

"READING THE SCRIPTURE STORY"

(Romans 9:1-11:36)

Douglas Moo

Paul's reading of the Old Testament against a broad theological background says something to us about our own reading of the Scriptures. Scholars debate about whether modern Christians should interpret and apply the Old Testament with the same degree of creativity that the New Testament writers did. But surely we should follow their lead in reading the Old Testament as a single integral story about God's plan of redemption that finds its fulfillment in Christ. Yet too many of us do not know the story well enough to do that. We read bits and pieces of the Old Testament over time, but often have little idea about how the whole thing fits together. Would we read a novel of Dickens like that—opening up a chapter or a page at random and seeing what "we can get out of it"?

Admittedly, the Bible cannot ultimately be compared to a novel, and we can learn a great deal by reading a single psalm, proverb, or book. But we will not appreciate the significance of specific texts until we have an idea of where they fit into the story line. Years ago preachers and teachers could assume that most of their listeners knew that story line. They were addressing people who had grown up with the biblical story, whether in church or in the culture. But we cannot assume that any more in our post-Christian society. At the seminary where I teach, we have had to revamp our curriculum, installing some basic Bible survey requirements for graduate students because we have learned we cannot assume they are familiar with the Bible's story.



Those of us who preach and teach, therefore, need to take more seriously the importance of helping the people to whom we minister to see the big picture of the Bible's wonderful narrative of God's redemptive plan. We need to offer classes that expose people to the breadth of the Scripture story. We need to make sure to show how specific texts inform, and are informed by, the Scriptures as a whole. And all of us—preachers, teachers, and laypeople alike—need to learn the "old, old story" so well that we can revel in the marvelous interrelationship between all the parts of Scripture.¹

¹ This applies to parents as well. Parents have a serious responsibility to train their children to follow the Lord and a huge part of that responsibility is training them to know the Scriptures well.