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Research Paper:
***Applying Syntopical Analysis to
Biblical Studies***

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Applying Syntactical Analysis to Biblical Studies

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1 TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Introduction	4
3	Literature Review	5
3.1	Traditional Approaches to Biblical Studies	6
3.2	Introduction to Syntopical Analysis	8
3.3	Intersections of Syntopical Analysis and Religion	10
4	Methodology.....	11
5	Analysis.....	13
5.1	Creationism.....	13
5.1.1	Traditional Approaches to Creationism.....	13
5.1.2	Syntopical Analysis and Creationism	14
5.1.3	Intersections of Syntopical Analysis and Religion on Creationism	14
5.2	Morality	15
5.2.1	Traditional Approaches to Morality	15
5.2.2	Syntopical Analysis and Morality	16
5.2.3	Intersections of Syntopical Analysis and Religion on Morality	18
5.3	Biblical Text as True History	18
5.3.1	Traditional Approaches to the Historicity of Biblical Text	18
5.3.2	2. Syntopical Analysis and Biblical Historicity.....	19
5.3.3	Intersections of Syntopical Analysis and Religion on Biblical Historicity ...	21
6	Conclusion	21
7	References	23
7.1	Traditional Approaches	23
7.2	Syntopical Analysis	25
7.3	Intersections of Syntopical Analysis and Religion	26



2 INTRODUCTION

Biblical studies, rooted in centuries of scholarly inquiry, has primarily relied on the method of exegesis for interpreting sacred scriptures. This method emphasizes understanding texts in their historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts (Barton, 1984). Traditional methodologies, such as textual criticism, literary analysis, and the historical-grammatical method, have formed the bedrock of this academic discipline, enabling comprehensive interpretation of biblical content (Fee & Stuart, 2014). However, as academic paradigms shift, there is a growing interest in evaluating alternative methodologies that offer nuanced perspectives.

Syntopical analysis, introduced by Morton Adler, is one such method. It emphasizes reading multiple books on a particular topic to facilitate a breadth of understanding rather than a depth in a single source (Adler & Van Doren, 1972). Although traditionally applied to secular texts, its potential applicability to religious studies has been acknowledged. For example, Bloom's exploration of the Western literary canon demonstrates a syntopical approach by drawing parallels between canonical works and Biblical texts (Bloom, 1995). Similarly, techniques that identify shared themes across various religious scriptures can expand the horizon of understanding (Frye, 1982).

The methodology of reading and understanding texts has evolved remarkably over the centuries. Among these methodologies, syntopical analysis, as introduced by Mortimer J. Adler in "How to Read a Book," provides readers with a method to understand complex ideas by reading and comparing them across various works. While this method has been applied extensively in fields such as philosophy, history, and literature, its application in the realm of Biblical studies still needs to be explored.

Given this context, this research addresses the following question: Can syntopical analysis provide a deeper understanding of biblical texts across different books? By evaluating the intersections between traditional Biblical studies and syntopical analysis, this study will use key texts such as Adler's *How to Read a Book* (1972) and Barton's *Reading the Old Testament* (1984) to determine the potential merits and limitations of integrating syntopical analysis into biblical studies.



3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The expansive realm of Biblical studies has long been dominated by traditional methodologies that prioritize depth and context. At the heart of this approach lies exegesis, a meticulous method wherein scriptures are interpreted in their historical and cultural contexts. Key techniques like textual criticism examine the text's origin and transmission, while literary analysis assesses its structures, and the historical-grammatical methodology interprets the Bible grounded in its historical setting and linguistic peculiarities (Fee & Stuart, 2014).

Parallel to these traditional methodologies, the 20th century witnessed the emergence of alternative analytical approaches, notably the syntopical analysis advocated by Morton Adler. In stark contrast to the in-depth exploration encouraged by exegesis, syntopical analysis emphasizes breadth. It posits that understanding can be enriched by reading multiple sources on a given topic, allowing for a comparison and contrast of diverse viewpoints (Adler & Van Doren, 1972). This approach inherently champions a holistic comprehension of subject matters, presenting an expansive view rather than a narrow focus.

Marrying these diverse methodologies to religion, especially Biblical studies, presents intriguing possibilities. There have been measured attempts in the academic realm to meld syntopical techniques with religious texts. Such endeavors often underscore shared themes across scriptures, offering a unique perspective that highlights both commonalities and disparities (Frye, 1982).

In assessing the landscape of Biblical studies, it's evident that the field has always been in flux, continually evolving as scholars introduce and integrate innovative methodologies. The decision to spotlight traditional biblical studies, syntopical analysis, and their intersection in this literature review stems from a keen interest in this evolution. As Biblical studies stands at the crossroads of tradition and innovation, there's a pressing need to ascertain how newer methodologies like syntopical analysis can complement, or even enhance, traditional approaches. In essence, the aim is to determine whether a broader approach can indeed yield a deeper, more nuanced understanding of sacred

Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

scriptures, effectively bridging time-tested techniques with contemporary analytical perspectives.

To further elucidate and emphasize the core themes underpinning this literature review, and to guide subsequent research sections, the three primary topics are:

1. **Traditional Approaches to Biblical Studies:** This encompasses the established methods, predominantly exegesis, that focus on understanding scriptures in their historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts.
2. **Introduction to Syntopical Analysis:** A methodology that emphasizes the breadth of analysis, advocating for the study of multiple sources on a given topic to achieve a comprehensive understanding.
3. **Previous Intersections of Syntopical Analysis and Religion:** This explores the limited but insightful attempts to integrate syntopical techniques with religious studies, spotlighting shared themes across different religious scriptures.

With these core themes identified, the subsequent sections will delve deeper into each topic, assessing their individual merits, potential intersections, and implications for Biblical studies.

3.1 TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO BIBLICAL STUDIES

Historically, the study of the Bible has been approached using exegesis, where scriptures are interpreted in their historical and cultural context. Methods such as textual criticism, literary analysis, and historical-grammatical methodology have dominated the landscape. The realm of Biblical studies boasts a rich tapestry of academic contributions, each delving into unique interpretative techniques or presenting context to scriptures. A comparative examination of the selected works provides insights into traditional methodologies and potentially sets a stage for the introduction of syntopical analysis.

Barton's (1984) *Reading the Old Testament: Method in biblical study* serves as an enlightening resource, dissecting various methodologies applied specifically to Old Testament studies. The comprehensive nature of his

Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

discourse offers an opportunity to juxtapose traditional methodologies against the breadth-oriented approach of syntopical analysis.

Similarly, *The Jewish study Bible: Second edition* by Berlin & Brettler (2014) provides a dense commentary on the Old Testament, albeit from a Jewish lens. The richness of its annotations and methodologies might act as a fertile ground for comparison, especially when applying a syntopical approach.

The works of Fee & Stuart (2014) and Hayes & Holladay (1982) navigate the domain of understanding and interpreting the Bible. While Fee & Stuart introduce guidelines to grasp the Bible's essence, Hayes & Holladay construct a manual accentuating the traditional tenets of biblical exegesis. Both texts, in their own right, offer foundational context upon which the merits of syntopical analysis can be deliberated.

Furthering the exploration of the New Testament, McKnight's (2005) discourse on interpretative techniques offers a rich contrast to syntopical analysis. His analysis of the variegated methods employed can act as a counterpoint, enhancing the depth of our comparative study.

Osborne's (2006) foray into hermeneutics with *The Hermeneutical spiral* showcases the intricate cycles of biblical interpretation. His insights act as an essential compass for understanding the multi-layered nature of biblical studies and can serve as an anchor when contrasting with the breadth of syntopical analysis.

Delving deeper into biblical criticism, Soulen & Soulen's (2001) handbook offers a panoramic view of traditional methodologies. Given its encompassing nature, it serves as a linchpin for understanding traditional interpretative techniques.

Stuart's (1984) handbook, reminiscent of Hayes & Holladay's manual, offers meticulous techniques for Old Testament exegesis. Its focus and specificity make it a treasure trove for researchers looking to understand, and later contrast, traditional interpretative techniques against syntopical methods.

Lastly, Walton (2006) provides a refreshing perspective by placing the Old Testament amidst other ancient Near Eastern literature. This work has implicit



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

syntopical undertones, as it introduces comparative themes across cultures, serving as an implicit nod to the advantages of syntopical analysis.

These works, in their collective essence, map out the terrain of biblical studies, emphasizing traditional methods of exegesis, interpretation, and context. While many do not explicitly utilize syntopical analysis, their exhaustive treatments of scripture provide ample material for comparison. It is upon this foundation of established methodologies and rich contextual insights that the value and potential of syntopical analysis can be further probed and evaluated.

3.2 INTRODUCTION TO SYNTOPICAL ANALYSIS

A profound understanding of syntopical analysis is deeply rooted in exploring its application across varied disciplines and grasping its foundational concepts. The selected works provide rich insights into the evolution and application of syntopical reading, furnishing a productive ground for comparative exploration.

Central to the entire notion of syntopical analysis stands the monumental work of Adler & Van Doren (1972), *How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading*. Serving as the bedrock for this method, the authors meticulously introduce the levels of reading, underscoring the importance and intricacies of comparative textual analysis. The art of traversing multiple texts, synthesizing overarching themes, and discerning nuances is at the heart of this seminal work. Indeed, the strategies articulated by Adler & Van Doren are pivotal and form the core methodology underpinning this research.

In a deviation from traditional academic texts but with an intrinsic overlap in methodological approach, Bloom's (1995) *The western canon: The books and school of the ages* presents an in-depth exploration of the Western literary canon. Though the principal focus of the text orbits the formation and discussion of canonical literary works, the underlying approach is undeniably syntopical. Bloom's meticulous examination of intertextual relationships and his insights into the cascading influence of one text over another underscores the universality and adaptability of syntopical analysis, even within literary criticism.



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

One of the hallmarks of traditional biblical studies has been the method of exegesis – an analytical and interpretative lens that prioritizes understanding scriptures in their historical and cultural context. This method, illustrated by works like Barton's (1984) examination of Old Testament studies or Stuart's (1984) guidelines for Old Testament exegesis, hinges on delving deep into individual texts. The goal is a thorough understanding, with an emphasis on historical, cultural, and literary contexts. It is a meticulous approach, prioritizing depth over breadth, and seeks to unearth the author's intended meaning while considering the original audience and setting.

In contrast, the syntopical approach, as meticulously outlined by Adler & Van Doren (1972), encourages a broader reading strategy. Instead of a deep dive into a single text, syntopical analysis focuses on the comparison and contrast of multiple works on a shared subject. This method's strength lies in its ability to synthesize and extract overarching themes, insights, or contradictions across several sources. Bloom's (1995) exploration of the Western literary canon provides a vibrant testament to this approach, showcasing the interconnectedness and intertextual relationships among canonical literary works. Similarly, Manier's (1978) examination of Darwin's influences accentuates the utility of this method in weaving a richer, more nuanced tapestry from varied texts and contexts.

While both methods offer valuable insights, they cater to different research objectives. Traditional biblical exegesis, with its intensive, focused scrutiny, seeks to offer clarity and understanding to specific biblical passages or themes. On the other hand, the syntopical method, with its expansive comparative nature, endeavors to create a holistic understanding by drawing connections and discerning patterns across multiple works. While exegesis shines in its detailed, contextual analysis of singular texts, syntopical reading excels in drawing broader thematic parallels and intersections. In the realm of biblical studies, the marriage of both these approaches could potentially offer a more layered and comprehensive understanding of scriptures, both within their specific contexts and in relation to other texts or themes.

Venturing into the historical-scientific realm, Manier's (1978) work, *The young Darwin and his cultural circle*, offers an illuminating syntopical examination of the myriad influences that shaped Darwin's foundational drafts on the theory of natural selection. This work elucidates the power of syntopical

Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

analysis, demonstrating its effectiveness beyond literature or philosophy and into the domain of historical and scientific writings. By contrasting a diverse array of texts and influences Darwin possibly encountered, Manier's discourse serves as a testament to the method's versatility.

The collective insights from the selected works solidify the essence and adaptability of syntopical analysis. Adler & Van Doren lay the foundational framework, Bloom exemplifies its application in literary criticism, and Manier highlights its utility in historical and scientific exploration. Each work, in its own capacity, accentuates the depth, breadth, and versatility of syntopical reading, validating its potential application in biblical studies. This comparative exploration not only fortifies our understanding of syntopical analysis but also paves the way for its innovative application in subsequent research endeavors.

3.3 INTERSECTIONS OF SYNTOPICAL ANALYSIS AND RELIGION

The exploration of religious themes, particularly within the context of the Bible, has benefited from syntopical approaches in unique ways. The ability to draw connections, examine recurring motifs, and juxtapose different texts can provide fresh insights into well-trodden territories. Among the scholars venturing into this realm, Frye, Schwartz, and Miles stand out for their distinct interpretations and methodologies.

Northrop Frye's "The Great Code: The Bible and Literature" (1982) presents a compelling case of how the Bible has interwoven itself into the fabric of Western literary traditions. Frye doesn't just focus on direct biblical references in literature; instead, he identifies underlying patterns, themes, and structures rooted in the Bible that have permeated literary narratives. By doing so, Frye showcases the Bible not just as a religious text, but as a foundational literary cornerstone. This kind of syntopical analysis allows readers to perceive the Bible's influence more broadly, understanding its role not just within the religious sphere, but within cultural and literary ones as well.

Conversely, Schwartz's "The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism" (1996) adopts a thematic syntopical approach, homing in on the motif of violence across monotheistic religions. Schwartz's exploration goes



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

beyond a singular religious text, drawing insights from various scriptures and traditions, be it Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. The result is a nuanced understanding of how violence is portrayed, justified, and interlinked within monotheistic contexts. Schwartz's work exemplifies the strength of syntopical reading: the ability to dissect a theme across a plethora of sources, offering a multidimensional perspective.

Lastly, Jack Miles's "God: A Biography" (1995) offers a unique twist on syntopical reading. Instead of spanning multiple distinct books or disciplines, Miles extracts from the various literary styles and books within the Old Testament itself. In doing so, he creates a 'biography' of God, analyzing the deity's character development, actions, and intentions. It's a fresh lens, treating God not just as a divine figure but as a literary character with motivations, actions, and consequences. This internal syntopical approach, where different parts of a singular text are juxtaposed, reveals layers that might be obscured in a traditional linear reading.

In summation, each of these works underscores the versatility and depth that syntopical analysis can bring to religious studies. Whether by revealing broader cultural influences, delving into thematic intricacies, or reimagining central figures in new lights, syntopical reading opens avenues for richer, more multifaceted understandings of religious narratives.

: While limited, there have been attempts to apply syntopical techniques to religious texts, especially when examining shared themes across different religious scriptures.

4 METHODOLOGY

For the scope of this research, a deliberate selection of Biblical books was undertaken, encapsulating a balanced representation from both Old and New Testaments. To enrich the discourse and capture a wide spectrum of interpretations, other religious and philosophical writings touching upon congruent themes were also incorporated.



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

In adhering to the essence of Adler's syntopical reading methodology, the following structured process was employed:

1. **Preliminary Survey:** Initially, a comprehensive survey of all the chosen works was carried out. This preliminary step facilitated the identification of pertinent passages, recurrent themes, and the overarching narrative each text presented.
2. **Formulation of Questions:** A set of guiding questions was developed to steer the reading and analysis. These questions served as anchors, ensuring that the examination remained focused on formulating a coherent issue or problem suitable for comparison.
3. **Thematic Categorization:** Each identified problem or issue was categorized. Concurrently, key terminologies associated with each category were delineated. This step was instrumental in streamlining the vast amount of information and paving the way for systematic comparison.
4. **Synoptic Analysis:** An in-depth analysis was conducted, weaving through the discussions and arguments presented in the texts. This involved gleaning insights, understanding the essence of each author's viewpoint, and juxtaposing these perspectives to discern patterns, contradictions, or synergies.

To ensure a rigorous and systematic approach, the qualitative content analysis method was incorporated. This involved:

1. **Data Familiarization:** Immersion in the content by multiple readings to ensure thorough familiarization.
2. **Coding:** Assigning codes to text segments that represent specific themes or patterns. This was done iteratively, refining codes as more patterns emerged.
3. **Theme Identification:** Grouping coded data into potential themes and cross-referencing with the original data to ensure accuracy.
4. **Review and Refinement:** Continual review of coded data and identified themes, refining where necessary.

Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

5. **Final Analysis and Write-Up:** Integration of the themes and patterns discerned through syntopical reading and content analysis, leading to the formulation of a coherent narrative and insights.

This blended methodology, combining Adler's syntopical approach with qualitative content analysis, ensures a structured, comprehensive, and meticulous examination of the chosen texts, while also permitting a flexibility that allows for the organic emergence of insights.

5 ANALYSIS

5.1 CREATIONISM

5.1.1 Traditional Approaches to Creationism

The theme of creationism, while universally recognized, has diverse interpretations across various traditional biblical studies.

Barton (1984) provides a multi-faceted understanding of creationism in the Old Testament. This approach is deeply rooted in historical and cultural perspectives, often highlighting the direct acts of God in shaping the universe and life within it.

Berlin and Brettler (2014) offer a Jewish lens on the theme. Their commentaries unravel creation as not just the act of forming the world but as a declaration of God's supremacy and an unfolding covenantal relationship with humanity.

Fee and Stuart (2014) encourage a contextual reading of creationism, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in the intended message of the original authors. Their guide to understanding the Bible showcases the nuances in creation narratives, differentiating between allegory and literal interpretation.

Walton (2006) sets the Hebrew Bible's creation narrative against the backdrop of other ancient Near Eastern literature. Here, creationism is a shared theme but with variations in the narrative, offering valuable insights into how surrounding cultures influenced biblical authors.

Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

5.1.2 Syntopical Analysis and Creationism

Using the principles outlined by Adler and Van Doren (1972), a syntopical approach to creationism would involve identifying and comparing creation narratives or references across multiple texts, not just within the Bible but also in external writings. This method goes beyond surface-level readings, digging deep to identify shared themes, contrasting views, and underlying philosophies.

Bloom's (1995) examination of the Western literary canon, while not explicitly about creationism, demonstrates syntopical reading's effectiveness in understanding thematic influences. Reading the Bible in tandem with other works of the Western canon might reveal patterns in how creationism has shaped literary narratives over the ages.

Similarly, Manier (1978), through his syntopical exploration of influences on Darwin, showcases the contrasting themes of creationism and evolution. This kind of analysis highlights how creation narratives have been juxtaposed against scientific discourses and the ensuing debates in the intellectual realm.

5.1.3 Intersections of Syntopical Analysis and Religion on Creationism

This approach seeks to identify how the theme of creationism has been represented across different religious and literary traditions.

Frye (1982), in his syntopical reading of the Bible in relation to Western literature, illustrates the omnipresence of biblical patterns. Creationism is not just about the genesis of life but is intrinsically linked with themes of redemption, fall, and resurrection. The cyclical nature of these themes speaks volumes about human understanding and representation of creation.

Schwartz (1996), while primarily focused on violence in monotheism, touches upon creationism as a backdrop. The juxtaposition of creation and destruction, birth and death, provides a comprehensive view of theological perspectives on existence.

Lastly, Miles (1995) offers an exceptional reading of the Old Testament that could be labeled syntopical in spirit. By weaving together various books and literary styles within scripture, Miles presents God's portrayal in the light

Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

of creation, among other themes. It's a testament to the complexity and depth the theme of creationism holds within religious narratives.

In sum, creationism, while a universally acknowledged theme, holds various interpretations and representations across different methodologies. A syntopical analysis, grounded in traditional methods and explored through intersections with other disciplines, provides a comprehensive understanding of this profound theme.

5.2 MORALITY

5.2.1 Traditional Approaches to Morality

The Bible's discourse on morality is rich and diverse, and traditional biblical studies have sought to unpack these teachings in various ways.

Barton (1984) offers insights into the Old Testament's ethical landscape. Grounded in historical and cultural contexts, his analysis elucidates the origins and evolutions of moral imperatives, especially those tied to the covenant between God and His people.

Through Berlin and Brettler's (2014) Jewish lens, the intricate dance between morality and law, especially in texts like Leviticus and Deuteronomy, comes to the fore. Their commentaries illuminate the profound connection between obedience to divine laws and moral uprightness in the Hebrew tradition.

Fee and Stuart (2014) provide a hermeneutical framework for understanding the moral teachings across both Testaments. Their guidelines stress the importance of discerning cultural and historical contexts, ensuring that ancient moral teachings are interpreted appropriately for modern audiences.

In contrast, Walton (2006) explores the Old Testament's moral tenets in relation to other ancient Near Eastern cultures. The comparative study reveals shared moral standards and unique divergences, underscoring the universality and distinctiveness of biblical morality.



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

5.2.2 Syntopical Analysis and Morality

The syntopical approach seeks to contrast and compare the biblical teachings on morality with those in other philosophical and literary works.

Grounded in Adler and Van Doren's (1972) methodology, one would examine the Bible's moral teachings alongside external texts. Such a reading illuminates shared ethical principles, variations, and the underlying philosophical foundations.

As an example, we can perform this analysis on Morality using a syntopical approach between The Bible and Plato's *Republic*. Here, Morality, as a philosophical and religious construct, has been a point of contention and reflection across civilizations. The Judeo-Christian scriptures and Plato's magnum opus, *The Republic*, are foundational texts that offer profound insights into the nature of morality. A syntopical analysis brings into focus the confluence and divergence of their perspectives.

The Bible, encompassing both Old and New Testaments, provides a mosaic of moral lessons, commands, and narratives that guide adherents in their ethical choices.

Barton (1984) and *Berlin and Brettler (2014)* provide foundational understandings of the biblical worldview, highlighting the Covenantal laws and Prophetic calls as central to moral behavior. *Fee and Stuart (2014)* draw attention to the contextual interpretation of these laws, emphasizing the cultural milieu in which they were written.

The moral framework is centered on God's character and will. The Ten Commandments in Exodus and Deuteronomy lay foundational principles for personal and societal conduct. The Beatitudes in the New Testament, especially, focus on internal virtues and attitudes.

Plato's *Republic* offers a detailed exploration of justice and morality, grounded in philosophical reasoning. At its heart, the text is a dialogue on what it means to live a just life.

The allegory of the Cave demonstrates the importance of enlightenment and knowledge in moral reasoning. The philosopher-kings, as envisioned by Plato, embody the highest moral virtues and are best suited to guide society.

Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

Plato's tripartite theory of the soul divides human instincts into rational, spirited, and appetitive. A harmonious soul, where the rational element guides the other two, represents the moral individual.

Both the Bible and *The Republic* regard morality as essential for societal harmony. However, their foundational premises differ. While the Bible's moral imperatives are rooted in divine command and revelation, Plato's are grounded in reason and philosophical inquiry.

Using *Adler and Van Doren's (1972)* syntopical methodology, one can discern shared themes of justice, virtue, and the greater good. However, while *Bloom (1995)* might argue that biblical morality is inherently intertextual and influenced by its cultural milieu, Plato's morality is positioned as universally rational.

Manier (1978) offers a comparative lens, emphasizing the influence of societal and external factors in shaping moral perspectives. The Bible's morality, in this light, can be seen as a divine response to humanity's needs, while Plato's is an intellectual endeavor to discern the highest good.

The Bible and Plato's *Republic* provide rich tapestries of moral thought, each uniquely nuanced and profound. The Bible's divinely commanded morality offers a clear, albeit sometimes culturally contextual, path for righteous living. Plato, on the other hand, invites rigorous intellectual engagement to discern the moral good. In their intersection, a comprehensive appreciation of morality emerges, grounded in both divine revelation and philosophical reasoning.

There are other more traditional approaches also. For example Bloom's (1995) work provides a lens to understand the ripple effect of biblical morality across Western literature. While not exclusively focusing on morality, his syntopical examination of the canon reveals the influence of biblical ethics on shaping characters, plots, and overarching narratives. Manier (1978) offers a valuable contrast, highlighting the moral dilemmas surrounding the theme of evolution. A syntopical exploration in this light might juxtapose biblical moral imperatives with the ethical challenges posed by scientific advancements.



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

5.2.3 Intersections of Syntopical Analysis and Religion on Morality

Understanding biblical morality requires a deep dive into its narrative fabric and its intersection with various religious and philosophical traditions.

Frye (1982), through his reading of the Bible in relation to Western literature, brings forth the intertwined nature of morality with other thematic arcs. The Bible's moral teachings, he suggests, are not isolated imperatives but are deeply connected with themes of redemption, sacrifice, and divine justice.

Schwartz (1996), while examining violence in monotheism, also touches upon the moral underpinnings that justify or condemn such violence. His work offers a nuanced understanding of the fine line between moral righteousness and fanaticism.

Lastly, Miles (1995) presents a portrait of God, which in many ways, is a reflection of divine morality. Drawing from various Old Testament books, Miles' portrayal highlights the moral complexities, dilemmas, and resolutions presented in the narrative journey of God and His people.

In conclusion, the theme of morality, as presented in the Bible, is a multifaceted gem reflecting various hues depending on the light of interpretation. Through a syntopical analysis grounded in traditional methods and expanded by its intersections with other disciplines, one can fully appreciate the depth and nuances of biblical morality.

5.3 BIBLICAL TEXT AS TRUE HISTORY

5.3.1 Traditional Approaches to the Historicity of Biblical Text

The debate surrounding the Bible's representation of true history has been a focal point in religious and academic spheres for centuries. Many traditional approaches have sought to harmonize or reconcile biblical narratives with archaeological and historical evidence.

Barton (1984) provides a thorough exploration of the Old Testament's historical accounts. Through his study, the distinction between theological narratives and historically verifiable events is illuminated, emphasizing that

Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

the purpose of some biblical texts might be more to convey theological truths than historical facts.

Berlin and Brettler (2014) offer a Jewish perspective, detailing the narratives of the Hebrew Bible in their cultural and historical settings. Their commentaries discuss the potential origins of certain accounts, often juxtaposing them with external historical records.

Fee and Stuart (2014) emphasize the significance of genre recognition. They argue that not all biblical texts are intended as historical accounts, and recognizing this can aid in accurate interpretation. They provide tools to discern between historical narratives, poetic reflections, and prophetic visions.

Walton (2006) extends the conversation to the wider Ancient Near East, comparing biblical narratives with the historical accounts of neighboring civilizations. This comparison provides a backdrop that either validates or challenges certain biblical stories.

5.3.2.2. Syntopical Analysis and Biblical Historicity

The syntopical methodology contrasts and compares the Bible's historical accounts with those found in other historical and literary texts.

Using Adler and Van Doren's (1972) framework, one would scrutinize the Bible's narratives alongside other historical accounts. Such an examination might reveal common events depicted across different cultures or discrepancies in details.

The chronicles of history are both a reflection of events and an interpretation by those who record them. The Bible and Herodotus's *Histories* serve as monumental narratives that have profoundly shaped our understanding of ancient history. Syntopically juxtaposing these texts allows for a nuanced exploration of historical representation.

The Bible, with its vast tapestry of narratives, chronicles the journey of the Israelites, interwoven with tales of patriarchs, kings, prophets, and the life of Jesus Christ.

Barton (1984) and *Berlin & Brettler (2014)* shed light on the historical and cultural backdrop of these narratives. The Exodus, conquest of Canaan, and the Babylonian exile are but a few of the pivotal events narrated,



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

contextualized by the divine covenant and prophetic guidance. *Walton (2006)* emphasizes the Bible's contextual relationship with other Near Eastern historical traditions.

For example, often termed the "Father of History," Herodotus offers an extensive account of the Greco-Persian wars, but not without delving into the histories, customs, and geographies of various nations. His methodology, as deduced from his narratives, is a combination of direct observation, hearsay, and critical analysis. Notably, his accounts of Egypt, Persia, and Scythia provide a rich tapestry of the ancient world, marked by his inquisitive nature and storytelling prowess.

Both the Bible and Herodotus's *Histories* are products of oral traditions and written accounts, shaped by their respective cultural, religious, and philosophical milieus.

Using *Adler and Van Doren's (1972)* syntopical approach, one discerns points of intersection such as references to common rulers, locations, or events. For instance, the mention of Cyrus the Great in the Bible finds resonance in Herodotus's accounts, providing different vantage points on the same historical figure.

Bloom (1995) would likely underscore the interpretive layers that each narrative adds, considering their distinct purposes – one primarily religious and the other historiographical. Herodotus's accounts, as *Manier (1978)* might contend, reflect a blend of history and cultural commentary, while the Bible's narratives are inherently theological, often emphasizing divine providence in historical events.

The juxtaposition of the Bible and Herodotus's *Histories* underscores the multifaceted nature of historical accounts. While both texts provide invaluable insights into the ancient world, their distinctive perspectives and purposes render them complementary rather than strictly analogous. A syntopical analysis not only uncovers overlapping events and figures but also highlights the interpretive choices made by their respective authors in the face of history's vast expanse.

Bloom's (1995) analysis of the Western canon touches upon the Bible's influence and representation in later historical writings. Through his lens, one can discern how subsequent generations perceived the Bible's historical



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

accuracy. Manier's (1978) exploration of Darwin's influences can serve as a juxtaposition. Just as questions arise about the historicity of biblical accounts, Manier's work shows that scientific narratives, too, are shaped by various influences and might not always represent objective truths.

5.3.3 Intersections of Syntopical Analysis and Religion on Biblical Historicity

The Bible's historicity is further nuanced when viewed through its intersections with religious interpretations and theologies.

Frye's (1982) reading, while primarily literary, touches upon how certain biblical events are echoed in Western literature. These echoes might suggest a collective acceptance or questioning of these events' historicity.

Schwartz (1996) delves deep into the violent episodes in religious texts. By examining the historicity of these episodes, Schwartz provides insights into how historical events can be molded to convey theological or moral lessons.

Miles (1995), in his biographical reading of God, navigates the fine line between history and theology. Through his syntopical lens, Miles suggests that even if certain events aren't historically accurate, they hold profound theological and moral significance.

In conclusion, the question of the Bible's depiction of "true history" isn't merely about factual accuracy. It intertwines with theology, morality, and literature. Through a syntopical analysis grounded in both traditional methods and its intersections with other disciplines, one can appreciate the multilayered nature of biblical historicity.

6 CONCLUSION

Historical and literary analysis, especially when approached syntopically, is a nuanced endeavor that offers a profound depth of insight. As we've journeyed through various themes and comparative studies, the wealth of knowledge and perspectives gleaned from our selected bibliography has been instrumental.



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

The methodologies applied to biblical studies, as elucidated by *Barton (1984)*, *Berlin & Brettler (2014)*, and others, highlight the rich tapestry of traditional and contemporary approaches that have shaped our understanding of the sacred texts. These methodologies, from exegesis to hermeneutics, offer a comprehensive foundation for interpretation.

Adler & Van Doren's (1972) seminal work on syntopical analysis provides a robust framework for cross-textual exploration. This approach was especially illuminating when juxtaposing themes of creationism, morality, and historical accounts across different literary and philosophical works. The strategy they proposed encourages a deep dive into subjects, showcasing the interconnectedness of ideas and the depth of thought spanning different cultures and epochs.

Herodotus's Histories and *Bloom's (1995)* exploration of the Western canon, along with other pivotal works, showcase the vibrant tapestry of human thought, culture, and history. The Bible's profound impact on Western literature and thought, as highlighted by *Frye (1982)*, is a testament to its enduring influence and relevance.

By syntopically analyzing morality, for instance, across the Bible and philosophical works like Plato's *Republic*, or comparing historical accounts between the Bible and Herodotus, we've underscored the multifaceted and sometimes complementary nature of these narratives. Such analysis not only deepens our understanding but also challenges us to reflect upon the broader contexts and interpretations.

In essence, the journey through these themes and texts reaffirms the importance of comparative and interdisciplinary study. Through syntopical analysis, we unearth the rich dialogues that exist between texts, revealing shared ideas, contrasting views, and the ever-evolving nature of human thought. It's a reminder of the interwoven tapestry of knowledge and the boundless potential of literary and historical exploration.

In the expansive realm of biblical scholarship, the tools and methodologies employed determine the depth, breadth, and quality of insights drawn from sacred texts. One such method, syntopical analysis, as championed by *Adler & Van Doren (1972)*, offers a unique and enriching approach to dissecting and



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

interpreting biblical narratives. Yet, surprisingly, its full potential has not been ubiquitously embraced within the academic circles of biblical studies.

The meticulous process of syntopical analysis encourages scholars to juxtapose various texts, drawing out shared themes, divergent perspectives, and underlying philosophies. This method offers not merely an understanding of a text in isolation but situates it within a broader intellectual and historical context. By cross-referencing the Bible with other monumental works, such as those of ancient historians or philosophical treatises, one can discern the tapestry of interconnected ideas and influences that have shaped both the biblical narrative and the broader cultural milieu. Despite its clear benefits, the incorporation of this method into regular scholarship seems to have been sporadic at best.

One might postulate that the intricacies and demands of syntopical analysis, which require a wide-ranging familiarity with diverse texts and the ability to discern subtle connections, may deter some scholars from its consistent application. However, in an era of interdisciplinary study, the melding of traditional biblical exegesis with syntopical methodology can only serve to enrich and broaden our understanding. It is incumbent upon contemporary biblical scholars to recognize and harness the profound capabilities of syntopical analysis, ensuring it occupies its deserved place in the scholarly toolbox.

7 REFERENCES

7.1 TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

Barton, J. (1984). *Reading the Old Testament: Method in biblical study*. Westminster John Knox Press.

Barton delves into various methodologies applied in Old Testament studies, offering a comprehensive look into traditional and contemporary approaches. This work can provide a contrast to syntopical analysis.

Berlin, A., & Brettler, M. Z. (2014). *The Jewish study Bible: Second edition*. Oxford University Press.



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

This is a comprehensive guide to the Old Testament from a Jewish perspective. It offers detailed commentaries, methodologies, and annotations that can be used for comparison in a syntopical analysis.

Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. (2014). *How to read the Bible for all its worth*. Zondervan.

Fee and Stuart present guidelines for interpreting and understanding the Bible. While the book's approach is not syntopical, it provides context and interpretative techniques beneficial for this research.

Hayes, J. H., & Holladay, C. R. (1982). *Biblical exegesis: A beginner's handbook*. Westminster John Knox Press.

This manual on biblical exegesis lays out traditional methods for interpreting the Bible. It offers a detailed foundation on which syntopical analysis can be juxtaposed.

McKnight, S. (2005). *Introducing New Testament interpretation*. Baker Academic.

McKnight discusses the variety of methods used in New Testament studies. His exploration of the methodologies can provide a contrasting view to the application of syntopical analysis.

Osborne, G. R. (2006). *The Hermeneutical spiral: A comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation*. InterVarsity Press.

Osborne's work revolves around hermeneutics and offers insights into the cyclical nature of interpretation. This work is essential for understanding the depth and layers of biblical interpretation.

Soulen, R. N., & Soulen, R. K. (2001). *Handbook of biblical criticism*. Westminster John Knox Press.

This is a compact guide to the methodologies and terminologies in biblical criticism. Its broad scope offers a comprehensive understanding of traditional methodologies.

Stuart, D. (1984). *Old Testament exegesis: A handbook for students and pastors*. Westminster John Knox Press.



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

This handbook provides techniques and processes for exegesis, focusing specifically on the Old Testament. It's a valuable resource for contrasting traditional methods with syntopical analysis.

Walton, J. H. (2006). *Ancient Near Eastern thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the conceptual world of the Hebrew Bible*. Baker Academic.

Walton's work examines the Old Testament in the context of other ancient Near Eastern literature. This can offer a backdrop for a syntopical analysis, particularly when considering comparative themes across cultures.

7.2 SYNTOPICAL ANALYSIS

Adler, M. J., & Van Doren, C. (1972). *How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading*. New York: Touchstone.

This seminal work lays the foundation for the method of syntopical analysis. Adler and Van Doren describe the levels of reading and the art of comparison across texts. The strategies outlined are central to the methodology underpinning this research.

Bloom, H. (1995). *The western canon: The books and school of the ages*. Harcourt Brace & Company.

While Bloom's focus is on the formation of the Western literary canon, his approach is inherently syntopical, as he examines intertextual relationships and the influence of one text over another. It offers a lens to understand syntopical reading in the literary realm.

Manier, E. (1978). *The young Darwin and his cultural circle: A study of influences which helped shape the language and logic of the first drafts of the theory of natural selection*. Springer.

Manier's book offers a syntopical look at the influences on Darwin's early writings, contrasting various texts and influences Darwin might have been exposed to. This demonstrates syntopical analysis in the context of historical and scientific works.



Applying Syntopical Analysis to Biblical Studies

7.3 INTERSECTIONS OF SYNTOPICAL ANALYSIS AND RELIGION

Frye, N. (1982). *The great code: The Bible and literature*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Frye's work is a syntopical reading of the Bible as it relates to Western literature. He identifies Biblical patterns and how they've influenced various literary traditions.

Schwartz, R. M. (1996). *The curse of Cain: The violent legacy of monotheism*. University of Chicago Press.

Schwartz takes a syntopical approach, examining the theme of violence in monotheistic religions, drawing insights from multiple religious texts and traditions to form a comprehensive view.

Miles, J. (1995). *God: A biography*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Miles presents a biographical reading of God as depicted in the Old Testament, using a sort of syntopical analysis by drawing from various books and literary styles within the scripture itself, offering a unique and comprehensive portrayal.