'd say that's about 60. When we're talking about the Adam connection, maybe 70.

And these things, and then the connection between Elijah and Jezebel and Ahab and Herod, Herodias and John the Baptist, I would say that's a stronger one. That's more like an 80%. And so I don't put enormous amount of weight on each one of these things.

I'll differentiate between them. On occasions, I will lower the weight that I put on something, and on occasions it will rise. And so what about - it's the accumulation of different details often that helps us to recognise connections.

So the pattern of the story, the sullenness of this man who's not getting what he wants, who's in struggle against some brother with Naboth and Ahab, and that sullenness again reminds you of Cain in his initial relationship to Ahab. And then you have the killing of the brother, the blood crying out, the punishment then as God confronts that person. All of those things strengthen the connection between Cain and Ahab.

They don't clinch it necessarily, but they strengthen the connection. And as you see, each one of those, there's a cumulative weight. Whereas if you just had one of those connections by itself, it wouldn't actually weigh that much.

So every time we see someone being sullen because they don't get what they want in Scripture, you can't actually do that much with that. But when you see it in this particular relationship, then yeah, it makes more sense. Think of another example of a story that has a very similar pattern, the story of Zeresh and Haman in the book of Esther.

Haman struggling against Mordecai, that one person he wants. He has everything else. The king, he's almost second only to the king.

He has this privilege placed within the land, but he just does not have Haman. He just does not have Mordecai, and he wants to kill Mordecai, and his wife Zeresh stirs him up to this action. Again, these are themes of Cain and Abel, and it's themes of Eve and Adam.

And as you read through that story, those things will help you to read what's going on. The characters of Cain and Abel and the characters of Mordecai and Haman are playing off against each other. There's this deep rivalry between the two.

Because Mordecai is getting the pleasure of the king, and Haman feels he might be

losing the pleasure of the king. And that just drives him mad. It's similar to Cain's offering not being accepted and Abel's offering being accepted.

These are, again, these are themes that we should be alert to. These are patterns that, again, they're not absolutely certain. There may be 50-60%, but when in conjunction with all these other patterns, they have a bit more weight.

They cumulatively bear more weight than each one of the parts will by themselves. And so often that little branch of argument might snap, but the whole framework will still hold weight. What else is going on here? I think that when you read the story of Ahab against the larger history of what's taking place within the book of First Kings, you'll begin to see the significance of the character of Ahab.

Ahab is not just an individual king. Ahab stands for certain things. Ahab is part of a larger history.

Likewise with Jeroboam, who has sons Nadab and Abijah, and he sets them up as priests, and he sets up two golden calves. These are themes that connect him with a larger story. He's someone who spent time in Egypt as well, and he's gone through a deliverance from Egypt type experience.

Nadab and Abijah were the two sons of Aaron, the two sons of Aaron who were killed because of the offering of strange fire. And then the golden calves were the thing that Aaron set up. So there's a connection there, a sort of wicked Aaron type figure in the character of Jeroboam.

And then there's all these themes from the Exodus that help you to interpret who this character is against the broader sweep of Israel's history. So it's not just focusing upon this individual, but recognizing this individual stands for these or relates to these broader themes, will help you to interpret those broader themes, but also those broader themes will help you to interpret this particular character. Likewise with Ahab in this passage, that Ahab is more easily understood when you understand the way that Israel is becoming more and more like Egypt, and its king like Pharaoh, that there are these patterns that are being played out.

These themes of Egypt have been playing throughout the book of 1 Kings. This is not novel. This is something that you see in the story of Solomon.

This is Solomon who increasingly becomes like Pharaoh. He's someone who takes Pharaoh's daughter. He's someone who gets chariots from Egypt, and he's someone who becomes like a harsh taskmaster.

And Jeroboam, his servant, spends time in Egypt to escape from him and then undergoes a sort of Exodus experience. Then he acts like Aaron, setting, he sets up his sons with ill-fated names as priests. And he has this, these golden calves, which remind you of the

great sin, the paradigmatic sin of Israel in the Exodus.

So all these things help you to read the story in terms of a larger set of themes playing out, not just individual narratives that are largely detached from each other. Now, this is again quite a rambling talk. I hope this helps.

There are a lot of other things that could be mentioned, but these are all the things, the sorts of things that I found helpful and some examples of how we can use this. If you have any further questions, please leave them in my Curious Cat account. And if you would like to support these videos, then please, if you found them helpful, then please consider doing so in my Patreon account, and I'll give the link for that in the notes.

Thank you, and hopefully see you again in the next day or so.