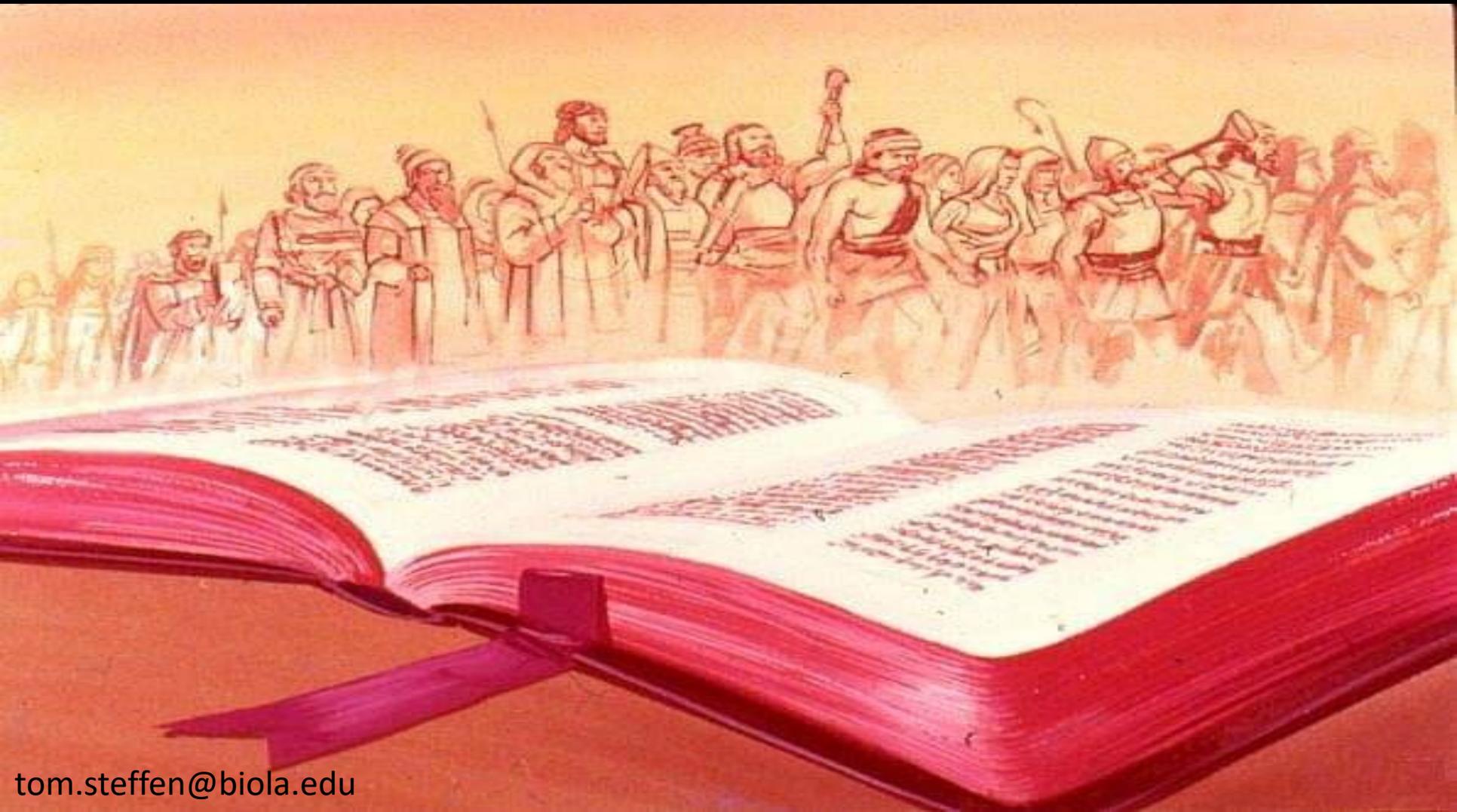


# Narrative Theology



"I prefer 'THUS saith  
the Lord' over 'once  
upon a time.'"

—Pastor



"Scripture is to  
important to  
leave to **story**."

—Pastor



"I have been taught how to outline and analyze Scripture, but I have not been taught how to capture the drama of story and communicate truth through it."

—Grad student



"Could it be that this narrative theology is just another methodology to meet felt needs of people rather than the ultimate need?"

-Grad student



How do  
**you** view  
Scripture?



# Bible as

Private Devotional?

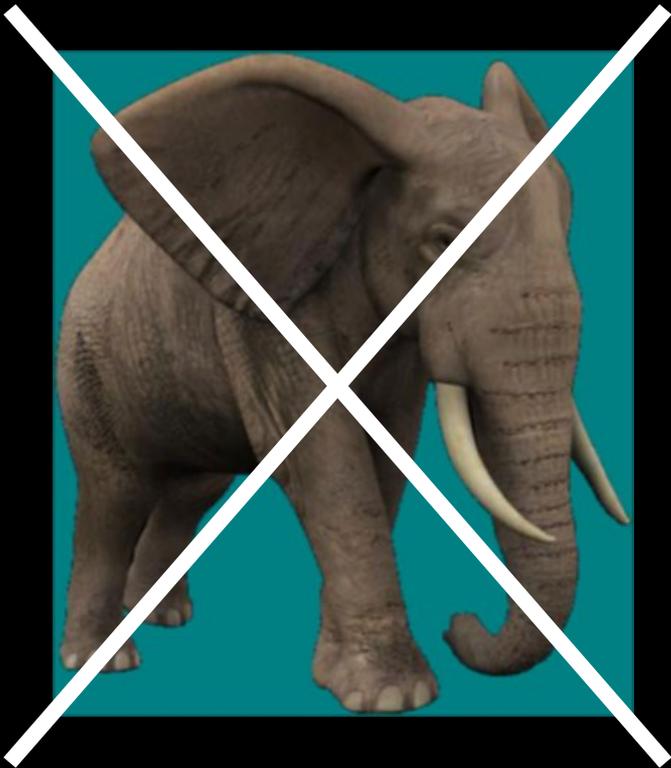
Self-help?

Moral manual?

Rule book?

Textbook?

Parts valued over whole



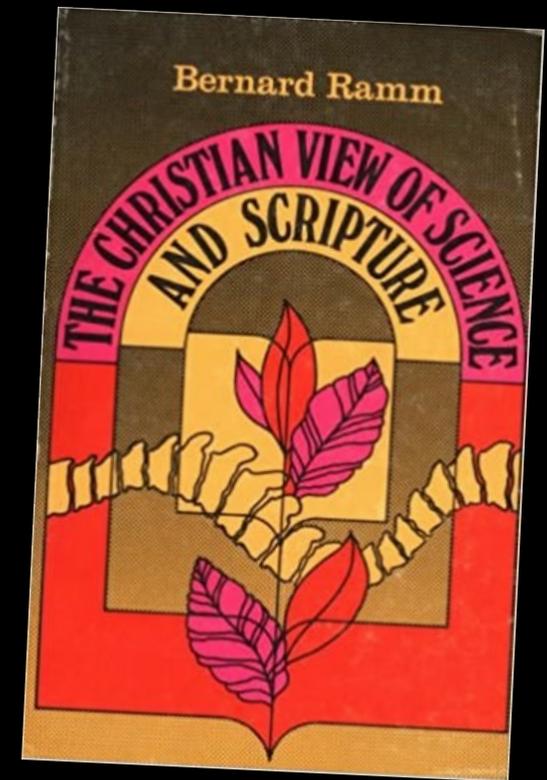
How  
did this  
originate?



# Systematic Theology

#1: "Training in logic and science forms an excellent background exegesis."

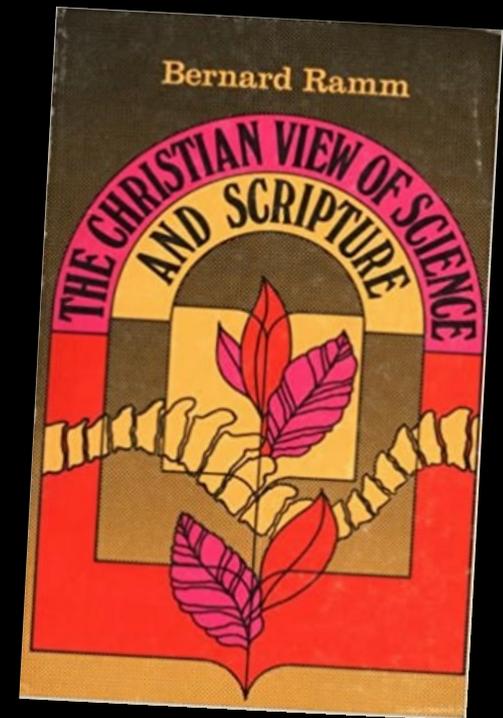
1954



# Systematic Theology

#2: "Systematic teaching of Scripture is the Scriptures **final intention.**"

1954



# Defining Theology

**A. H. Strong:** "the **science** of God and of relationships between God and the universe" (1972:1).

**Charles Hodge:** "the **science** of the **facts** of divine revelation so far as those **facts** concern the nature of God and our relation to him"

**Lewis Sperry Chafer:** "the collecting, **scientifically** arranging, comparing, exhibiting, and defending of all **facts** from any and every source concerning God and his works."

# Defining Theology

**J. Oliver Buswell (Presbyterian):** "Theology has its own laws, and the theologian **merely observes these**, confident that their observation will yield doctrinal fidelity to God's truth."

**Friedrich Schleiermacher:** "the **science** of Christian faith."

**Carl Henry:** "In brief, the Bible is a **propositional revelation** of the unchanging truth of God."

# Fragmented Bible

"...the fragmenting of knowledge within the seminary curriculum. Subjects and fields develop their own literatures, working assumptions, vocabularies, technical terms, criteria for what is true and false, and canons of what literature and what views should be common knowledge among those working in the subjects. The result of this is a profound increase in knowledge but often an equally profound loss in understanding what it all means, how the knowledge in one field should inform that in another. This is the bane of every seminarian's existence."



# Fragmented Bible

"The **dissociated fields**—biblical studies, theology, church history, homiletics, ethics, pastoral psychology, missiology—become a **rain of hard pellets** relentless bombarding those who are on the pilgrimage to graduation. Students are left **more or less defenseless** as they run this gauntlet, supplied little help in their efforts to determine how to relate the fields one to another. In the end, the only warrant for their to endure the that somehow **someday it will come in a church.**"

having



# Theology Perspectives

Systematic theology – philosophy based

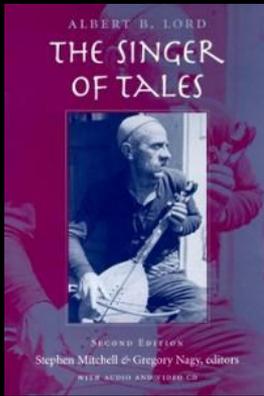
Biblical theology – “successive  
installments”

Natural theology – “heavens pour  
forth speech”

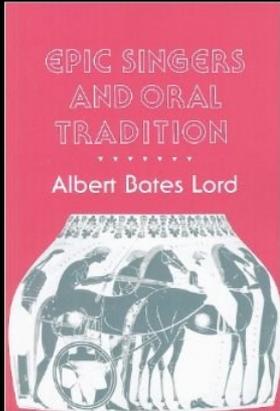
Historical theology – diachronic



# Story Movements



## Secular Story Movement



1930-X

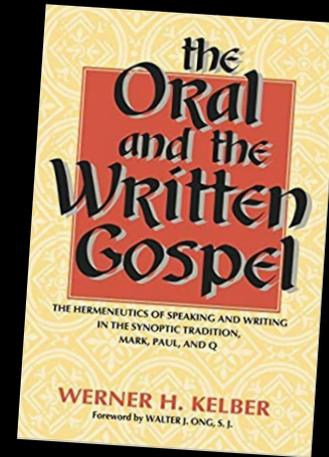
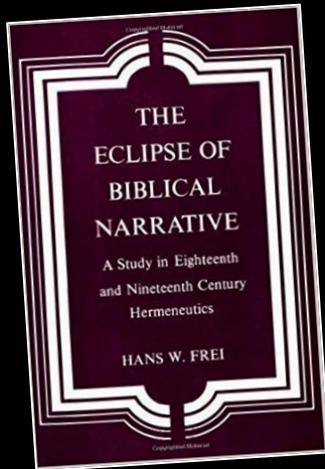
1970

1990

# Interpretive History & Orality Interrupts Theology

Secular Story Movement

Sacred Story Movement



1930

1970

X

1980

X

1990

# Story Movements

Secular Story Movement

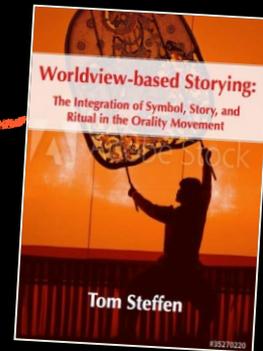
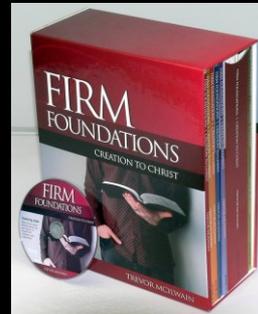
Sacred Story Movement

Strategic Story Movement

1930

1970

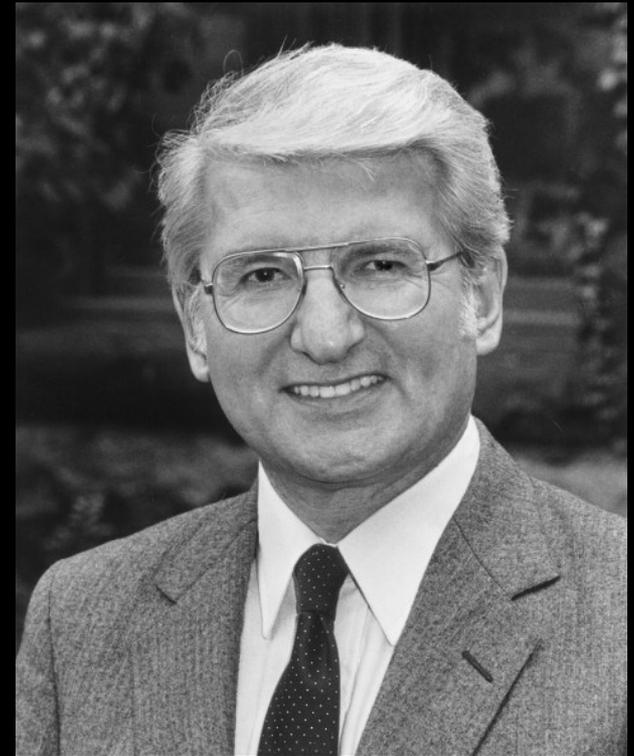
1980 X



# Narrative Theology

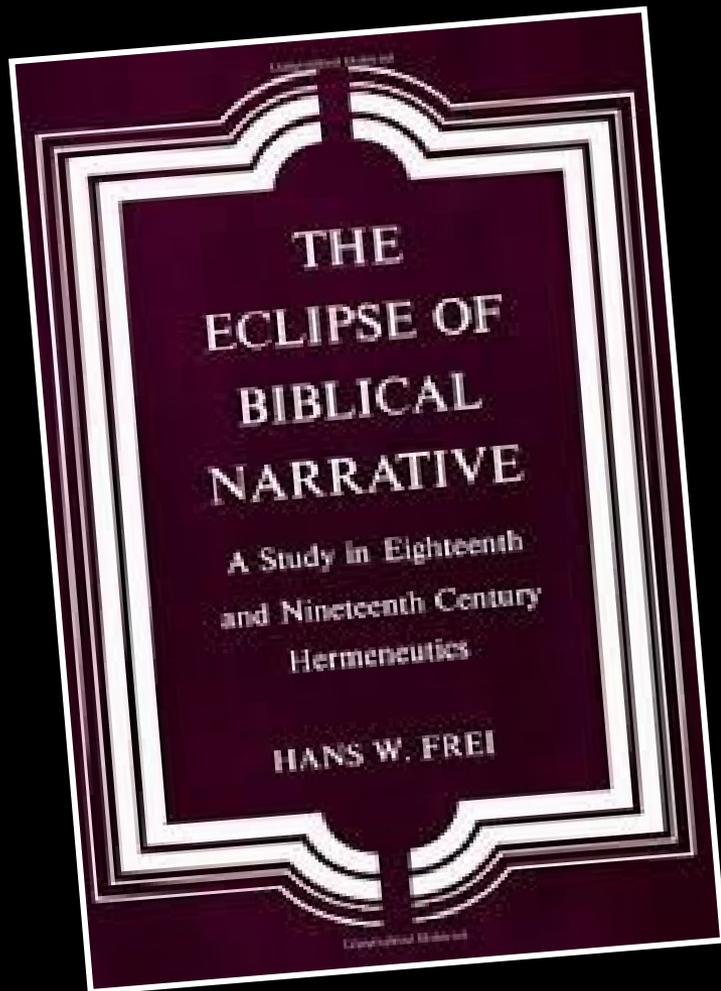
Gabriel Fackre

“discourse  
about God in  
the setting of  
story.”



(1926-2018)

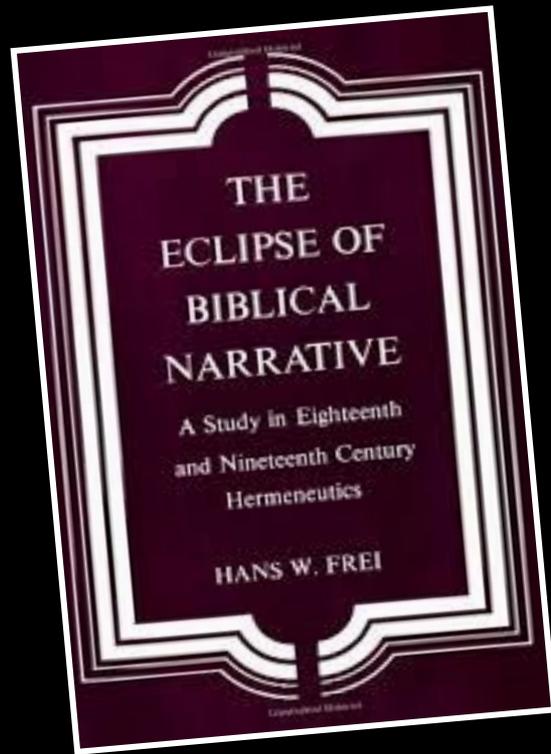
# Narrative Theology: Players



1974

Disrobing  
narrative  
from full  
textual  
meaning is  
destructive.

# Narrative Theology: Players



1974

**Bible** = literary text depicting unique characters & personages.

**Problem:** a "path not taken"

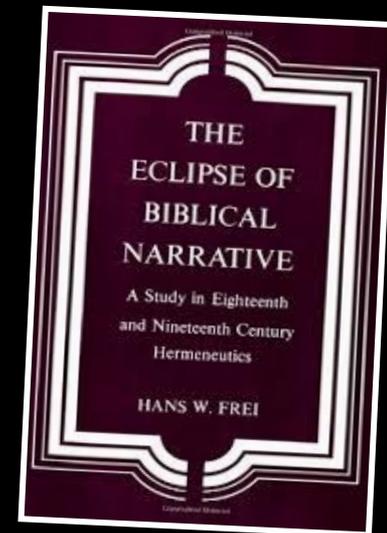
# Narrative Theology: Players

Enlightenment reduced theo to general principles est by reason

Restore "realistic narrative" =

combination of

"ordinary events w/ extraordinary happenings"

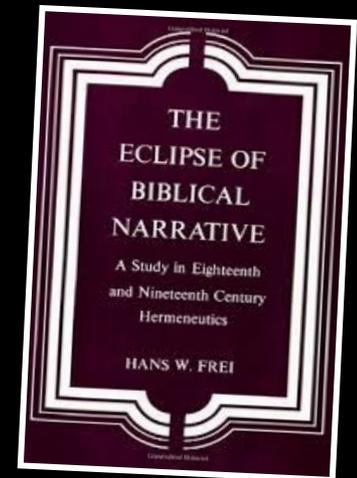


# Narrative Theology: Players

☰ Bible stories should be read from their perspective, not our's

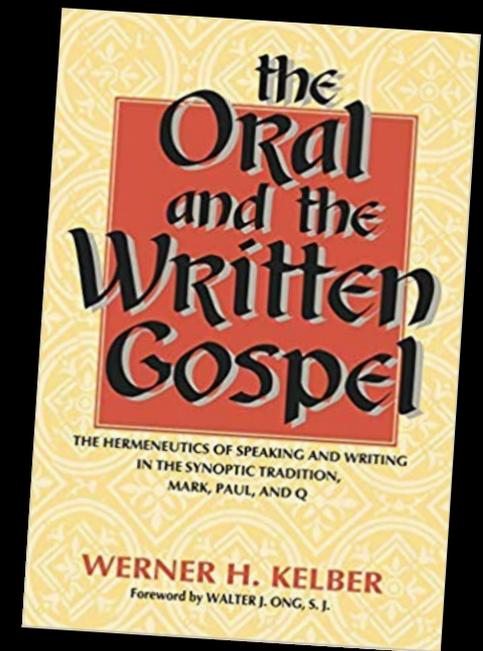
☰ Meaning of story defined by the story and larger story

☰ Story = meaning of doctrine, not an illustration of



# Narrative Theology: Players

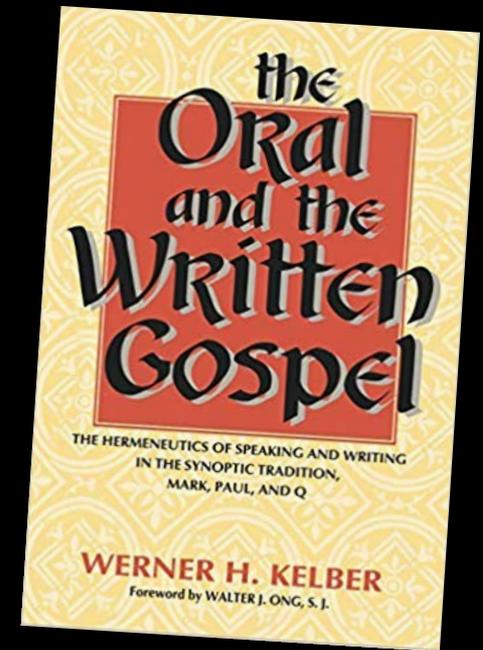
"The oral medium . . . handles information differently from the written medium . . . This axiom forms the premise of my work."



1983

# Narrative Theology: Players

"The nature of the medium helps determine the form and kind of knowledge preserved."



1983

# Narrative Theology: Players

"Have our  
'text-bound  
minds' blinded  
us to other  
possibilities?"



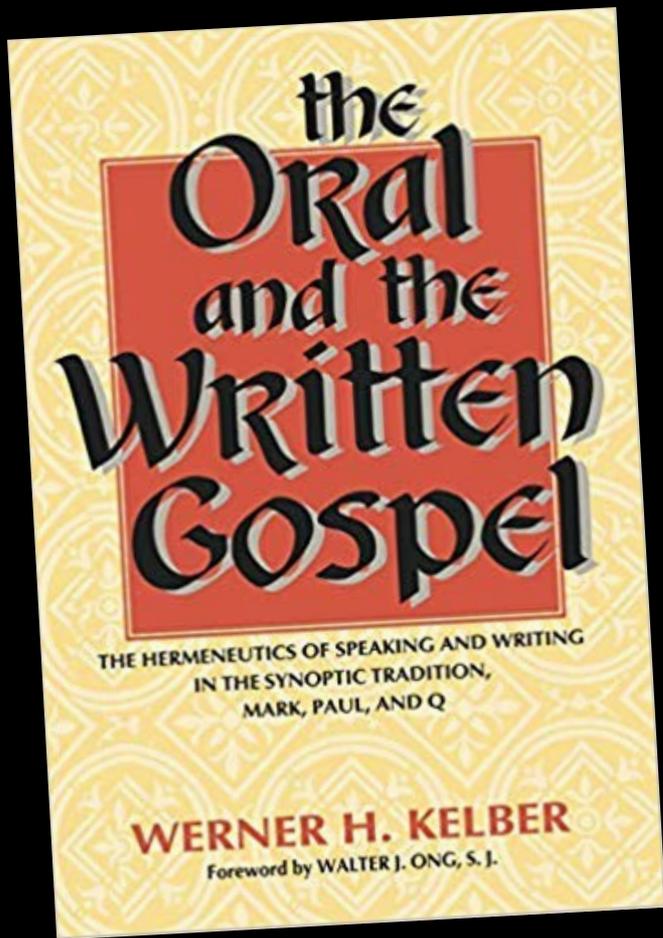
Werner Kelber

# Narrative Theology: Players

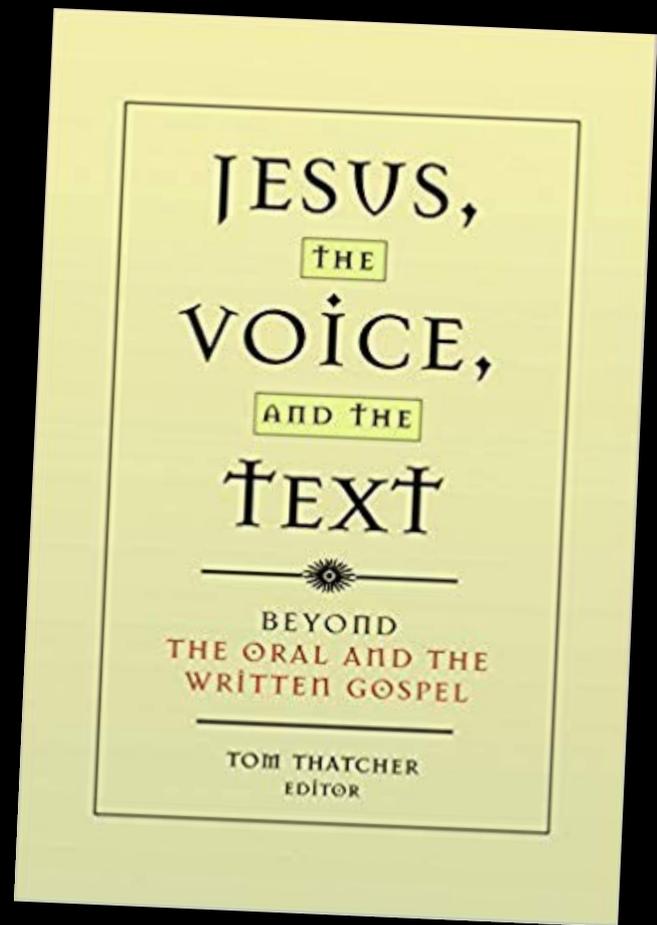
"If [only] we can  
wean ourselves  
from the notion  
that texts  
constitute the  
center of gravity  
in tradition."



Werner Kelber



1983



2008

# Narrative Theology: Players

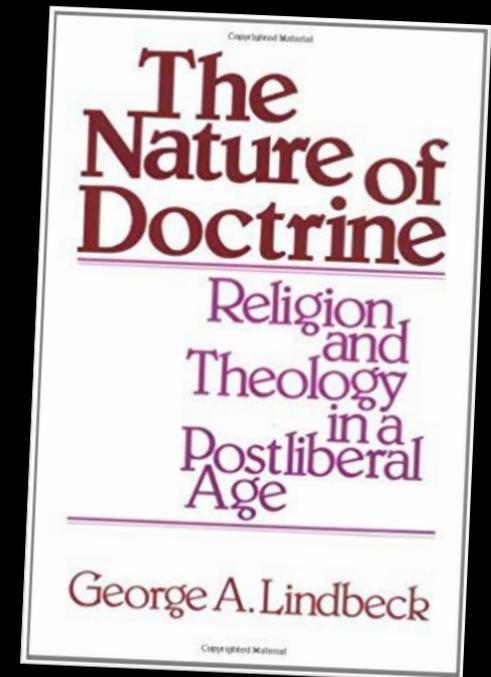
Coins "post-liberal"

Key book in forming post-lib theology

1984



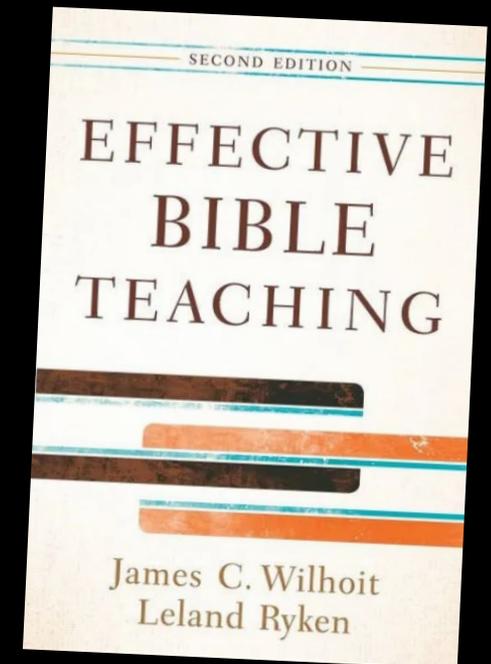
George Lindbeck  
(1923-2018)



# Challenges & Changes

Challenges the assumption the Bible is

1. Primarily a **conceptual book** (Bible incarnates its meanings in concrete images, characters, and events, and highly affective, appealing to our will, emotions, and imagination as well as our minds).

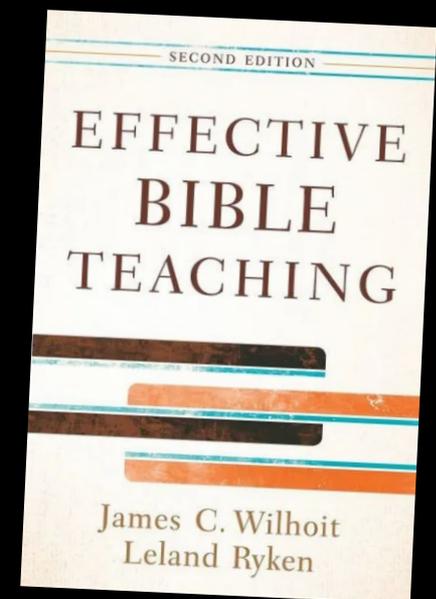


# Challenges & Changes

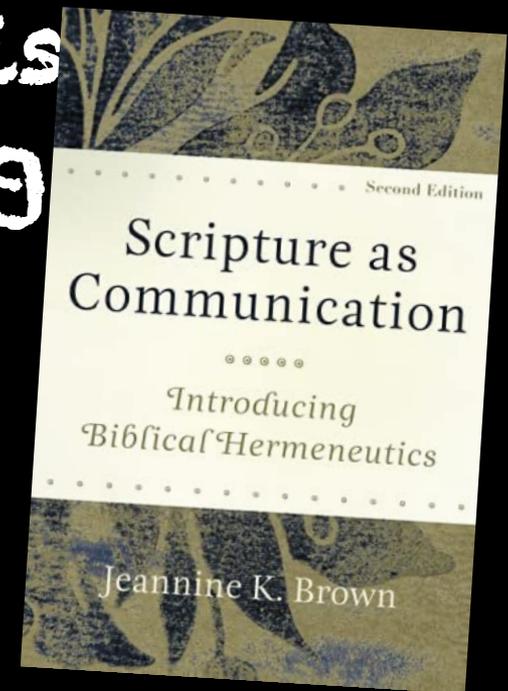
Challenges the assumption the Bible is

1. primarily a conceptual book

2. a theological outline w/ proof texts



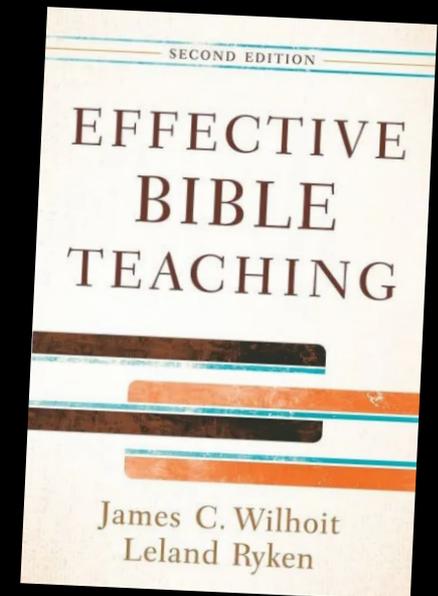
"the biblical authors affirm a theological story in their communication—the story of who God is and what God is doing in this world."



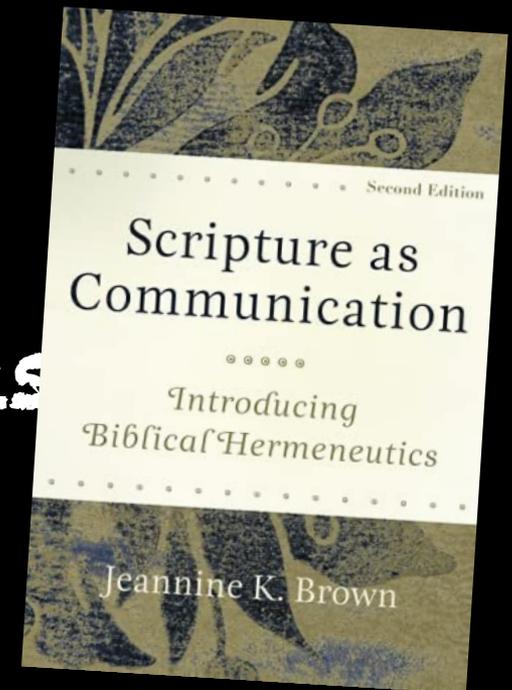
# Challenges & Changes

## Challenges the assumption the Bible is

1. primarily a conceptual book
2. a theological outline w/ proof texts
3. a single type of writing style



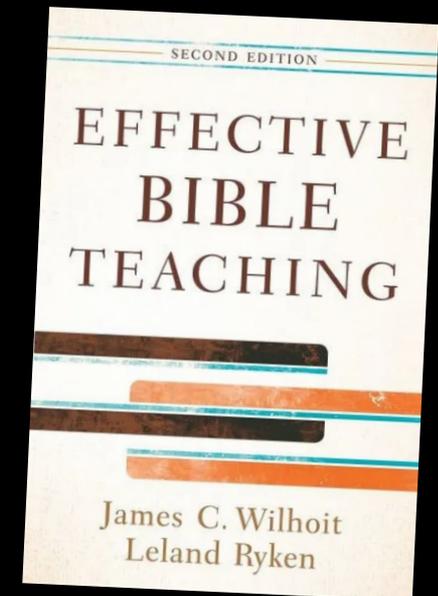
"Poetry, epistle,  
narrative, and all other  
biblical genres **show**  
**their narrativity** by  
assuming stories,  
affirming stories,  
and often  
subverting stories

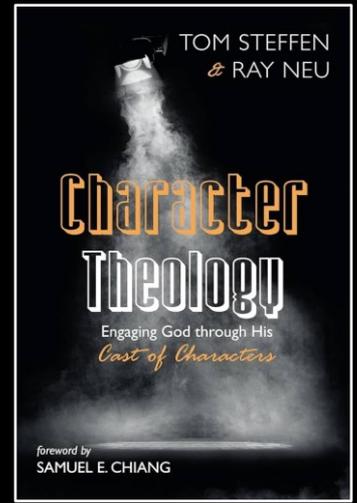
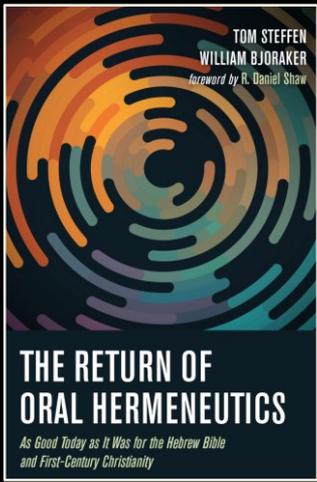


# Challenges & Changes

## Challenges the assumption the Bible is

1. primarily a conceptual book
2. a theological outline w/ proof texts
3. a single type of writing style
4. should be treated differently than other books





How does Nar Theo  
challenge our use of  
questions?



What is the oral  
imprint on your  
questions?



# Character-centric ?s



?s that teach

What emotion(s) did the father experience when the younger son asked for his inheritance?

Who made wise choices?

Who was shamed in the story?

# Character-centric ?s



**How does God's character differ from the older son's words/actions?**

**Which character put it in your head failure is temporary?**

# Character-centric ?s



?s that teach  
?s

What symbol / proverb\* / famous saying depicts each key character in the story?

Who would like to sing / draw / dramatize this story?

# Character-centric ?s



# Heresy-buster ?:

Who in/outside  
the story supports  
your conclusion?



?s that teach

How strongly do  
your questions  
go beyond content  
to reading characters?  
Reading rooms?



# Narrative Theology: Pros

- 📄 It focuses on Scripture
- 📄 It respects the narrative genre
- 📄 Listens to entire text vs. proof-text (Lk 24:27; Ro 15:4)
- 📄 It's earthy, holistic
- 📄 It connects



# Narrative Theology: Pros

- 📖 It's communal
- 📖 It provides other genres a home
- 📖 Serves as third party  
(soft bluntness)
- 📖 Takes us beyond  
Enlightenment guilt  
to shame



# Narrative Theology: Cons

- Other stories given same status as Bible stories
- Dehistoricizing = relativism
- Nar theologians often distance themselves from literalist view of Scripture



What did most  
of our teaching  
about how  
we view the  
Bible?

miss

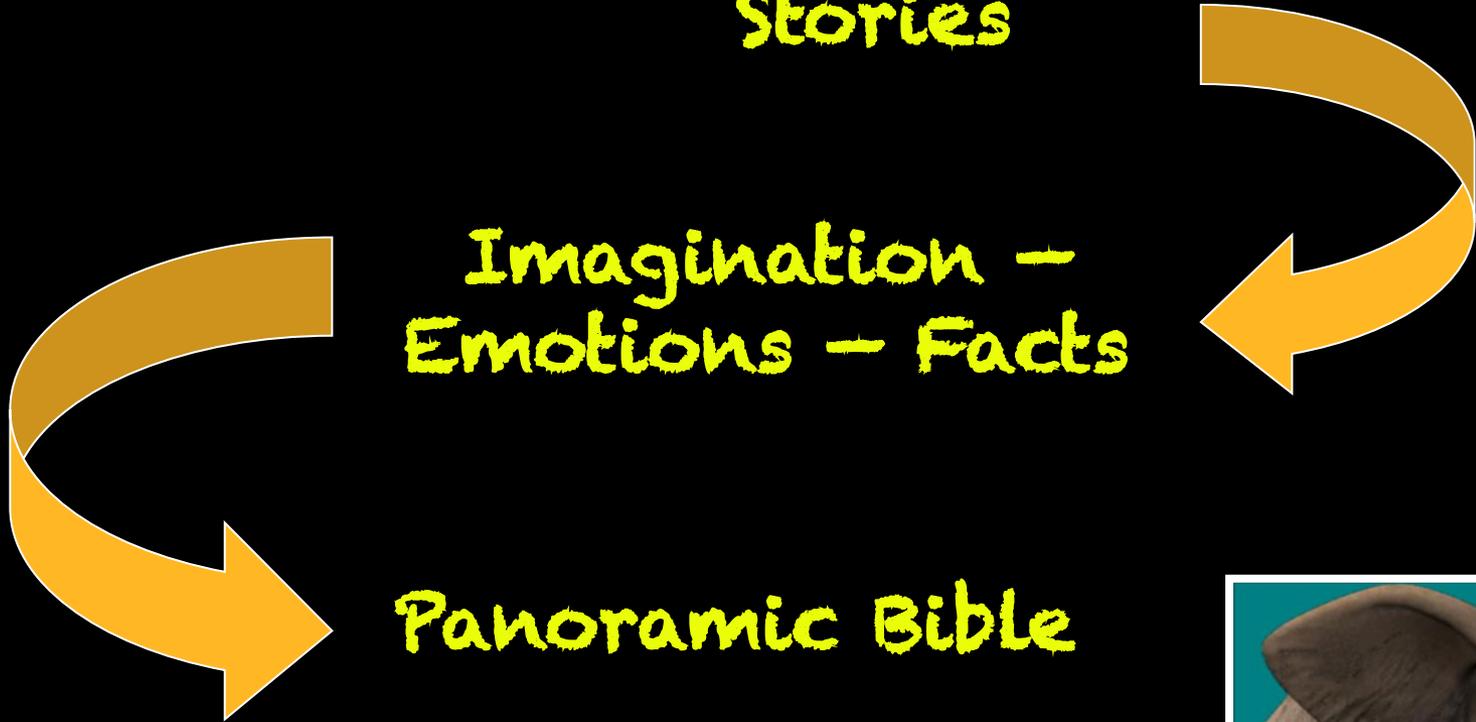


# Bible as Sacred Storybook

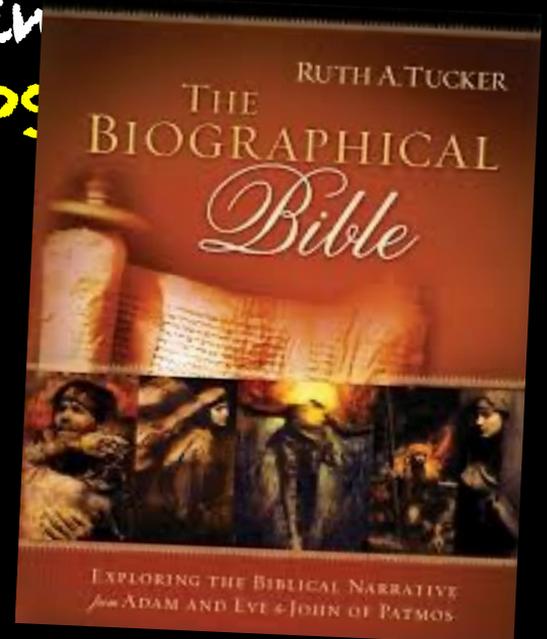
Stories

Imagination –  
Emotions – Facts

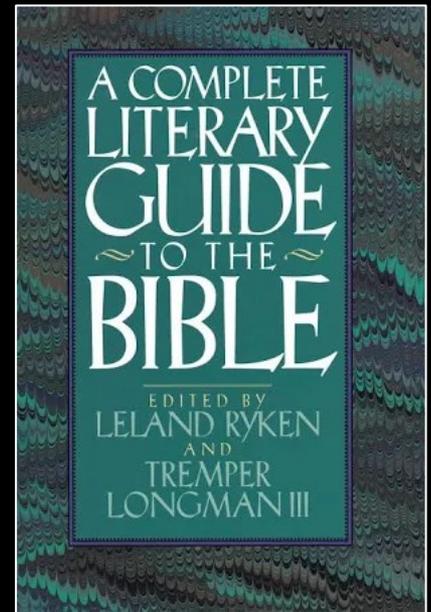
Panoramic Bible



"for many publishers and preachers and ordinary people, the Bible is largely a manual of propositions. The colorful personalities pushing their way out of its pages are seen as secondary—if that. But any attempt to turn this incredible chronicle into a theological dissertation destroys the very essence of its message. We learn how to live and how to die by putting ourselves in the narrative. Indeed, we recognize these characters by looking the mirror."

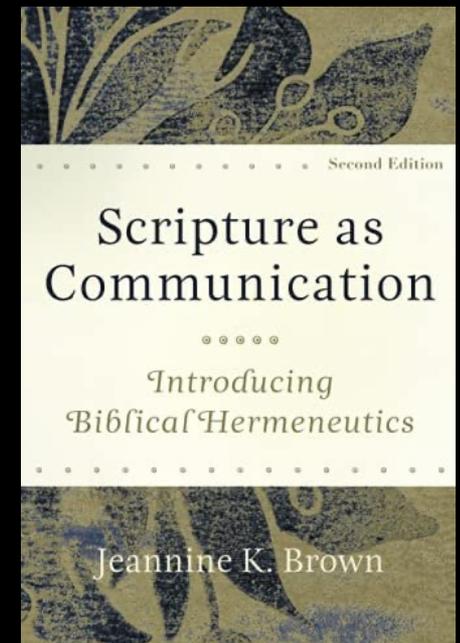
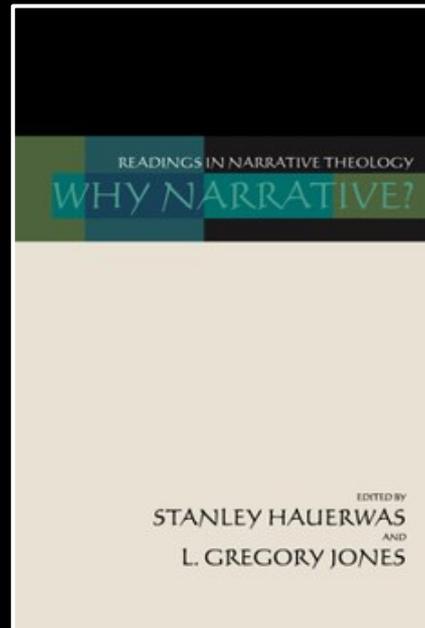
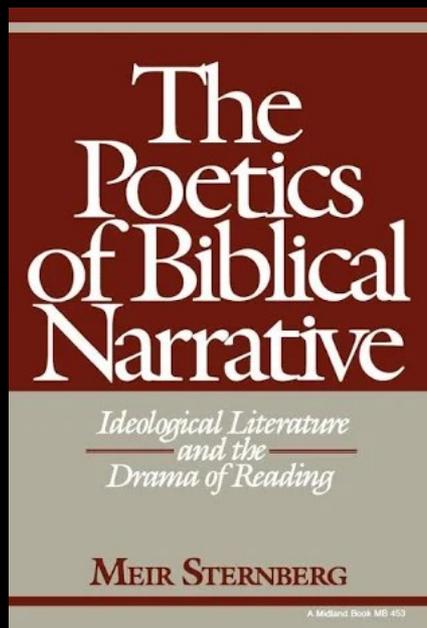
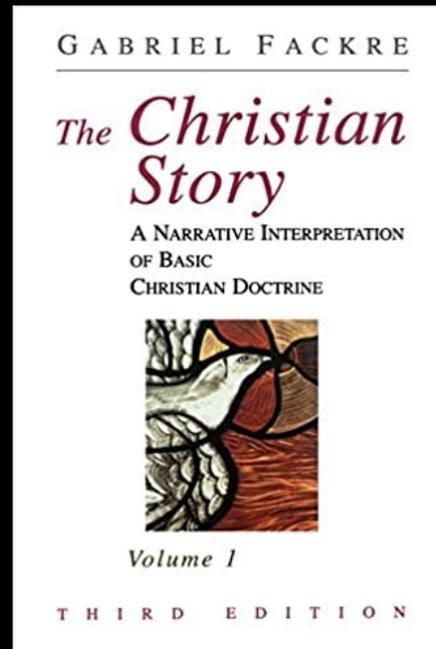
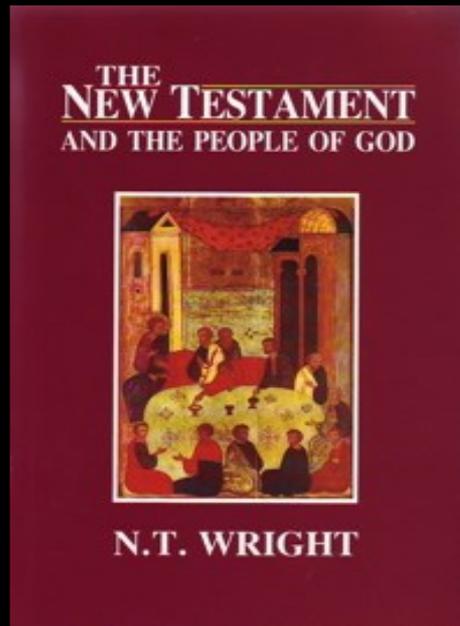
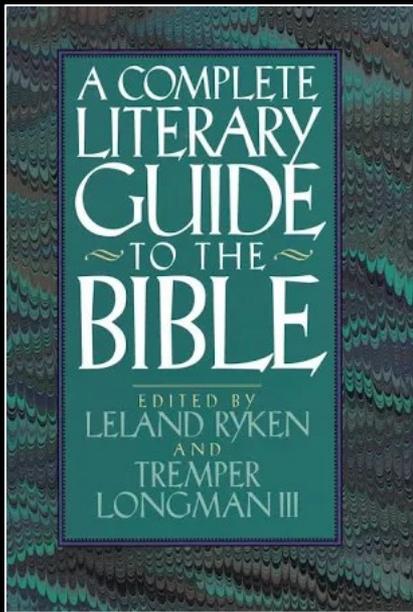


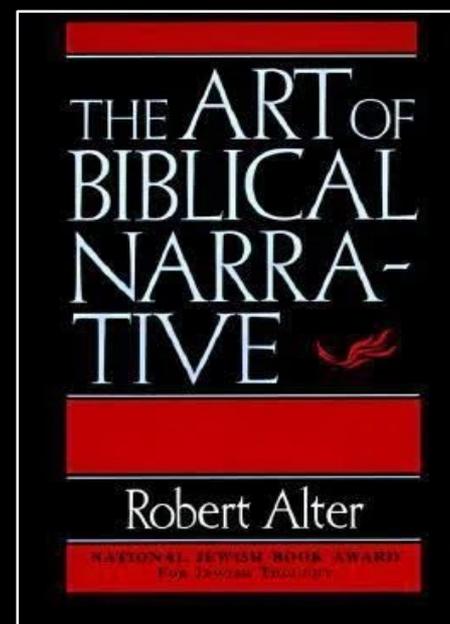
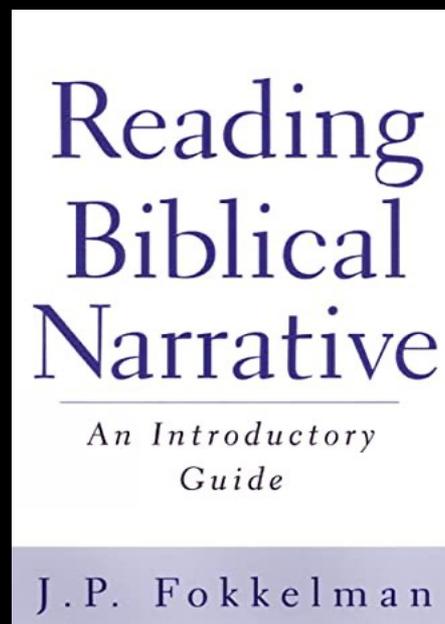
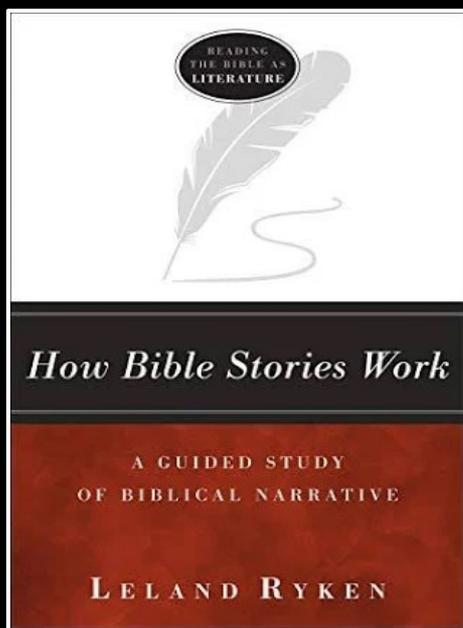
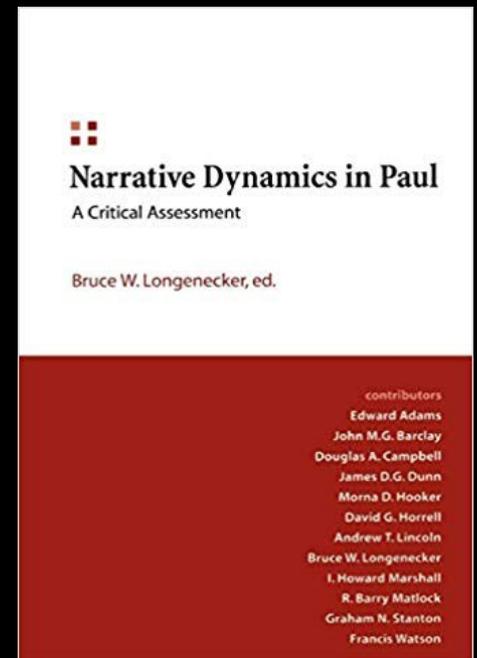
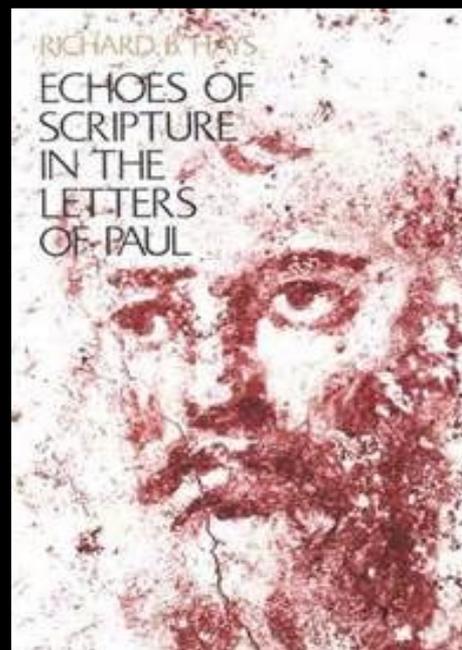
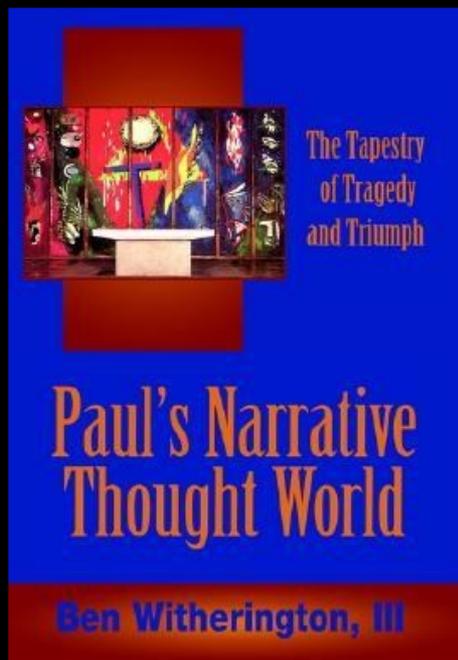
Bible "is an **affective book** that communicates its meaning by **moving the feelings and the will** of its readers."



"Let the Bible be the Bible."









Which has **primacy**,  
narrative theology  
**or** sci-based  
theology? Why?





How does the  
meaning of  
narratives differ  
from the meaning  
of facts?





How does Nat Theo  
challenge our  
**fragmented** grasp  
of Scripture?





How does Nar Theo  
take us beyond  
propositional logic?  
What different  
logic is required?





How does Nat Theo  
challenge our grasp  
of the **epistles**?



# The ~~End~~ Beginning

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