

Biblical Interpretation— Old Testament Narratives

Christ's Community Study Center

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Interpreting Old Testament Narratives—Course Syllabus

Preface

In the preparation of this course, I have discovered more keenly the relevance of OT wisdom for answering the nagging questions plaguing the fallen world of mankind. It is my hope that the student-reader will appreciate the wisdom of Ecclesiastes as much as I have.

Introduction

1. Purpose of the course

- a. For the student to acquire methods, techniques, and strategy enabling him to determine—as far as possible—the original meaning of an OT narrative for the original audience.
- b. For the student to acquire the skills necessary for proper application of an OT text for the 21st century congregation, one that is faithful to the author’s original meaning and purpose for the original audience.

2. Summary of Course Content

The course is divided into eight lessons, each covering various sections of the book. See outline.

3. Course Materials

In addition to this textbook, the student must read an additional 300 pages (Bachelors) and 600 pages (Masters). Any book listed in the Bibliography or any commentary on a book of the Bible with OT narratives will be acceptable for additional reading. Furthermore, the student...

- May access our website: christcommunitystudycenter.org for additional reading. There are other courses there on interpretation. Save the document from the website to a flash drive and then print the document off the flash drive, or read it off your flash drive, or load it to your hard drive.
- May read books loaded onto their Kindles, as long as the book is related to the course topic. My book on Interpreting NT Epistles and NT poetry would be relevant to the interpretation of OT narratives; however, the books with graphics could not be put in Kindle format. Check the table of contents on your Kindles for books on interpretation or OT theology.
- Borrow books from the Study Center Library

4. Course Objectives

- (1) To study OT narratives in community with other students (classroom)
- (2) To provide students with a strategy or method for interpreting OT narratives
- (3) To convince students that much of God’s message for His church is found in the OT.
- (4) To enable students to discern the broad metanarrative (the big story) of the OT and how this metanarrative is traced through the NT.
- (5) To encourage students to read, study, and preach from the OT with regularity and confidence.

5. Course Structure

The course will follow the outline in the Table of Contents. At least fifteen hours of class attendance are required, plus outside reading and completion of questions.

6. Course Requirements

- (1) Participate in fifteen hours of lectures and class discussions.
- (2) Complete the questions at the end of each of the eight lessons. Because of the extensive requirements of this exercise, I am only requiring one other paper.
- (3) Read the textbook and the 300 or 600 extra pages of reading described in “Course Materials”. Write a three page evaluation (Bachelors) or five page evaluation (Masters) based upon the required reading.
- (4) Write one sermon (or Bible study) of seven pages double-spaced (Bachelors); two consecutive sermons (or Bible studies), 10 pages double-spaced (Masters). The consecutive sermons deal with a larger passage—i.e. two sermons on the same longer passage which cannot be covered in one sermon.
- (5) No final exam. If you carefully and thoughtfully complete the 80 questions, you will be very familiar with the material (and very irritated with your professor). No exam is necessary.

7. Course Evaluation

- (1) Class participation (10%)
- (2) Questions at the end of each of eight sections (75%)
- (3) Reading (3 or 5 page evaluations of additional reading of 300 or 600 pages)—(5%)
- (4) Sermon(s) (10%)

8. Course Benefits

The benefit of this course will be increased confidence in understanding OT narratives and their usefulness in doctrine, reproof, and edification.

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Interpreting Old Testament Narratives

Lesson One—Getting Off to the Right Start

Introduction

The interpretation of the Old Testament, as well as the interpretation of the New, requires both rigorous study and dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Both are essential. This is true because the books of the Bible have both a divine and a human author. The human authors were ordinary men who were affected by their own innate abilities as authors, their historical and cultural situation, their personal circumstances, etc. The grammatical-historical-cultural factors in each book must be investigated thoroughly to discover the writer's intended meaning to the original audience. On the other hand, the Bible also has a divine author, the Holy Spirit, who will not yield his truth to the arrogant reader who will not yield himself to the Spirit's illuminating influence, regardless of intellectual acumen and educational achievement. Only with rigorous study of the text and dependence on the Spirit can the interpreter interpret and apply the Scriptures in ways that are appropriate to the original application of the text to the original audience.

I. The Process of Interpreting OT Narratives

In *He Gave Us Stories*, Richard Pratt offers three major principles in the interpretation of OT narratives.¹

A. Preparation: Recognition of the Need for Rigorous Study and Total Dependence upon the Illumination of the Holy Spirit

The first of these principles is preparation which includes the acquisition of tools and power. Without the proper tools, we cannot do the job of constructing a building, but without the electrical power, many of our tools are useless. In the interpretation of Scripture—whether the Old or New Testaments—the tools of interpretation are the grammatico-historical methods we employ to go about making sense of the texts. The Bible has both a divine author and a human author. The human authors were affected and influenced by their ancient culture, political and economic circumstances, their education, personality, audiences, background, and so forth—all the influences which make up what is called the organic inspiration of Scripture as opposed to the erroneous mechanical view of inspiration in which the Holy Spirit dictates the text to the human author who is passive in the process. All of these factors must be considered in order for us to understand what they wrote and why they wrote it. Therefore, interpretation has a scientific element—an intellectual element—which cannot be by-passed. To be effective interpreters, we must think clearly and logically about how the Bible came to us progressively through history, doing the proper research to determine the meaning. Pratt recalls a conversation with a friend who was convinced that Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28) represented the Christian's ascent to God by way of personal effort. No amount of exegetical

¹ Richard L. Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories—The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives*, pp. 1-17

persuasion could move him from his heretical interpretation of this passage since “‘The Holy Spirit told me this is what it means, and that’s good enough for me!’”²

On the other hand, the Bible also has a divine author, the Holy Spirit, without whose help correct Biblical interpretation is impossible regardless of our interpretive skills. Often the Holy Spirit brings us beyond our personal skills by revealing truth to us which is not derived from diligent study.³ A burst of insight into the text comes to us suddenly like a ray of sunshine through the trees far more profound than anything we have learned from personal examination of the text or from our examination of commentaries. This is the work of the Spirit who will not limit Himself or His ministry to scholars or trained preachers. This is why those of us who have enjoyed the benefit and blessing of extra training must not be condescending to other believers who share their insights with us. Often their interpretations will be consistent with the original intention and purpose of the human author. This demonstrates that their insights are the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and for us to dismiss them as ignorant and uninitiated in the disciplines of hermeneutics is the same as denying the work of the Holy Spirit.

But further, the Spirit often works against our study of the text which is clouded by preconceptions (unproven assumptions) that we have brought to the text because of our upbringing and culture.⁴ God loves us so much that often He will bless us with the truth in spite of all our effort. This does not imply that we must avoid study in our quest for truth, but that we must not arrogantly believe that our study is infallible or that God is obligated to bless our labors under all circumstances.

Too often one or the other of these elements—tools or power—is ignored or marginalized (set aside as unimportant).⁵ When the intellectual tools of interpretation are over-emphasized, the interpreter falls into the error of arrogance, thinking that he does not need to depend upon the illumination of the Holy Spirit to help him understand the text. With enough expertise in Greek, Hebrew, historical studies, etc, he thinks he will be quite capable of what the text meant to the original audience without prayerful and humble dependence. When this happens, he grieves the Holy Spirit, thus hindering the exegetical process. “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11 NASB). Thousands of brilliant Biblical scholars fail to discern the intended meaning and application of Scripture by their unwillingness to submit their minds, hearts, and labors to the sovereign guidance of the Holy Spirit. No matter how brilliant or educated men may be, God will not reveal Himself to the pride of men (Prov. 8: 13).⁶

² Pratt, p. 4

³ Pratt, p. 6

⁴ Pratt, p. 7

⁵ Pratt, pp. 3-7

⁶ Waltke, p. 81, contributes this fallacious idea to the Enlightenment and Scottish realism which nurtured the belief that all truth could be discerned through unaided human reasoning—the “scientific approach” to truth. While not abandoning the scientific approach to matters which are discoverable through this method, we must understand the limitations of the scientific approach (philosophical positivism) to ultimate questions—like the origin and meaning of life. Science has no verifiable answers to such questions, only suppositions. Moreover, we must also understand that the scientific method is fallible. Modern science has corrected much of what we once believed. Only a hundred years ago or so, doctors did not wash their hands between patients, claiming that this was a waste of time. Likewise, what we now “think” we know scientifically will one day be discredited by further scientific investigation. Just as God must reveal the truth of Scripture, He must also reveal scientific knowledge. Yet, even as scientists must labor diligently to discover truth about the nature of life, Christians must labor diligently to discover what God has actually said in the Bible.

Walter Brueggemann is one such example, renowned as one of the foremost scholars of the OT. Brueggemann maintains that Yahweh's self-regard

“may emerge something like wild capriciousness [fickleness] and sovereignty without principled loyalty. It is this propensity [inclination] in Yahweh...that precludes [makes impossible] any final equation of sovereignty with covenantal love or with pathos....Yahweh in effect has no interest in Israel, but Israel is a convenient, ready-at-hand vehicle for the assertion and enactment of Yahweh's self-regard.”⁷

In stark contrast is the opinion of David C. Steinmetz, who says,

Scripture is not in our power. It is not at the disposal of our intellect and is not obliged to render up its secrets to those who have theological training, merely because they are learned....Because the initiative in the interpretation of Scripture remains in the hands of God, we must humble ourselves in His presence and pray that He will give understanding and wisdom to us as we meditate on the sacred text....the truth of God can never coexist with human pride. Humility is the hermeneutical precondition for authentic exegesis.⁸

The opposite error is no less prideful. For some well-meaning Christians, laborious study of the Scriptures is unnecessary; one must simply wait upon the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning of the text. “God told me what this text means” is a common refrain among Christians who have spent very little if any time researching the grammar, context, structure, and analogy of Scripture pertaining to the text in question. The implicit assumption is that the Holy Spirit will simply reveal His truth immediately to the individual reader through a burst of infallible insight. But this ignores several facts. First, the Holy Spirit has already revealed His truth to the human author of the text through inspiration.

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21 NASB)

Therefore, we need not presume God will give us the meaning apart from the text which has been previously revealed. If indeed, the Holy Spirit wished to communicate with each of us directly or immediately, He would not have inspired the writing of the Bible in the first place He is quite capable of speaking to each of us directly. This does not contradict what has been said above about the Spirit working beyond our study. The Holy Spirit may choose to grant us insight into the text apart from diligent study, but He is not obligated to do so, and we should not presume that this is His usual method of teaching us.

Secondly, the infallible inspiration of the Bible is has been completed in redemptive history. It is not continuously in operation through the gifts of the Spirit to the church. But if a person says that God “told” him the definitive (final) interpretation of a text of Scripture, he is claiming infallibility.⁹ If

⁷ Cited by Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 71, words in brackets mine

⁸ David C. Steinmetz, p. 71, quoted by Waltke, p. 81

⁹ The same can be said of those who claim to be NT prophets on the same order as the OT prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. The problem of extra-biblical revelation is always present for those who believe that God is still speaking directly to some believers. If He is, then all other believers must yield themselves to this extra-biblical revelation, lest we be in rebellion against God.

God has revealed the infallible interpretation of a text, then the whole church is obligated to listen to this interpretation and live by it. But inspiration is not the same thing as illumination. Through illumination, the Holy Spirit enables believers to understand the Bible—a ministry of the Holy Spirit which is continuous in the life of the church. The Holy Spirit illumines each Christian, giving him or her ability to discern the meaning of the text and its application for daily life.

Nevertheless, the gift of illumination to every believer can be misunderstood. While the inspiration of the Spirit to the original human author is complete, illumination is incomplete. In other words, we may partially discern the meaning of the text without understanding it fully, and often our interpretation is a mixture of truth and error—truth arising from the illumination of the Spirit, error from our own mistaken interpretation. Further, the degree to which the Spirit illumines the text for the individual will usually be proportionate to the individual's effort in studying the text—"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15 NASB). Implicit in Paul's words to Timothy is the idea that Timothy could possibly "mishandle" Scripture and one day appear before God ashamed because he had misinterpreted Scripture to others. Correct interpretation was not automatic, but the result of hard labor as the Lord's "workman". Further, Paul does not guarantee Timothy—his personal disciple—infallible insight into the texts of Scripture. There was always the possibility that Timothy could be mistaken, otherwise why Paul's admonition to handle it correctly? And if this was true of Timothy, Paul's personal disciple, it is most certainly true of us.

Since illumination is not complete for every believer, interpretation is not simply an individual endeavor (task), but the collective endeavor of the whole body of Christ. No one, however spiritual or brilliant, knows all the truth about Scripture; thus, we need one another as well as the corporate witness of the church throughout the ages to properly understand the Bible. For a person to dogmatically assert, "God told me that this is what it means," is a prideful assertion which ignores the work of the Holy Spirit in the church throughout centuries of interpretation. Such a person is claiming infallible illumination—even exclusive illumination—from the Spirit granted to no one else past or present—not even to Timothy, Paul's disciple. He alone presumes to have the infallible meaning of the text! This is not wisdom, but arrogance. On the other hand, it is not arrogance to diligently research the historical and grammatical context of a passage as well as the interpretations of others and say, "To the best of my understanding, this is the intended meaning of the text."

In summary, we need both diligent study of the text as well as enablement from the Holy Spirit. Neither is a substitute for the other.

B. Investigation

The next principle of interpreting a text is investigation, including the study of the grammar of the text and the historical setting in which and for which it was written.¹⁰ This is called the grammatico-historical study of the Biblical text. It includes grammar because God intended to communicate with His people in the same way they communicated with each other—through words and language which

¹⁰ Pratt, p. 7

actually mean something.¹¹ It is historical in the sense that words and language convey (impart) meaning in the historical context in which they were written. The Bible was not dropped out of the sky, but resulted from particular historical circumstances affecting the human author and his audience. He wrote to address particular problems confronting the people of God. For example, Genesis was written to the people of Israel coming out of Egyptian bondage and idolatry. God had promised them the land of Canaan according to the covenant made with their father Abraham. Samuel—originally one book—was written after the division of the kingdom to address the need for a descendent of David to be king over Israel. We cannot understand the meaning or the purpose of these books apart from the historical circumstances in which they arose.

To illustrate, if the average American picked up a *New Vision* newspaper published in Kampala and read a story about Joseph Kony's raid on a village in eastern Congo, would the raid make any sense to him? Not likely, because he would have no idea that this man is a psychological "nut-case" who believes that God is inciting him to murder.

C. Application

How do the OT narratives apply to the life of a 21st century believer? This is where much modern scholarship—even some evangelical scholarship—has gone astray. Many modern commentaries on the OT deal almost exclusively with technical questions with little regard for God's plan to redeem a people for Himself who are zealous for good works. Such commentaries are generally boring and difficult to read for anyone but scholars and seminary students. Happily, many evangelical scholars are correcting this error through careful application of OT narratives for today's church—application consistent with the intent of the original author.

Another approach to OT narratives is the—dare I say it—overemphasis in "preaching Christ" from every narrative. Discerning types of Christ in the OT is very important, and I have included a section on typology in this course. After all, the OT is the story of redemption made possible by the coming of God in the flesh to redeem us from the fall and from the sin which results from the fall. Of course, we will see Christ all over the OT. But we must be careful not to reduce the OT to a book of typology. The authors, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had other purposes for their original audiences who did not comprehend the future Messiah with the clarity of the NT believer. What benefits did the original writers have for them? Consider the story of Job. Job was a righteous man who suffered severe providence to demonstrate the prerogative of God in using His servants in any manner He chooses to accomplish His purposes in history—many of which are incomprehensible to us. Doubtlessly, Job is a picture of Christ—THE righteous man—who suffers at God's hand to save His elect people. And just as Job is vindicated before men at the end of the story, so is Christ when God raises Him from the dead. Yet, we lose much of the benefit of the book if we fail to see that our personal destiny as believers is also ordained by a sovereign God for His glory and the ultimate good of the believer (Rom. 8: 28).

Commenting on 1 Kings 17: 17-24, Dale Ralph Davis remarks,

¹¹ As opposed to the postmodern theory claiming that language is trapped in a cultural prison and is virtually meaningless. But you don't have to worry yourself over this theory, since by their own standards, postmodern writings are also meaningless.

Were I preaching this passage I would want to lead from Yahweh's defeat of death in verses 23-24 to Christ's triumph over it in, say, Mark 5: 21-43, Luke 7: 11-17, and John 11, and then fully in his resurrection (2 Tim. 1: 10!). But what about verses 17-18? Doesn't it strike us that here is a woman in desperate need (vv. 10-12), who embraces a divine response (vv. 13-14) and enjoys a steady provision (vv. 15-16)—only to be crushed with death and sorrow (vv. 17-18)? The God who promises to sustain life now takes life away. Isn't there some of Gilead's balm seeping from this text for some of the Lord's contemporary people? Aren't there believers...in our assemblies who know exactly what this widow faced? They enjoy the Lord's smile upon their tent and then he seems to plunge them into the pit. It is simply a part of believing experience, and when we see it set out clearly in an Old Testament narrative, the text cries out for us to set it before God's people. Simply to see this sequence from enjoyment to despair, from God's provision to his severity, amazingly comforts saints. They sense that God's word (and therefore God) understands them and strangely they have fresh hope. But there is nothing overtly Christological about this point; this does not directly 'preach Christ.' So am I to assume that this point should not be pressed upon my hearers, that the God of all comfort will have to find another vehicle for his consoling work?...I am convinced that I do not honor Christ by forcing him into texts where he is not.¹²

Not only are there OT stories given for consolation, but for warning. The Apostle Paul said that the judgments upon the OT people were recorded for us so that we would not follow their wicked example.

Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. (1 Corinthians 10:6 NASB)

II. Checks and Balances on Our Interpretation of OT Narratives

Pratt mentions three things which shape our understanding of Scripture and which provide checks and balances upon any proposed interpretation of Scripture.¹³

A. Our theological heritage

In one sense, this is another name for systematic theology, and it basically consists of how the Holy Spirit has taught believers in the past. Some of this heritage will be correct; some will be incorrect. That which is true to the Scriptures reflects the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual illumination of the Scriptures did not begin in the 21st century, but reaches back to the very beginning of the written Word and even during the oral history of revelation before Moses put anything in writing. All the great ecumenical councils of the church, the works of the church's most gifted theologians, its creeds and confessions, etc. fit into this category. To ignore these confessions and theological works is the same thing as ignoring the progressive work of the Holy Spirit in teaching His church. Although none of these works are infallibly inspired by the Spirit, they represent the gradual illumination by the Holy Spirit systematically and historically. Just as God did not produce the Scriptures in one day, but directed their writing over a period of about 1500 years, so He did not grant full understanding of the Scriptures in one day, but gradually through history. For this reason, no one can ever say, "I have the exhaustive meaning of this text of Scripture", although he may be interpreting it correctly.

¹² Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh—How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts*, pp. 137-138. See pp. 134-138 for full explanation.

¹³ Pratt, pp. 70-77

B. Our present community

The Spirit will continue teaching His church the meaning of Scripture at least as long as this present world exists—and, I suspect—throughout eternity. The “present community” includes the interpretive work within the church today as the Holy Spirit continues to illumine the meaning of Scripture. Just as we cannot ignore His illuminative work in the past, we also cannot ignore the teaching ministry of the Spirit presently going on in the church today. The danger of ignoring our theological heritage has been noted, but it is equally harmful to idealize (idolize?) certain theologians, creeds, and confessions of the past as if they were the last word on any subject of faith and practice. Pratt, a Presbyterian theologian who appreciates historical theology, calls attention to this danger.

On occasion evangelicals subject themselves to the tyranny of heritage. These well-meaning believers look at the church today, see its many weaknesses, and are tempted to idealize some historical period [the Puritan era, for example?]. We isolate a particular creed or group of people and insist that all interpretation must fully conform to their viewpoints. The outcome of these tendencies is not difficult to see. When heritage tyrannizes hermeneutics, we lose touch with our contemporary world. Our interpretations become irrelevant, unable to deal with today’s questions [e.g. wife abuse and polygamy, which older theological works ignore].

The issues of our day force the church beyond the findings of heritage. Today we must interpret Old Testament narratives in the light of nuclear war, world hunger, human rights, euthanasia [the killing of the old, the sick, or mentally and physically handicapped], genetic engineering, abortion, and a host of relatively modern issues. Our heritage can help only indirectly. Total dependence on heritage turns our eyes away from contemporary needs.¹⁴

The hermeneutical activity of the present community includes the “constitutional documents, position papers, advisory letters, and disciplinary cases” of various denominations which are continually responding to the present problems and needs of the church. It also includes the theological writings and research of theological societies, Bible colleges, and seminaries. Present community also includes the week to week teaching ministry of pastors/elders and other non-ordained teachers who labor in the word for the benefit of the local church. God does not limit Himself to a seminary degree or official ordination; He will work through whomever He wishes and in any denomination He wishes. If we limit our research of scholarly material to a single denomination or to a small group of scholars and teachers, we will miss much of what the Spirit has to offer His people.¹⁵

Just as our theological heritage can “tyrannize” our interpretation, the same thing can happen if we allow the present community of interpretative work to dominate our investigation. Just as some people idealize the theological works of ancient scholars, other Bible students will spend too much time keeping up with the latest theological theories and speculations.

Many of us tend to follow every theological trend that comes our way. As the church explores an issue, we jump on the bandwagon and find nearly every story in the Old Testament speaking to it. Yet we can press attention to current concerns too far. Without the restraint of heritage, our pursuit of relevance can actually distract us from authentic Christianity. As Paul warned, we are not to be “blown here and there

¹⁴ Pratt, p. 75 (comments in brackets mine)

¹⁵ Pratt, pp. 72-73

by every wind of teaching” (Ephesians 4: 14). We must not allow the present community to dominate interpretation.¹⁶

As one example, I believe one of the “trends” that has dominated reformed campuses for the last ten years has been that of “federal theology” which appears to objectify the relationship of infant children to God on the basis of their water baptism. If they are baptized, they are “in” until they opt “out”. But we may dispel any overconfidence in this “objective” relationship with God in the New Covenant by researching the relationship of Israel with Yahweh in the Old Covenant. Most of these “objective” covenant members died in unbelief during their wilderness wanderings, the period of the judges, the monarchies, and even during Jesus’ ministry, having failed to appropriate the blessings of the covenant through “subjective” faith, that is, the individual faith of each person (Heb. 4: 2). If the prophets gave them no confidence in their relationship to God on the basis of circumcision, we have no basis for giving parents confidence in their children’s faith on the basis of baptism.

C. Private judgment

This consists of what we learn from the Bible through private, independent study. With all the theological helps and commentaries, private judgment in the West is sorely neglected as a means of attaining knowledge from the Bible, but God expects every individual believer to do his best at interpreting the Bible for himself. We have previously discussed the overemphasis of private judgment. Private judgment can gravitate to extreme arrogance as if the Holy Spirit gives the meaning of a text to me alone. The opposite extreme is a slavish dependence upon commentaries and other theological works—slavery too easily accepted by theological students and pastors—to the point that the private reader never discovers anything first-hand from a text of scripture. Although it would be a rare occurrence for anyone to “discover” something from the Bible that no one else has ever seen before, it should not be a rare occurrence for non-scholars to discern the true meaning—though not exhaustive meaning—of a text from their own private study apart from any reliance on scholarly works. This is half the joy of studying the Bible—to allow the Spirit to speak to us through the word, not only revealing the application, but the meaning of a text.

Private judgment has prevented the church from falling into permanent apostasy. John Hus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and thousands more stood against their theological heritage from the Roman Catholic Church and its doctrine of salvation by works to espouse the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Had they merely parroted¹⁷ the viewpoints of the Roman Catholic authorities, the apostolic faith would have been lost. At the same time, unless the private interpretations of scholarly and influential theologians are checked by the theological heritage of the church (historical theology) and the present community of other theologians, teachers, and the membership of the church, their individual interpretations can become esoteric (strange) and far-removed from the simple message of the Bible.¹⁸ Even godly interpreters and pastors like John Stott—who many years ago accepted the doctrine of annihilationism¹⁹—can allow themselves to go astray by not checking their opinions against the weight of present and past

¹⁶ Pratt, pp. 75-76

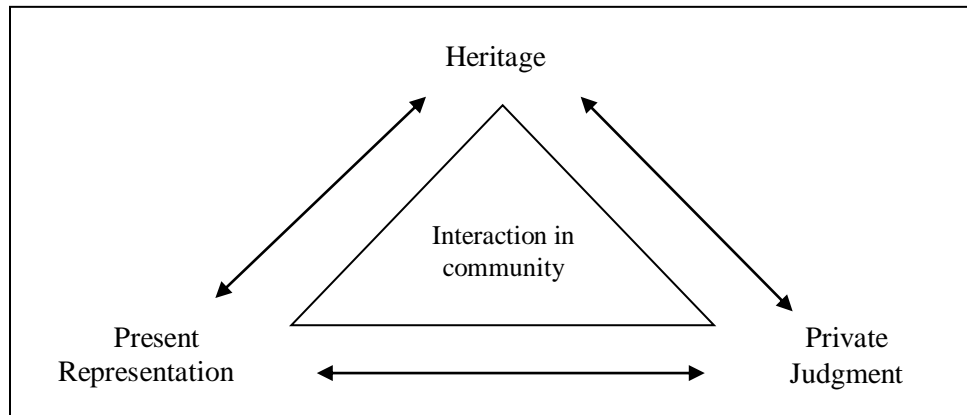
¹⁷ A talking parrot is a bird that mimics the sounds of a person. It sounds as if it is talking.

¹⁸ Pratt, p. 76

¹⁹ Annihilationism is the false doctrine that sinners do not suffer eternally in hell but are simply annihilated or destroyed in an absolute sense at the final judgment. For more information, see my “Doctrine of Man”.

scholarship. Pratt offers the diagram below visualizing the relationship among these three interpretive elements. Commenting on this diagram, he says,

At times the various elements confirm each other; we often find that our own convictions agree with those of the contemporary church and our heritage. When we find this harmony, we have confidence and a high level of cognitive rest. Of course, harmony does not ensure that we have proper understanding, but convictions grow stronger as we hear confirmation from all sides.



At other times, however, discord within our hermeneutical team [heritage, present community, private judgment] sounds a warning. We should be cautious when the church moves away from its heritage. If individuals come to conclusions at odds with the rest of the church, we should hesitate. The less concurrence we discover, the less confidence we should have.

Each member of our hermeneutical team has a role to play. Heritage keeps us in touch with the work of God's Spirit in believers of the past. Present community holds us accountable to the work of the Spirit in believers of our own day. Private judgment keeps us looking for personal illumination from the Spirit. In light of the complexities of interpreting Old Testament stories, we need each of these elements to watch over the others....²⁰

III. Literary Analysis

Any casual reading of the OT will reveal that the OT was not given to us in the form of a textbook on systematic theology. Much of it was given to us in the form of poetry—e.g. Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and most of the prophetic literature. The remaining portion, about 40%, was written as narrative. Yet, all evangelicals agree that much of our systematic theology comes from the OT. We learn a great deal about the nature of God, the person of Christ, and the salvation of God's people from the OT; but such truth does not come to us primarily in the form of propositions—statements of fact. Furthermore, the OT is not a textbook on ethics. Some of the OT is given in didactic (teaching) form similar to the didactic expositions/exhortations of NT epistles. The Ten Commandments in Ex. 20 as well as the case laws scattered throughout the Pentateuch are examples of ethical teaching. However, in comparison to narratives and poetry, direct ethical teaching, in the form of commandments, comprises very little of the OT. The OT is primarily poetry and narrative (stories). Therefore, we must learn to interpret the OT with an emphasis on literary analysis, not with an

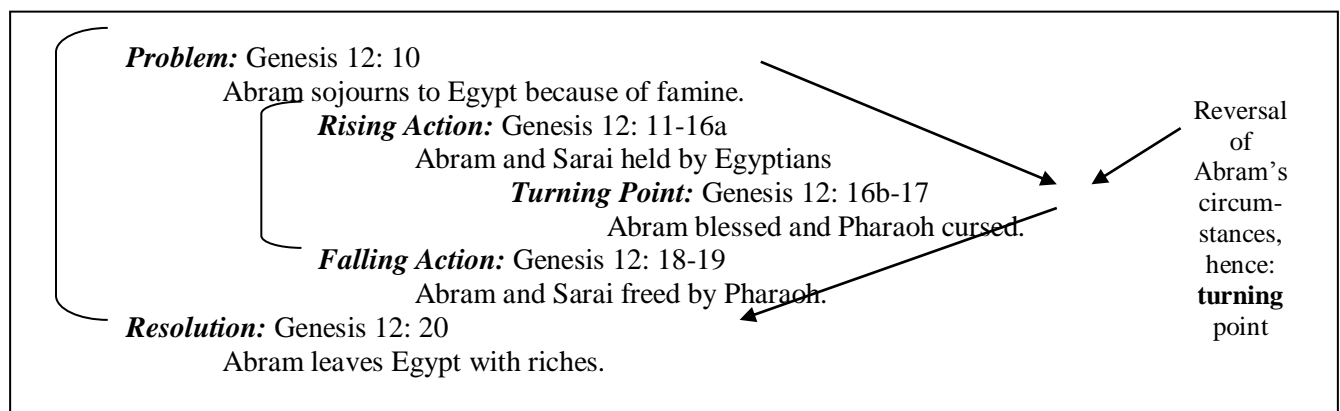
²⁰ Pratt, pp. 76-77

emphasis on theological or moral categories. Theological and moral principles will become evident as we carefully examine the literary units of the OT, but if we approach the text primarily with systematic theology or ethics as our first and goals, we will miss much of the purpose for which the text was written.²¹

For example, what was Moses' purpose in including the story of Abram (not yet Abraham) and Sarai (not yet Sarah) in Egypt in Gen. 12: 10-20? If we are pre-occupied with systematic theology, we may come away from the story with only the concept of God's sovereignty in judgment and salvation. Because Pharaoh has Abram's wife, God inflicts his house with severe diseases. God is thus shown to be sovereign over the world of nature and men. And since God blesses Abram in spite of his sinfulness, we see that Abram is blessed not because he deserves it, but because God is gracious to him in spite of his sinful behavior. As important as these theological concepts are, is this the primary purpose of the author?

On the other hand if we approach the text with a preoccupation with morality or ethics, we may concentrate on Abram's lie or his lack of faith. While Sarai was indeed his half sister (Gen. 20: 12), she was also his wife—an inconvenient truth Abram chose to hide. Rather than trusting God implicitly (without doubt or reserve), Abram resorts to the human solution of twisting the truth to accomplish his goal of saving himself—something he does later by taking Hagar as his concubine. Again, an important consideration, but not the primary import of the text. We could also be side-tracked with the ethics of Abram marrying his half-sister. Was this incest? Quite obviously, God did not consider it incestuous at the time, for He promised a son to Abram and Sarai who would become the heir of the covenant promise. But if God's sovereignty, Abram's lie, or questions about incest are not the main point of the passage, what is?

In order to receive the full benefit of the text, and in order to apply the text appropriately to our lives in the 21st century, we must first ask: What did Moses wish to teach the original readers of the text; i.e. the nation of Israel coming out of Egyptian bondage and idolatry? By doing a literary analysis of the text, we will discover much more than God's sovereignty and an illustration of the ninth commandment—as important as these truths are. Pratt has diagrammed the structure of the text in the following way:²²



²¹ Pratt, p. 98. But see also “The Role of Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology” below.

²² Pratt, p. 99 (diagram is slightly modified)

In a few verses, Moses, presents three contrasts:²³

(1) the poverty of famine in v. 10 with Abram's riches in v. 20 [Note: the riches are only implied in v. 10 but expressly stated in 13: 1-2. Notice the repetition of the phrase in 12: 20 and 13: 1, "and all that belonged to him".]

(2) the virtual captivity they experienced in Egypt in vv. 11-16a with their release in vv. 18-19

(3) the blessing of Abram and the cursing of Pharaoh

Before you read the next sentence in this analysis, ask yourself this question: Does this story remind me of any other story in the OT? By examining the structure, you might see resemblances between the story of Abram and Sarai in Egypt and the story of their descendents in the land of Egypt. Examine the points of comparison below.²⁴

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Famine drives Abram and Sarai into Egypt. | • Famine drives Jacob and his sons into Egypt |
| • Abram's deception | • The deception of Joseph's brothers |
| • Abram prospers in Egypt through material gain | • Israel prospers in Egypt through much child-bearing |
| • The posterity of Abram is threatened by Pharaoh taking Sarai to be his wife | • Israel's prosperity is threatened by the slaughter of male children |
| • God distinguishes between Abram and Pharaoh—His people and those who are not His people | • God distinguishes between the Israelites, His people, and the Egyptians who are not His people |
| • God intervenes to prevent the extinction of the covenant line | • God intervenes to protect the nation of Israel from extinction |
| • Pharaoh's house is plagued with disease | • All of Egypt, including Pharaoh's house, is plagued |
| • Freedom from Egypt comes through confrontation with Pharaoh | • Freedom from Egypt comes through confrontation with Pharaoh |
| • Abram sent away with riches | • Israel sent away with riches |

Two other points of comparison could be added to the ones above.

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Abram's <u>faithlessness</u> followed by God's <u>faithfulness</u> | • Israel's <u>faithlessness</u> followed by God's <u>faithfulness</u> |
|--|---|

While we cannot deny the importance of telling the truth, faith, etc, we see from the comparisons that Moses uses the story to demonstrate the continuity of the promises of God—God's faithfulness—from the patriarch Abraham down to the present experience of the Israelites in the wilderness. God was determined to accomplish His covenant promises made to Abram in Genesis 12 and 15. Abraham's deliverance from Egypt foreshadowed their deliverance, and God's faithfulness to Abraham foreshadowed His faithfulness to the nation. However, does this historical-redemptive purpose disallow the use of this text in teaching the importance of truth-telling, faith, moral integrity,

²³ Pratt, pp. 99-100

²⁴ Pratt, p. 101

or the sovereignty of God? The answer is no. All of these subjects can and should be mentioned in the preaching of this text. The “full value” of the text includes all these things.

One can also see from this example that it is important to discern, to the best of our ability, the date of the text. Moses wrote this story for the Hebrews coming out of Egyptian bondage. This helps the reader determine Moses’ purpose. See X. Identifying the Writer and His Audience, below.

Application: How would you preach this text? Christians living in Africa are facing many challenges to their faith. There are many promises to Christians contained in the Bible which seem far-fetched (unbelievable) and remote. Yet, remember that God’s promise to Abraham also seemed far-fetched and remote and that Abraham never lived to see the fulfillment of these promises personally (Hebrews 11). Like Abraham, we must believe God, and our faith will be reckoned to us as righteousness. One day we will enjoy the full complement of all God’s promises to His people.

IV. The Meaning—or Meanings (?)—of OT Narratives

A. Polyvalence—Multiple Meanings for Each Text (?)

Polyvalence is another word for multiple meanings. Before the Protestant Reformation, most Biblical scholars assumed that OT narratives had more than one meaning. This was especially true of Philo and the Alexandrian tradition of Clement, Origen, and Ambrose. The medieval church by the time of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) had adopted the four-fold sense of Scripture which went beyond the literal sense of the text. This four-fold sense (the *Quadrigena*) included the following:²⁵

- (1) the literal meaning or what the text actually says
- (2) the allegorical meaning of the text that taught what the church should believe
- (3) the tropological meaning which gave ethical instruction to individuals
- (4) the analogical meaning which directed attention to the future

The last three meanings go beyond the literal sense. Thus, to know the full meaning of a text, one must read “between the lines and under the lines”—figuratively speaking—o determine what God *really* intended. Walter Kaiser cites Origen’s allegorical “exegesis” of Ex. 1: 22—2: 10. Pharaoh represents the devil. The male and female children of the Hebrews represent, respectively, the rational and animal faculties of mankind. Pharaoh wanted to destroy the males—the rational faculties through which the soul seeks spiritual things—but he preserved the females—man’s animal-like instincts and carnal (fleshy) nature.²⁶ (How would women feel about this interpretation?)

One example I heard several years back was a sermon on David’s three mighty men whom the preacher identified as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; but the text gives no such indication of this. Another example of the allegorical method is the notion that Herod’s massacre of the two year old infants of Bethlehem is a warning that only those who hold to the Trinitarian faith will be saved and that Binitarians (who believe in two persons of the Godhead) and Unitarians (those who hold to one person in the Godhead) will perish in hell. The passage teaches nothing of the kind. To test how well you can allegorize Scripture, what is the meaning of the following passage?

²⁵ Pratt, p. 110

²⁶ Cited in Bennie Wolvaardt, *How to Interpret the Bible—A Do-It-Yourself-Manual*, p. 61

Then he [*Elisha*] went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, young lads came out from the city and mocked him and said to him, "Go up, you baldhead; go up, you baldhead!" When he looked behind him and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. Then two female bears came out of the woods and tore up forty-two lads of their number. (2 Ki. 2:23-24 NASB)

The real meaning is this: Elisha represents the church. he young lads represent the heretics and false prophets who threaten the church. he two female bears represent the early councils of the church which condemned the ancient heretics. If you have never heard this interpretation of the passage, it's because I just made it up. Impressive exegesis, don't you think? I have gone beyond the literal sense of the text to expose the real meaning. Well, not really. My interpretation has nothing to do with the text which I have conveniently and maliciously allegorized. Origen would have been proud of me, but not the Apostle Paul or John Calvin.

If indeed one must go beyond the literal sense of the text to determine the intended meaning, the average Christian reader will not be able to understand Scripture.²⁷ Thus, the Quadriga, or four-fold meaning of every text of Scripture, supported the arguments of the established Roman Catholic hierarchy maintaining that only trained priests authorized by the Church should be allowed to interpret Scripture. No one else was capable of doing so. The Bible was therefore declared out of bounds for the "lay person".²⁸ The natural and predictable outcome of this theology was an ignorant "laity" in the church which also led to an equally ignorant "clergy".²⁹ If indeed only "gifted" experts could understand the Bible, the logical conclusion was that only those experts further up the Roman Catholic hierarchy could adequately understand the Bible. During most of the medieval era, even parish priests had little knowledge of the Scriptures. The interpretation of the Bible; therefore, became a top-down affair from the pope to the cardinals and so on, everyone being told what he must believe and having little incentive to study the Bible for himself.³⁰

The Reformation was at its very roots a protest (as in "protestant") against the hierarchical domination of the church—particularly in the area of hermeneutics—which had led to multiple theological heresies. Whenever the membership of the church as a whole cannot understand the Bible, the road is paved (covered with tarmac) for an ecclesiastical hierarchy to interpret the Bible however it wishes without any resistance from the grass roots membership of the church. Indeed, the hierarchy of the Roman church actually used obscure hermeneutical methods to their advantage to hold the membership in bondage to their authority. In response to this abuse, the Reformers maintained the literal sense of the Scripture—the Scriptures should be understood in their literal meaning unless the context compels us to believe otherwise (for example, in apocalyptic or poetic literature).³¹

The hierarchical monopoly over the Bible continues to plague the church even today. Apart from the Roman Catholic error of an infallible pope, many non-Catholic pastors—particularly Pentecostals—

²⁷ After listening to your preaching, the average listener should be able to say to himself, "Yes! I can see this meaning and application clearly from the Bible." He should not say, "Wow! I would never have seen this."

²⁸ The term "laity" is itself unbiblical. The church is the fulfilment of God's calling for Israel which was to be a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19: 6; compare 1 Peter 2: 9).

²⁹ Also not a biblical term. If there is no laity, there can be no clergy. Such terminology separates God's people into different classes.

³⁰ Pratt, p. 112

³¹ Pratt, p. 113

hold their congregations in bondage and ignorance to their self-proclaimed extra-biblical revelation. They make claims of God speaking directly to them through the Holy Spirit apart from the Scriptures³², or they fabricate fanciful allegorical interpretations of the Bible which suit their selfish interests and . Church members have even lost their lives and material assets to false prophets who claimed to speak in the name of God. The only preventative to the tyranny of false prophets and deviant pastors is comprehensive education of believers in proper hermeneutical methods.

B. Univalence—a Single Meaning Intended by the Original Author

Every passage of Scripture has but one meaning intended by the original author.³³ This statement must be qualified, but it is accurate as it stands.³⁴ If a text has multiple meanings, then for all practical purposes it has no meaning at all.

There is only one meaning for every place in Scripture. Otherwise the meaning of Scripture would not only be unclear and uncertain, but there would be no meaning at all—for anything which does not mean one thing surely means nothing.³⁵

In the interpretation of Elisha and the young men above, someone else could devise an equally fanciful allegorical meaning. The only limit to any number of multiple meanings would be the interpreter's imagination. Imagination, not interpretive skills and diligent labor, would be the key to good preaching—the very kind of preaching that renders the church ignorant of the Bible and even though such preaching attracts thousands of ignorant followers.

C. Full Value of a Text:

Having said that “scripture has one meaning”, we must qualify the statement by saying what this statement means and what it does not mean. To say that Scripture has one **meaning** does not imply that it has only one **application**. A single text may be applied in numerous ways and in different contexts; otherwise, the Scriptures would have little use for us in the 21st century far removed in time, place and culture from the original readers. Second, one single meaning does not imply that anyone, not even the most imminent scholar, can **exhaust** the meaning of the text. As Pratt notes, “univalence is not the same as simplicity”.³⁶ Thus, we may formulate many summaries of the original meaning which are faithful to the text. These are only summaries since no single summary can fully exhaust the text. We may find many good summaries of any text simply by consulting numerous commentaries. Further, one meaning does not imply that even the original author understood the full significance or value of the text he was writing. Old Testament prophets wrote many things about the coming Messiah they did not fully understand, but we now see clearly long after the events have taken place (e.g. Isa. 53; compare 1 Pet. 1: 10). The following categories help

³² Apart from biblical support since many Pentecostal pastors are ignorant of what the Bible teaches

³³ Pratt, p. 112

³⁴ See 2. Biblical elaborations, below. Also, see McNeill, *Hermeneutics*, III. Special Literary Methods, C. Allegories, for a qualification of this statement in which I interact with John Frame (*Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, pp. 198-199) and Milton S. Terry (*Hermeneutics*, pp. 322-323).

³⁵ William Ames, 1576-1631; quoted in Pratt, p. 113

³⁶ Pratt, p. 125

us distinguish between the single meaning of a text and its “full value”.³⁷ According to Pratt, the full value of the text consists of three elements.

1. Original meaning

Original meaning is the sense of a text in the setting of its original writer and audience. Why did the writer compose this passage? What was his purpose for this story? Since this setting is the frame of reference in which the Spirit first inspired and accommodated Scripture, the original meaning is normative for all other interpretative work.

By “normative”, Pratt means that the original intention of the author sets the standard or boundaries for how the text must be handled by interpreters (2 Tim. 2: 15). The interpreter does not have complete freedom in dealing with the text, but is limited by the grammatical-historical context of the original author.

2. Biblical elaborations

Elaborations include all that Scripture says about an Old Testament story. How does the Bible expound on this narrative? Elaborations may focus on an entire story or part of it; they may speak directly or indirectly of the passage....They never contradict the original meaning, because God is the ultimate Author of both. But elaborations often go beyond the original meaning, bringing out implicit dimensions of a text that remained hidden in the writer’s day.

One example of an elaboration would be Paul’s exposition of the story of Sarah and Hagar in Gal. 4: 22-31 in which he uses these two women as symbols for two covenants, a covenant of promise and covenant of works. Moses, the original author, did not include—nor could he have intended—this elaboration in the original meaning of the text in Genesis. Yet, the Holy Spirit intended it, and He inspired the Apostle Paul to utilize the text in this fashion to highlight the differences between salvation by grace through faith and salvation by works through the law. The picture of a helpless sinner before an omnipotent king depicted in the story of David and Mephibosheth, I believe, would qualify as another legitimate elaboration of the text of 2 Samuel 9. The Old Testament is filled with types which are further elaborated or explained in the New Testament. Essentially, allegories are extended types which do not teach new doctrines but serve to illustrate established biblical truth.³⁸

Walke cites the conclusion of Daniel L. Baker who says that there are many allusions to the OT by NT writers who do not refer to specific texts in the OT. Waltke goes on to note,

There may be validity to interpreters applying the method of typology and of seeing correspondences between an Old Testament event, person, or institution and Jesus Christ and his church where there is no explicit indication of that correspondence, such as in the case of Joseph and Jesus.³⁹

Note the similarities between Joseph and Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

<p>—</p> <p>³⁷ Pratt</p> <p>³⁸ Agai</p> <p>³⁹ Walt</p> <p>⁴⁰ Pasc</p> <p>christo</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loved by his father • Sent by his father to his brothers • Innocent • Sold for twenty pieces of silver • Becomes lord and savior of his brothers • The savior of strangers (Egyptians) and the world because of a plot to kill him • Joseph in prison between two criminals 	<p> Tei</p> <p>√altl</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loved by His Father • Sent by His Father to His brethren, the Jews • Innocent • Sold for thirty pieces of silver • Becomes Lord and Savior of His brothers • The Savior of the Gentiles and the world because of a plot to kill Him • Jesus between two criminals on the cross 	<p>15</p>
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Yet, nowhere in the NT do we have Joseph cited as a type of Christ. However, Waltke immediately offers this caveat⁴¹,

But they [*interpreters*] should realize and acknowledge that though their interpretations may be spiritually evoked, they should not invest their interpretation with the authority of a canonical text or demean those who question the correspondence.⁴²

In other words, although the correspondences between Jesus and Joseph are quite obvious, there may be other such types in the OT whose antitypes in the NT may not be so obvious. There is room for friendly disagreement among interpreters.

3. Legitimate applications

Applications are those proper understandings which uninspired interpreters—past, present, and future—derive from the original meaning and Biblical elaborations. How has this story been applied? How should it be applied today? How may it be applied in the future?

The legitimate applications of a text are almost endless, but they must proceed from the way the author intended the text to be applied to the original audience (see below).

All three of these categories—**original meaning, biblical elaborations, and legitimate applications**—make up the full value of a text. “In this sense, full value is any divinely authorized use of a passage.”⁴³ Neither the biblical elaborations nor the applications of a text may contradict the original meaning of the text, although they may go beyond the original meaning. In other words, we may not make an application of a text which contradicts its original meaning and the intention of the original author. One example of a misapplication is a sermon on Elizabeth, wife of Zacharias (Lk. 1) that I heard about several years ago. The preacher’s application of this text was as follows: “If any of

⁴¹ A caveat is a warning or caution

⁴² Waltke, p. 142

⁴³ Pratt, p. 115

you women are barren, you need an angel.” His application was well-intended, but it strayed seriously from the original meaning of the text and its usefulness to the original audience.

To use another example, we must be careful in our application of Genesis 20. Abram lies about Sarai’s identity to Abimelech who later gives Abram a thousand pieces of silver. The application of the story is not: We can lie to unbelievers, and God will still bless us with riches. The application may be: God grants grace to Abram and protects the covenant people in spite of Abram’s sin. The same application would apply in our case. God protects us in spite of our sin and failings. The Apostle Paul might say of this story, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom. 6:1-2 NASB)

Summary and Conclusion

The meaning of an OT narrative is the intended meaning of the original author for his intended audience. If a passage has multiple meanings, then for all practical purposes, it has no meaning at all. However, the meaning of the text would also include the elaborations or expanded meaning of the text which go beyond the writer’s original meaning. These elaborations do not distort or confuse the original meaning (e.g. David’s covenantal kindness to Mephibosheth because of Jonathan), but they bring out hidden dimensions of the text which the writer could not have known or intended (e.g. God’s covenantal kindness to us because of Christ). It is not essential that these hidden expansions of the text appear in the NT Scriptures to be legitimate elaborations as long as they clearly illustrate the author’s intended meaning (e.g. Joseph as a type of Christ, rejected by his brothers but served as the savior of the twelve tribes). Finally, the full value of the text includes the original meaning, legitimate elaborations, and legitimate applications of the text. Since the extended audience of the text includes all the people of God throughout the history of God’s people—the OT and the NT church—the applications of the text can be virtually inexhaustible.

Lesson Two—Asking the Right Questions

Introduction

One of the most important principles of interpreting the Bible is asking the right questions from the text. Once we begin to do this, the implicit meaning of these OT stories will become more evident. As Waltke says, the OT narrators are “masters of indirection”. They will not shout the meaning of a text to us or spell it out for us. They will simply give us hints through their masterful artwork. What the author says (denotation) and what he does not say but implies (connotation) are both important to determining the meaning of an OT narrative. Further, the manner in which the author arranges his story structurally is important to determining the meaning. Often, writers use a chiasmic structure (reverse symmetry) with the emphasis of the story in the very center. At other times, he uses a forward symmetry which has no limitation in the number of parallel units in the story (see the story of Samson below). This should become clearer as the reader proceeds with Lessons Two and Three. The author’s purpose in writing the story is sometimes suggested in his structural arrangement, as the story of David and Mephibosheth illustrates (2 Samuel 9 “sandwiched” between David’s military victories).

V. Important Questions to Ask in Determining the Meaning of a Text

A. What did the author choose to say, and what did he choose not to say?

The author of the Biblical text—like any other author—makes selections in words and content to accomplish his particular purpose. Therefore, what the author says and what he chooses not to say are important indicators to his meaning.⁴⁴

1. Denotation and Connotation

Denotation is the use of a certain word in order to give an explicit, direct meaning. If I say, “I am presently using a writing instrument”, the meaning of “writing instrument” would be too broad (ambiguous) for the reader to identify it. The instrument could be an ink pen, pencil, or a piece of chalk. In actual fact, I am now using my computer with a Microsoft Word program. To denote the meaning I wish to convey, I would say, “I am doing word processing with my computer.” Connotation is not a specific meaning, but a suggested meaning. If I say that someone is a “shady” character, I have not specifically said that he is a crook, but I have at least suggested that he is a crook (at least in the American context). If someone says that a certain woman is a “woman of the night”, they have suggested that she is a prostitute or an immoral woman without specifically saying so. The word “prostitute” would be a denotation, a specific word.

To use a biblical example, in the story of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11), Moses uses the words, “came down” and “go down” in vv. 5 and 7 instead of “went up” or “go up”. The reason for this use of words could be that he was making a satirical contrast between what the inhabitants of the earth were doing and what God was going to do. In v. 4 we read, “They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth’” (Genesis 11:4 NASB). God instructed Adam to multiply and subdue the whole earth. This command implied that man must spread out

⁴⁴ Pratt, pp. 118-120

rather than huddle together. As prideful men sought to make a name for themselves by staying together and building a tower upward into heaven, God came down to thwart their efforts. Although they thought their tower had reached into God's exalted place—heaven itself—to dethrone God, God must actually come down to get a glimpse of it.⁴⁵ In this example, there is both denotation (explicit meaning) and connotation (suggested or implicit meaning). The connotative idea could be that God is the sovereign creator exalted in the heavens who must condescend (stoop down, as if to a child) to have any contact with man, while man is a finite creature who should be in submission to God but attempts to usurp God's place by building a tower reaching into heaven where God dwells.

Notice what God tells the prophet Jonah in the first chapter: “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2 NASB; emphasis mine). At first, it strikes us as very odd that God would send a Hebrew prophet to a pagan city. What does the law of God have to do with unbelievers? Shall Israel impose its morality on a pagan culture? Indeed, God's law is not limited to Jews, but applies to all mankind.⁴⁶ The story of Belshazzar illustrates the same point. “‘TEKEL’—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient” (Daniel 5:27 NASB). The “scales” are the standard of God's law which Belshazzar, a Babylonian king, had flagrantly violated. Thus, the author of Jonah does not specifically say, “The Ninevites are subject to the law of God. Rather, he suggests this fact (connotation). The same is true of Daniel's prophecy. We have to interpret the passage to come to this conclusion.

At the end of Ruth, the writer includes a genealogy leading from Perez to David. But why? Because he wishes His Jewish readers to know that David's great-grandmother was a Moabitess. Through faith, even the Gentiles could be included in the blessings of God's chosen people, even to the point of being the ancestors of the kingly line of David. Implicit in the genealogy is the inclusion of Rahab, the wife of Salmon and mother of Boaz (Matt. 1: 5).⁴⁷ The author does not specifically say, “By the way, even the Gentiles can be included in the covenant promises, because Ruth is a Moabite!” The OT authors do not usually spell it out for us. As Bruce Waltke says, they are masters of indirection.

Spiritual discernment is a prerequisite for doing Old Testament theology because, like a parable, it is a masterpiece of indirection, yielding its wealth only to those with eyes to see and ears to hear.⁴⁸

2. What the author says

In the story of the Battle of Ai in Joshua 7, what the author specifically says (denotation) is the clue for interpreting why the Israelites failed to defeat a city far inferior to Jericho on the first try. Some commentators attribute the defeat to Joshua's over-confidence after the defeat of Jericho.⁴⁹ Yet, if we take note of the text itself, the author leaves us in no doubt about why they failed. Achan had taken something under the ban belonging to God (v. 1). To emphasize this fact, the author structures the

⁴⁵ Pratt, p. 120

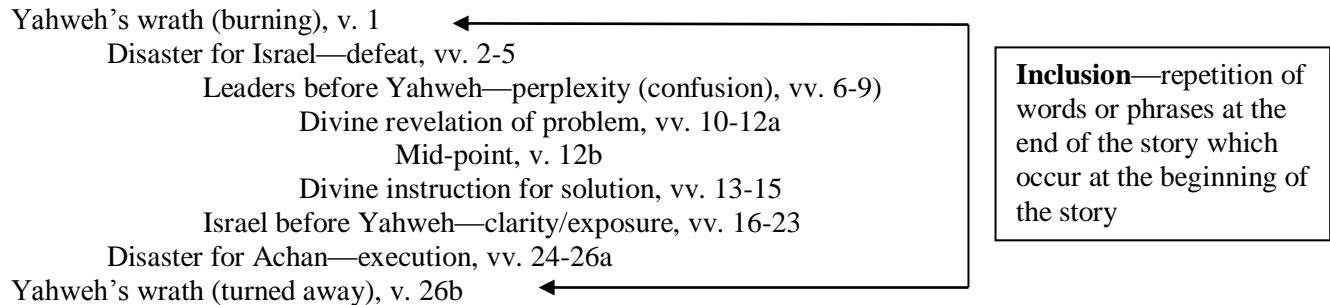
⁴⁶ See Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Flesh*, p. 6, from whom this example is taken

⁴⁷ This fact should discourage anyone in Israel, and in today's church, from self-righteously hindering converted prostitutes from entering the kingdom of God.

⁴⁸ Waltke, p. 36

⁴⁹ A faulty interpretation noted in Davis, *Joshua—No Falling Words*, p. 59

story with a reference to the wrath of God. Note the structure below and the inclusion of v. 1 and v. 26.⁵⁰



Thus, the author frames the whole story in Joshua 7 with the inclusion about the wrath of God—the key to interpreting the story. The NT equivalent of this story is found in Acts 5, the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. In that episode, the deception of two people threatens to unravel the unity and forward progress of the newly founded church carrying out the Great Commission. Likewise in Joshua 7, the deception and treachery of Achan threatens the unity of Israel and the forward progress of conquering the land of Canaan. In both stories, God takes the lives of the perpetrators but spares the rest of His covenant people. However, it should also be noted that innocent Israelite soldiers died as the result of Achan's sin. The sin of a few in the church can hurt many of God's people.

In Joshua 11, notice the description of the enemy of Israel given in vv. 1-5.

Then it came about, when Jabin king of Hazor heard of it, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon and to the king of Shimron and to the king of Achshaph,² and to the kings who were of the north in the hill country, and in the Arabah—south of Chinneroth and in the lowland and on the heights of Dor on the west—³ to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Jebusite in the hill country, and the Hivite at the foot of Hermon in the land of Mizpeh.⁴ They came out, they and all their armies with them, as many people as the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots.⁵ So all of these kings having agreed to meet, came and encamped together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. (Joshua 11:1-5 NASB)

The author could have merely said, "...when Jabin king of Hazor heard of it, he gathered other armies with him to go up against Israel"; but by describing these forces in detail, the author highlights the power of God in delivering Israel from a far superior force.⁵¹ For all practical purposes, Israel was hopeless in the face of her enemies, making the power of God more evident in the story.

The short statement of Joshua 11: 18 is hardly noticeable, but it is packed with information. The author has given us relatively little material from chapters 2—11 on the actual battles fought by Israel in conquering Canaan. Along the way, he has spent considerable time with the Israelite spies and Rahab, the circumcision of the grown males who had not been circumcised as infant males, and the deception of the Gibeonites. From the little material concerning the actual battles, we would be inclined to believe that the conquest of Canaan took only six months, but v. 18 corrects this

⁵⁰ Davis, *Joshua*, p. 58

⁵¹ Davis, *Joshua—No Falling Words*, p. 92)

misconception, “Joshua waged war a long time with all these kings” (Joshua 11:18 NASB).⁵² The *BibleWorks* Timeline estimates the conquest at about 7 to 8 years, quite a protracted (prolonged) war.

The typological and applicatory significance of this is weighty, especially for Western Christians accustomed to McDonald’s hamburgers, TV dinners, and getting other things done in a hurry. The kingdom of God does not come quickly and effortlessly, especially if the church is sitting idly waiting for something to happen to this sin-wrecked world. If we are successful in making disciples of all nations—the New Covenant equivalent of conquering Canaan—sacrifices have to be made in a long, protracted war fought with the spiritual weaponry described in Ephesians 6. War is always messy business and is very expensive. Money must be spent on military machinery—planes, guns, tanks. In spiritual warfare, missionaries, bible schools, literature, translations, etc. must be supported by the church. Some people evangelizing in hostile areas will be imprisoned or killed. But there is no sacrifice made in “seeking first the kingdom of God” which God considers too great—it is, after all, His kingdom; and He has more than enough reward to go around for those who seek His kingdom first before everything else. Jesus’ instructions to His disciples in Matt. 10 seem to indicate that the church will always be in a state of war until Christ returns. Although we enjoy our Sabbath rest in Christ, there will be no permanent rest until He defeats all His and our enemies.

Continuing with what the author says, examine the following passages taken from Judges: 3: 9-11, 12-15, 30; 4:1-4, 31; 6:1, 28; 10:7-8; and 12:7-8, 9b-14. Careful reading of all these passages will reveal that God’s judgment upon Israel did not last as long as His deliverance. While suffering oppression under Cushan-rishathaim for eight years, the land enjoyed rest for forty years, five times as long. While serving Eglon 18 years, deliverance at the hand of Ehud lasted 80 years, more than four times as long. Jabin oppressed the Israelites for 20 years, but deliverance under Deborah endured for 40 years, twice as long. Midian subdued Israel for seven years, followed by deliverance under Gideon for forty years, almost six times as long. They are later given over to the Philistines for 18 years, followed by 6 years of deliverance through Jephthah, 7 years through Ibzan, 10 through Elon, and 8 through Abdon, totaling 31 years. God is, indeed, gracious to his chronically sinful people, but did Israel recognize God’s grace? Did they do the math and realize that they had enjoyed deliverance much longer than suffered bondage? No. The author leaves the math for the Israelite reader to discover.

The story of David and Goliath (1Samuel 17) illustrates the importance of paying careful attention to the specific details of what the author says. Notice the detail of Goliath’s size and the weight of his weapons. In my NIV Study Bible (Zondervan, 1985), the notes in the margin indicate that his armor (v. 5) weighed 125 pounds or 57 kilograms. The head of his spear (v. 7) weighed 15 pounds or about 7 kilograms, thus requiring a massive shaft (like a “weaver’s beam”). Goliath himself was six cubits and a span. A cubit is one and a half feet, times six equals 9 feet plus the span of a man’s hand. I have seen people who were seven feet tall. Many of them are playing professional basketball. But probably none of us have met anyone nine feet tall who could throw a javelin (spear) with a 7 kg head, nor carry around 57 kg of armor. Many of my African friends don’t even weigh this much. Thus, by paying attention to the author’s details, we can better appreciate why the Israelites were cowering behind rocks and bushes hiding from this giant.

⁵² Davis, *Joshua*, p. 100

We can also better appreciate David's faith, but the emphasis of the story is not David's faith, but David's God. This is made clear in vv. 46-47.

“This day **the LORD will deliver you up into my hands**, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and **He will give you into our hands.**” (1 Samuel 17:46-47 NASB)

Notice the **inclusion** at the beginning and end of these two verses. The battle belongs, not to David, but to David's Lord. From this we may deduce the purpose for which the story is written. It is a mistake to make David the object of hero-worship and to preach a sermon on this text which encourages people to be courageous like David. You might get them killed! Rather, the author is writing to Israelites of a divided kingdom after Solomon's death.⁵³ The author's purpose in this episode is to highlight the necessity of a king who *really* believes that “the battle is the Lord's”, that Israel's hope lies in its trust in Yahweh, not in worldly leaders like Saul, human weapons, or military might. Sadly, Israel and Judah never understood this and both were later sent into exile.

In the story of Absalom in 2 Samuel 14, the author makes a special note about his hair.

Now in all Israel was no one as handsome as Absalom, so highly praised; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no defect in him.²⁶ When he cut the hair of his head (and it was at the end of every year that he cut it, for it was heavy on him so he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head at 200 shekels by the king's weight. (2 Samuel 14:25-26 NASB)

Notice what the writer says and what he does not say. First, Absalom is very handsome; no one in Israel (including David) is more handsome, not only in facial appearance, but bodily. Women must have swooned when he walked by! Already, the writer is giving us a clue that we have in Absalom another Saul, and we all know how that story turned out (cf. 1 Sam. 9: 2)! Second, Absalom had a healthy head of hair—five pounds or 2.3 kg to be exact. It would become so heavy on his head that he was forced to cut it from time to time. When Absalom did cut his hair, he would weigh it. He would put it on the scales and actually determine how much his hair weighed. Do you know anyone else who does this?

This is what the writer says (denotation). But what does he not say (see also section 3 below)? What does he suggest or imply about Absalom (connotation)? What kind of person weighs his hair after it is cut? And what kind of man will allow his hair to get so long that it weighs five pounds? It is pretty obvious that Absalom was very proud of his hair. He was a very vain person, so vain that he later believed that he should reign over Israel in place of his father David even while his father is still alive. The author is preparing the reader for Absalom's future rebellion. Ironically, it is Absalom's pretty head that gets wedged into the fork of a large oak tree while running from Joab's troops (2 Sam. 18: 9).⁵⁴ Unable to free himself, he dangles from the tree long enough for Joab to arrive and put

⁵³ See the notes in your Study Bibles which may refer to verses like 1 Sam. 27: 6; 11: 8; 17: 52; and others which indicate the author's knowledge of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah).

⁵⁴ The text does not specifically say that his hair got tangled in the branches, but this is the most likely scenario. This may also be the reason the author makes special note of Absalom's hair at the beginning of the story. He knew that Absalom's vanity would be the end of him.

three spears through his heart. This is what the writer says. What he does not say, but what any average Jewish reader would know, is that Absalom's corpse swinging from a tree was the sign of God's curse for breaking the covenant (Deut. 21: 21-22; Gal. 3: 13). Rather than submitting to his father, whom God had chosen, he rebelled against David and, most of all, God, by his treasonous act.

One **application** among many: The author is rebuking Israel for its fascination with worldly leaders. The Absaloms of this world are the darlings of voters who love those who promote themselves.

3. What the author does not say—I

a. 1 Kings 16

In 1 Kings 16, the writer reveals little about the outstanding political and economic accomplishments of King Omri which must be learned from extra-biblical sources.⁵⁵ For more than 100 years after his death, foreign kings called Israel the land of Omri in honor of his multiple achievements, but the biblical historian only casually mentions his "might" in v. 17. The most important thing about Omri's life is that he "did evil in the sight of the LORD, and acted more wickedly than all who were before him" (v. 16) and that he "walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the LORD God of Israel with their idols" (v. 26). Thus, by omitting several well-known military and economic accomplishments of Omri, the biblical historian highlights what should have been Omri's accomplishments. He should have been a godly leader who led the nation of Israel to worship the true God. He failed in this task, and nothing else about his life mattered. The book of Proverbs says, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city" (Proverbs 16:32 NASB). Can we take the hint? If our lives—word and deed—do not point others to Christ, nothing else we do will matter.

b. Genesis 16: 16—17: 1

As we have seen with 1 Kings 16, the author can say a great deal by what he does not say. Such subtleties in Scripture are often missed. Ralph Davis points out a thirteen-year gap in time between Gen. 16: 16 and 17: 1 which is easily overlooked. In 16: 16, Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael. In 17: 1, he is 99. More than thirteen years had passed since the covenant ratification ceremony in Gen. 15, and twenty-three years had passed since the promise to Abraham in Gen. 12 (10+13=23; cf. Gen. 12: 4). This 13 years between Ishmael and Isaac is no big deal to the reader, but a great ordeal to Abram. What was he doing all this time? Waiting. Waiting for God to fulfill His promise to him. But God was not getting in any hurry, and Abram was not getting any younger. So, Lord, what's the deal? As Davis notes,

So by dropping thirteen years into the dumpster of history between chapters 16 and 17 the writer underscores the struggle of Abraham's faith. What happened in those 13 years? Oh, what had happened during the previous decade plus. Abraham played veterinarian to his goats, settled scraps [fights] among his herdsman, sat up with Sarah when she had the flu, sent scouts out to look for water sources for the flocks—in short, all the sorts of things that one does in the wash-your-face, brush-your-teeth, go-to-work routine of daily living. And year follows year that way, and Yahweh's promise goes unfulfilled. Is the writer not telling us that *time* can be a severe problem for faith? That it can be hard to go on believing

⁵⁵ Extra-biblical sources are sources outside the Bible, like the ancient chronicles of pagan kings.

when you have to walk on in ordinary, run-of-the-mill living without seeing any of the fireworks of promise?⁵⁶

c. Kings and Chronicles

There is a big difference in the emphasis of the writer of Kings from the writer of Chronicles. This is discovered by comparing different segments of history in the Kings with the same segments of history in Chronicles. Notice that in the first chapter of Kings, we have the drama of Adonijah's failed attempt to seize the kingdom of Israel. We read nothing of this in 1 Chronicles. The writer of Kings is intent on showing how the downward spiral of disobedience in Israel, particularly its kings, led to the curses of the covenant (Deuteronomy 27-28) and the eventual exile of both nations. Consequently, it was necessary to his purpose to show from the very beginning of Solomon's kingdom that there was division in the ranks which could only be contained if Solomon was faithful to the Mosaic Covenant. He was for a time, and Israel prospered; but in the end he failed, with disastrous consequences.

Moreover, we hear nothing in 1 Kings about David's having previously named Solomon as king until Nathan the prophet mentions it to Bathsheba on the verge of Adonijah's rebellion (1 Kings 1: 13-17). On the other hand, David's choice of Solomon seems crystal clear in 1 Chronicles in which the author depicts a smooth, uneventful transition of power from David to Solomon. First Chronicles 23: 1—29: 25 serves as a substitute for 1 Kings 1: 1—2: 9 and 2: 13—3: 3. In those large segments, the transfer of power takes place amidst a massive assembly of Israel's political, religious, and military leaders. While 1 Chronicles 23: 2—27: 34 records those present at the assembly, 1 Chronicles 28: 1—29: 25 records what happened.⁵⁷ 1 Chronicles 23: 2 and 1 Chronicles 28: 1 serve as an **inclusion** for those chapters.

And he gathered together all the leaders of Israel with the priests and the Levites. (1 Chronicles 23:2 NASB)

Now David assembled at Jerusalem all the officials of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the commanders of the divisions that served the king, and the commanders of thousands, and the commanders of hundreds, and the overseers of all the property and livestock belonging to the king and his sons, with the officials and the mighty men, even all the valiant men. (1 Chronicles 28:1 NASB)

From reading the lists of leaders in 1 Chronicles, the reader gets the impression of overwhelming support for Solomon and the national unity of Israel. Adonijah's rebellion—of which the Chronicler was well aware—is remembered as an insignificant footnote in the history of Israel, something he chooses not even to mention.⁵⁸ From this perspective, one may interpret David's inattention to Adonijah (1 Kings 1: 5-6) as possible indifference considering the fact that he had already made his choice of Solomon clear to Nathan and Bathsheba sometime back. On the other hand, should he not have made his choice of Solomon clear to Adonijah as well? Either he has not done so, or it could be that Adonijah has hopes of overturning David's decision in his end-run around Solomon, much like his older brother Absalom attempted an end-run around David (2 Sam. 15). The manner in which the narrator associates Adonijah with Absalom implies a similar character to Absalom: "And he was also

⁵⁶ *The Word Became Fresh*, pp. 15-16, emphasis his

⁵⁷ Pratt, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, pp. 247-248

⁵⁸ Pratt, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, p. 248

a very handsome man, and he was born after Absalom” (1 Kings 1:6b NASB). The whole presentation of the story in 1 Kings leads us to believe that David is either negligent or too senile to keep control of his kingdom⁵⁹, and that Solomon became king by a hair’s breadth, and no more, through the palace intrigue of Nathan and Bathsheba. Yet, we get no such impression from Chronicles in which David gathers a massive assembly to install Solomon as king. Moreover, David makes it crystal clear in this large assembly that God Himself had chosen Solomon to be king from among all his sons.

“Of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons), He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. ⁶”He said to me, ‘Your son Solomon is the one who shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him to be a son to Me, and I will be a father to him. (1 Chronicles 28:5-6 NASB)

Both of the accounts in 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles are true. There is, therefore, no contradiction, only a difference in perspective and purpose. The decree of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36: 23)—not recorded in 2 Kings—indicates a later date for Chronicles in which the audience would be Israelites who were given permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Consequently, Chronicles is written to the post-exilic community to provide guidance in their efforts to restore Jerusalem. In order to do so, it was not necessary to the author’s purpose to repeat the failures of Solomon in 1 Kings 11 or his ambiguous behavior in 1 Kings 2 with the elimination of his enemies. The Chronicler presents the idealized kingdom of David and Solomon as an encouragement to the restored exiles in Jerusalem to persevere in their devotion to God in spite of their tragic history. Although the Davidic kingdom has fallen, Israel still has a future; and this future is evident in the return of Israel from captivity through God’s providential use of a pagan king, Cyrus of Persia.⁶⁰

The Chronicler also focuses on the idealized kingdom of David by concentrating on the kings of Judah. Even the evil King Manasseh is shown finally in a positive light through his repentance (2 Chron. 33). The author of Kings, on the other hand, primarily presents the reasons for the disintegration of the Davidic kingdom, beginning with Solomon’s apostasy. Even David barely escapes God’s ultimate judgment of death by repenting of his sin of adultery and murder, a story reported in 2 Samuel but omitted in 1 Chronicles.

The writer of Kings prepares us for Solomon’s eventual demise in 1 Kings 3: 1 with his marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter and other foreign women (1 Kings 11: 1), his sacrifice on the high places (1 Kings 3: 3), and his proliferation of horses and chariots (1 Kings 10; cf. Deut. 17). Moreover, the author of Kings **alludes** to Solomon’s misplaced priorities by telling us that Solomon spent seven years on the temple but 13 years on his own house (1 Kings 6: 38—7: 1). Waltke suggests that Solomon’s construction of “rival buildings” serves as the center point and emphasis in a chiasmic structure which highlights Solomon’s downfall.⁶¹

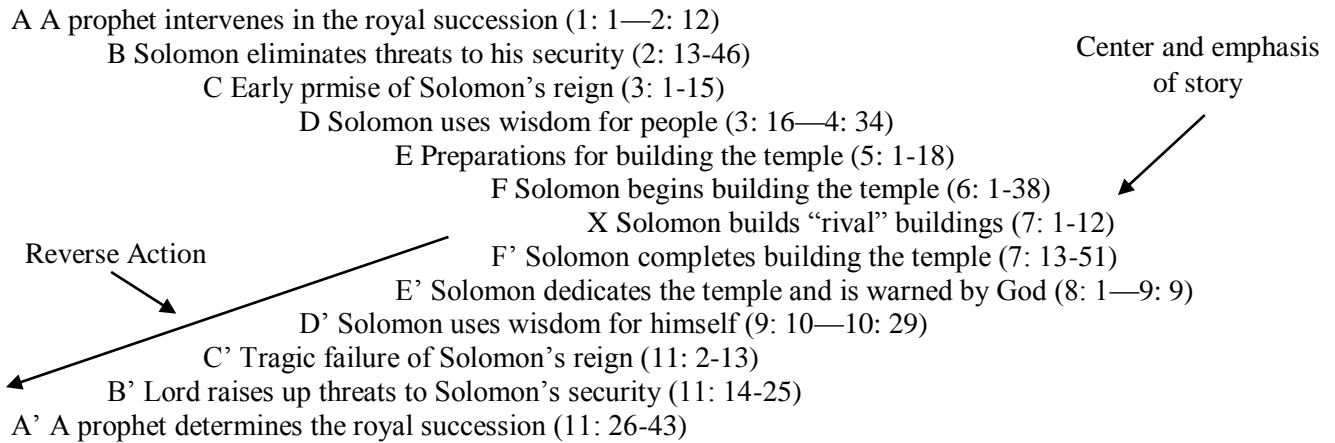
X. The narrator structurally, not necessarily chronologically, interrupts his narrative about building the temple with an account of his building his own palace complex to suggest subtly the division of Solomon’s heart. His own palace is considerably longer and more than twice as wide (1 Kings 6: 38 and 7: 1; 6: 2 and

⁵⁹ Walsh, p. 67

⁶⁰ The Zondervan NASB Study Bible, introductory notes on 1 Chronicles

⁶¹ Waltke, p. 705

7: 2). As his love becomes increasingly divided, his wisdom also becomes increasingly devoted to his own splendor, not *I AM*'s.⁶²



If Waltke's interpretation is correct, it shows how the biblical author is preparing the reader all along for Solomon's ultimate failure. Even Israel's wisest king was not wise enough.

4. The relationship between words and their context

Sometimes the same word can mean different things depending on its relationships with other words in the same context. Pratt uses the example of the word "house" in 2 Samuel 7: 1-16.

First, how many times do we see the word, "house" in this text? The word dominates the passage. What does the word, "house" mean (denote) in this passage? Does it have only one meaning or are there suggested meanings? In v. 1, "house" means David's palace, partially constructed of cedar (v. 2). In vv. 5-7, "house" means temple, for David was contemplating the possibility of building a temple to house the ark of God. In v. 11, "house" means dynasty or the succession of kings from David's line, for in v. 12 God assures David that He will raise up a descendent of David whose kingdom He will establish. Then, in v. 13, "house" once again means temple because God says that David's descendent will build Him a house. God does not need a dynasty of descendents to follow Him. He is eternal. But David is mortal. He will die; thus, he needs this promise from the Lord that his descendent will rule upon his throne in Jerusalem. In v. 16, "house" once again denotes (means) David's dynasty. David's palace of cedar will not endure before God forever, but his dynasty will endure forever in the person of Jesus Christ, the descendent of David.⁶³

Application: Do we have an explicit command in the NT to build God a house? With all the fascination with brick and mortar both in the US and Africa, one would think we did. The fascination, however, is ours, not God's. The church thrived for over three hundred years in the Roman Empire without buildings, and it can continue without them—in other existing structures (homes, businesses, schools, etc.) leaving money for supporting people in ministry. The "house" (dynasty) of David represents the kingdom of God in the OT. The kingdom of God in the NT is represented in the church (but includes much more than the church) including the work of believers in all walks of life.

⁶² Waltke, p. 706

⁶³ Pratt, p. 122, from whom I borrowed this example

B. How did the author arrange his story (or stories)?

Often, the meaning of a story or a series of stories is derived from the way the author arranges a story in relation to other stories.⁶⁴ The OT narratives are most often arranged in historical sequence—one event following another chronologically—but they are sometimes arranged out of sequence to the author’s purpose.

1. 2 Samuel 21—24

The last four chapters of 2 Samuel are a noteworthy example of “dischronologized events” which serve the writer’s particular purpose rather than simply reporting events in historical sequence.⁶⁵ Notice the indefinite temporal indicator in v. 1, “Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year....” (2 Sam. 21:1a NASB). “In the days of David” does not specify when this famine occurred. What we do know is that it occurred after David showed mercy to Mephibosheth (cf. v. 7; 2 Sam. 9). This is a very difficult passage to swallow and one we will explore below under “theology”.

Following this dramatic episode, we have a series of reports about four Philistine giants who were killed by some of David’s valiant warriors. Four different wars are mentioned; and, again, we don’t know exactly when they occurred except that they must have occurred after David killed Goliath and after he became king.

In 2 Samuel 22, we have David’s psalm of praise for all the deliverances he received at the hand of Yahweh (paralleled by Ps. 18) followed by his “last words” in chapter 23: 1-7. 2 Sam. 23: 8-39 gives several reports of the military exploits of David’s mighty men. This is followed by the dramatic episode of the illegitimate census and its consequences (chapter 24).

So why does the author include these non-chronological accounts at the end of 2 Samuel? Glancing briefly over the chapters of 2 Samuel, we find that from chapter 11 through 20, David’s life has been monopolized (dominated) by his sin of adultery and murder and the consequences which ensued from it. One might get the impression from this that David was not a very good king. This would be the wrong impression—as Kings and Chronicles clearly indicate from their positive references to his administration (1 Ki. 15: 11; 2 Ki. 14: 3; 2 Ki. 18: 3; passim [in other places]). Therefore, the writer is wrapping up the history of David’s reign as being one which—for the most part—enjoyed the blessing of God.⁶⁶

There are six distinct sections in 2 Sam. 21-24, five of which are positive and only one negative. And even in the negative episode concerning the illegitimate census, David’s submission to the Lord’s discipline is presented in a positive light. David trusts the Lord to be merciful even in His judgment (v. 14). Furthermore, through his sacrifice, the plague upon the people is checked. In the psalm of chapter 22: 45-49, his enemies are subdued under his feet—a type of the eternal dominion of Christ,

⁶⁴ Pratt, p. 122

⁶⁵ Pratt, p. 212

⁶⁶ Pratt, p. 213

the promise to David alluded to in 23: 5, “Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, Ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire, Will He not indeed make it grow?” (NASB)

On the other hand, the writer is also realistic about David’s flaws. The nation suffers a plague because he orders an illicit census (chapter 24). We are not told why the Lord was angry with Israel nor the reason the census was unnecessary and sinful. All we know is that the census was wrong and the nation suffered under it, just as it suffered from David’s adultery with Bathsheba. Such stories are clear indications of the trustworthiness of Scripture and its divine inspiration. Were the writers trying to cover up the sins of their best king, they would surely have omitted this and many other stories about David, but the Spirit inspired them to air the dirty laundry along with the clean.⁶⁷

⁶⁸ to

2. 2 Kings 18—20

A close examination of 2 Kings 18—20 will reveal that the events in chapter 20: 1-19 actually occur before the events of chapters 18 and 19. Chapter 18: 7 reveals that Hezekiah had rebelled against the king of Assyria, thus refusing to pay him tribute money. The writer reports this rebellion in a positive light by putting it in context with vv. 3-6 with the summary statement, “And the Lord was with him; wherever he went he prospered.” But Hezekiah’s defiance of Assyria was inconsistent, for in 18: 14 he once again agreed to pay tribute to the current king of Assyria, Sennacherib. His trust in Yahweh begins to crumble for two reasons found in 18: 9-13. First, the northern kingdom of Israel is defeated by Assyria and taken into exile. Second, Assyria has also seized all the fortified cities of Judah, leaving only Jerusalem (the “remnant”; cf. 18:13, 19: 4). Thus, Hezekiah is beginning to wonder how long Jerusalem can hold out against Assyria. To comply with Sennacherib’s demands, Hezekiah gave him all the silver found in the temple, and he emptied the royal treasury. Still short, he also cut off the gold from the doors and doorposts of the temple (18: 15-16). No longer trusting in Yahweh for deliverance, Hezekiah trusts, instead, in the word of Sennacherib.

Apparently, the loot given to Sennacherib was either short of the contract or Sennacherib violated the contract. The most likely explanation is that Sennacherib violated his word to Hezekiah, thus demonstrating that Hezekiah should not have trusted the word of a pagan king. The next thing we know is that Rabshakeh, Sennacherib’s general, is engaging in psychological warfare at the city gates of Jerusalem threatening to overthrow the city. In his speech, Rabshekah steps over the line and blasphemes the name of Yahweh by likening Him to all the gods of the other nations which Sennacherib had defeated (18: 17-37). In response to Rabshakeh’s threats, Hezekiah entrusts himself to the Lord and to the Lord’s prophet, Isaiah (chapter 19). In his petition, he reminds God how Rabshakeh had likened Him to all the other false gods Assyria had defeated. In response to his humility, faith, and trust, God trounces the army of Sennacherib, killing 185,000 troops in a single night.

From 19: 37, it appears that Assyria is no longer a threat as far as Hezekiah is concerned, but in 20: 6, God promises Hezekiah that He will deliver him from the king of...that’s correct, Assyria. This does

⁶⁷ For a structural analysis of 2 Sam. 21-24, see below.

⁶⁸ Juxtaposition means side by side

not reconcile with the fact that Assyria's army had already been devastated by Yahweh in chapter 19. Further, Hezekiah shows the son of the king of Babylon all the treasures of the temple and his house (20: 13), but if he had given all the silver and gold to Sennacherib previously, there would be no treasures to show off; they would be in the hands of Sennacherib. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the biblical historian reported the threat of Assyria and Hezekiah's meeting with the officials of Babylon out of chronological order.⁶⁹

But why did the historian depart from a chronological sequence? Was Hezekiah's faith in chapter 19 with his lack of faith in 18: 14 and 20: 13. In 18: 14, Hezekiah fails to believe that God will continue protecting him from Assyria as He had done formerly (18: 7; see comments above). He therefore agrees to pay the tribute withheld earlier. Further, Hezekiah courts the king of Babylon in hope of forming an alliance with Babylon against Assyria. This is why he shows the king's son all his treasures. It was a signal to Babylon that Hezekiah was willing to pay them for protection against the Assyrians. Of course, this alliance would make no sense if Assyria's army had been previously devastated by a death-angel from Yahweh. It only makes sense if chapter 20 occurs before chapter 19 chronologically. At any rate, God was not pleased with this arrangement—amounting to idolatry—or God didn't need any help from Babylon against Assyria something He demonstrates very graphically in chapter 19 which occurs after Hezekiah's meeting with the Babylonian emissary. The following parallel structure is suggested:

- A—Hezekiah's trust in Yahweh—rebellion against Assyria, victory against Philistia (2 Ki. 18: 1-8)
- B—Hezekiah's trust falters—agreement to pay tribute (2 Kings 18: 9-16)
- C—Sennacherib's treachery—Rabshakeh's blasphemy (2 Ki. 18: 17-37)
- A₂—Hezekiah's trust in Yahweh—prays for the Lord's help; Assyria defeated (2 Ki. 19: 1-37);
- prays for an extension of his life; his life prolonged (2 Ki. 20: 1-11)
- B₂—Hezekiah's trust falters—seeks an alliance with Babylon (2 Ki. 20: 12-13)
- C₂—Isaiah's prediction of Judah's defeat by Babylon (2 Ki. 20: 14-21)

Thus, we have three episodes of Hezekiah's trust in Yahweh (A and A₂) contrasted with two episodes of his lack of trust (B and B₂). Whenever Hezekiah trusts in the Lord, the Lord always comes through; and . He is victorious against the Philistines and prospers wherever he goes. The Assyrian threat is eliminated. He becomes terminally ill, but God restores him to health and guarantees him an extra fifteen years of life. But whenever Hezekiah puts his trust in men and foreign alliances, bad things happen (C and C₂). He is betrayed. refuses to honor the agreed-upon terms of the treaty. Babylon, which shows promise of future support, later becomes Judah's conqueror and oppressor. The writer is demonstrating to his readers that God will show Himself strong in behalf of those who trust him—even against overwhelming odds. He is also teaching them that trust in man is fruitless, especially pagan kings. Godless men and nations cannot be trusted, but God can and should be trusted. By arranging chapter 20 after chapters 18-19, the Israelite reader could see more clearly how foolish Hezekiah was in trusting foreign powers. Throughout the history of Israel, her kings made this same mistake which always led to disaster. We need not be concerned that the Israelite reader would have gotten confused with the order in which the author reports the events. He would have known that the author was reversing the order.

3. 2 Kings 5

⁶⁹ cf. Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings—The Power and the Fury*, pp. 291-293; see also C.F. Keil

For a third example, what is the writer suggesting in his arrangement of the story in 2 Kings 5?⁷⁰ A little, insignificant Israelite girl is kidnapped by marauding bands of Aramean soldiers. Her mistress is the wife of a very important commanding officer in the army. Remembering stories of Elisha the prophet, the little girl suggests that Naaman's leprosy could be cured by the prophet. The Aramean king agrees to send Naaman to Israel to be cured, but the letter does not specifically mention Elisha.

He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy." (2 Kings 5:6 NASB)

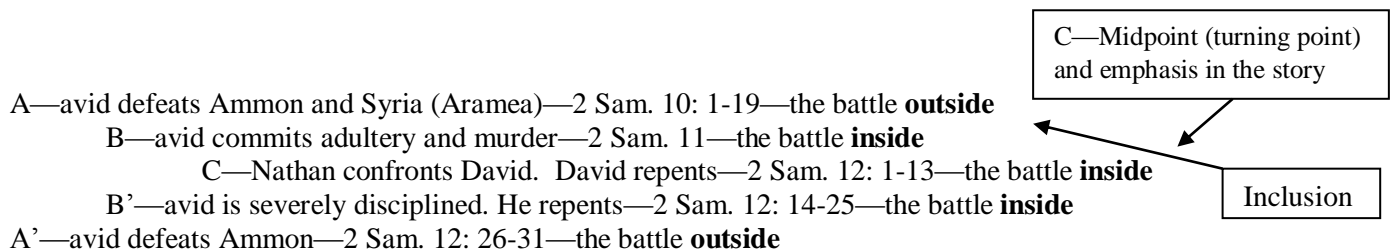
Notice the "you" in v. 6 addressed to the king of Israel. The assumption (what the king of Aram assumes without proof) is that the king of Israel would surely know about his own prophet who could cure diseases. ("He doesn't know? Well, how dumb is that?!") Upon reading the letter from the king of Aram, the king of Israel interprets the letter as a conspiracy to declare war against Israel when Naaman—a very important man—returns to Aram uncured. a.

When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me." (2 Kings 5:7 NASB)

Well, Jehoram, no one ever said **you** could cure leprosy! This letter is not about you! It's about Elisha and Elisha's God! It never occurred to Jehoram that there was, indeed, a prophet of Yahweh in Israel who could cure Naaman's leprosy (5: 8)! Therefore, the writer highlights the startling contrast between the faithlessness of Jehoram and the faithfulness of this common slave girl and that of the Gentile, Naaman. While the common remnant of Israel had faith, its leaders didn't. If anyone should have been aware of Elisha's divinely given powers, Jehoram should; but God uses this insignificant slave girl to draw attention to his unbelief. Who is this king, anyway? Note that the writer does not give the king the dignity of being named in the story. (What the writer does not say: "Jehoram is a spiritual zero!") He is Jehoram, Ahab's son.⁷¹ Well, now; this explains everything. Why should we expect faith from Ahab's son?

4. 2 Samuel 10—12

Take another example from 2 Sam. 10—12. In chapter 10, David is winning battles right and left against the Ammonites and Arameans. In chapter 11, he commits adultery with Bathsheba and has Uriah murdered along with his troops. In Chapter 12, David is confronted and rebuked by Nathan the prophet. At the very end of chapter 12, vv. 26-31, David is once again winning battles against Ammon. Almost two entire chapters are devoted to David's adultery, murder, and cover-up while chapter 10 and only a few verses of chapter 12 are devoted to his victories.



⁷¹ cf. 2 Ki. 3: 6; 2 Ki. 8: 16 in which "Joram" is a shortened form of "Jehoram". I know it's confusing, but don't take my word for it; look at a chart of the kings in your study bibles.

As we can see from the structure, David is fighting battles on two fronts. He is fighting Ammonites on the outside and his own sin on the inside. While winning the battle on the outside (chapter 10), he is losing the battle on the inside (chapter 11). Finally, he wins the in battle by repenting of his sin, by humbling himself in prayer and fasting, and by accepting God's judgment against him (chapter 12). By the amount of space devoted to the internal battles David is fighting compared with the external battles (52 versus 25), as well as the structure, the author indicates that the internal, spiritual battles are more important and consequential for David's life and the life of the nation of Israel.⁷² Winning military victories is only a moderate achievement compared to winning the battle against inward corruption. Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness", not external success.

Application: The average Israelite would probably not have agreed with the emphasis of the biblical writer or the interpretation offered here. After all, strength and material prosperity are what people vote for in popular elections. The average American would not agree either. When President Bill Clinton was being criticized for the Monica Lewinski scandal—ith whom he had a sexual affair uring his first term and then lied about it on public TV—his campaign advisers for his second presidential race came up with an ingenious slogan: "It's the economy, stupid." In other words, integrity in one's private life is inconsequential and unimportant for public office. The important thing was that the nation prospered financially during Clinton's first term of office, although he had little to do with it. Clinton won his second term, proving that many Americans put little or no priority on moral integrity for national leaders—or for themselves. A country's leaders are generally mirror-images of the people who elect them to office.

Continuing the analysis, we also see in this structure an **inclusion** which is a repetition of the beginning of the story at the end of the story (also called **inclusio** without the "n")⁷³ Whenever an author uses an inclusion, he is going to draw emphasis upon the material in the middle of the inclusion, particularly the very center. At the beginning and end of the story, David is fighting military battles. The purpose of this inclusion is to emphasize the inner battles David is fighting.

5. 2 Samuel 8—10

In the story of David and Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9), notice that the author arranges the story in-between David's conquest of the Moabites and Arameans in 2 Sam. 8 and his conquest of the Ammonites and Arameans in 2 Sam. 10.

Conquest of the Moabites and Arameans—no covenant (2 Sam. 8)

Kindness to Mephibosheth—covenant made with Jonathan (2 Sam. 9)

Conquest of the Ammonites and Arameans—no covenant (2 Sam. 10)

This structure is another inclusion in which David's kindness to Mephibosheth is "sandwiched" between his military victories. Again, we ask: Why this arrangement? Structurally, the spotlight is turned upon his kindness to Mephibosheth because of the covenant made with Jonathan. David is ruthless with his enemies—who are also the enemies of God—ut kind to those with whom he is in

⁷² Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel—Looking on the Heart*

⁷³ The inclusion contains or "includes" everything inside of it, namely, the center point and emphasis of the story.

covenant. Eschatologically⁷⁴, the same will be true of Christ when He returns in judgment. He will be kind to His covenant people but ruthless with His enemies who have rejected his offer of grace. We should not feel that God is treating the Moabites, Arameans, and Ammonites unjustly. They were godless people who practiced infant sacrifice and a host of sexual perversions. God had given them 400 years to mend their ways, but they had not done so (e.g. see Gen. 15: 16). David had also sent an expedition of good-will to the Ammonites (chap. 10), but his emissaries⁷⁵ had been spurned and humiliated. In the same way, God offers peace to His enemies through Jesus Christ, but this peace is most often spurned; and His emissaries—witnessing Christians—are rejected and sometimes persecuted and killed (cf. 2 Cor. 5: 20; Rev. 11). Thus, when Christ returns, He will punish those who have rejected His emissaries, but He will keep His promises to those whom the Father has given Him. None of them will perish (Jn. 10: 27-29).

C. Why did the author write the story?

1. Daniel 3

What was the author's purpose in including the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3: 1-30? Daniel's prophecy is written for the exiled community in Babylon, later to become the Persian Empire. While the nation of Israel had voluntarily worshiped false gods throughout its tarnished history, Daniel's three friends refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's statue even if they were punished with death. The story served several purposes:⁷⁶

- (1) to contrast the faithlessness of the nation of Israel with the faith of Daniel's friends
- (2) to encourage the faithful remnant in exile to stand fast in the true worship of God
- (3) to highlight the power of Yahweh in contrast to the powerlessness of false gods

2. 2 Samuel 9

Returning to 2 Samuel, why did the writer include the story of Mephibosheth? David was a warrior, and God blessed him in all of his military campaigns. The biblical historian could have filled the pages of 2 Samuel with story after story of military victories, but he chooses instead to take up space with the story of David's kindness to the lame son of Jonathan, the grandson of Saul, David's archenemy. So what? It is difficult to single out one single purpose of the biblical author since there may have been, and probably were, multiple purposes. As mentioned above, one main purpose of the passage was to highlight the importance of the covenant made many years earlier between David and Jonathan. David was a man of his word. Even though it was customary for kings to consolidate their power by eliminating any possible competitors to the throne—and Saul's grandson would have been one such competitor—he remembered his promise to Jonathan and fulfilled it. David is a covenant-keeping king who has a covenant-keeping God.

However, we may also say that the "full value" of the text goes beyond the original writer's intention. The author of Samuel (originally a single book), could not have known that the story would provide a

⁷⁴ Eschatology is the study of future events in the progress of redemption.

⁷⁵ An emissary is one who represents another person of higher rank, e.g. a king.

⁷⁶ Pratt, p. 124

theological type of Jesus Christ, the King of kings, who would show kindness to his enemies—sinners like you and me—because of the eternal covenant between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to save sinners on the basis of the blood atonement of Jesus Christ. All of us are enemies of God, incapable of saving ourselves or giving anything to God by which He would be obligated to forgive us of our sins. We are like Mephibosheth, “lame in both feet” (occurring twice in 2 Sam. 9), helpless, hopeless, and archenemies of the crown. Yet, because of His covenant promise to those who believe, He forgives us, saves us, and invites us to eat from his table for eternity (mentioned three times in 2 Sam. 9). Moreover, it is not we who initially seek God. He seeks us, even as David sought out Mephibosheth.

3. Judges 17-19

For another example, why did the author of Judges include the story of Micah’s idol in chapters 17—18 and the priest’s concubine in chapter 19? Why should these stories (one of them X-rated for violence and sexual content) even be included in the Bible? In the story of Micah’s idol, Micah acquires a Levite who becomes his private priest. Rather than being owned by the Lord and subject to His law, the Levite sells himself to Micah for his personal maintenance, thus revealing the failure of Israelite tribes to provide for their priests during this period. He also presides over Micah’s silver idol as if this was legitimate religious practice. The Levite later decides to desert Micah for what he perceives to be a better deal from a marauding band of 600 men from the tribe of Dan. Better to be paid by 600 people rather than one! The story highlights the decadent and degenerate condition of Israel’s religion during the period following Joshua’s death, the period of the judges. Everything was permissible in the name of religion; every man did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17: 6; *passim*⁷⁷). By placing the story of this Levite as the epilogue of Judges, the writer is telling his readers that Israel failed largely because the Levites and priests failed.⁷⁸ Once the worship of God is corrupted, the corruption of morals soon follows.

As for the story of the Levite’s concubine, read it for yourself—then read Gen. 19. You will come away from the story wondering why the Lord did not destroy Israel as he did Sodom and Gomorrah. The reason must be: God’s covenant promise to Abraham. or all practical purposes, the nation of Israel during the period of the judges had sunk to the moral equivalent of Sodom. Other than a small remnant of believers (see Ruth), there was very little difference, and the writer wants his readers to know this. Take note of the following two passages.

While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him."²³ Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly."²⁴ "Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man." (Judges 19:22-24 NASB)

Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter;⁵ and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them."⁶ But Lot went out to them at

⁷⁷ *Passim* means “in other places”

⁷⁸ Waltke, p. 125

the doorway, and shut the door behind him,⁷ and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly."⁸ "Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof." (Genesis 19:4-8 NASB)

This is what is known as an **allusion** in which one passage of Scripture refers to another.⁷⁹ Other examples of allusions are found in the prophets who condemn the Israelites for their violations of covenant law.⁸⁰

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, Who say to your husbands, "Bring now, that we may drink!" (Amos 4:1 NASB)

"You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy, whether *he is* one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. (Deuteronomy 24:14 NASB)

Application of Judges 17-19: What difference does this story make in my life or the life of God's people, the church? Well, if the author's inclusion of this story illustrated just how far Israel had sunk into the mire of moral depravity, it may be applied the same way today. Though claiming to be the chosen people of God, the visible church often resembles—and even surpasses—the moral decadence of the culture around it. Adultery, slander, materialism, apathy toward the poor, and a host of other heinous sins plague the modern church; and if God chooses to discipline His church with severe judgment—as he did the tribe of Benjamin—then we should not be too surprised if He judges us. In fact, God has already judged the church down through history and continues to judge it today. The Revelation of John warns the church in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) that they must repent or suffer the consequences.

Although God will never cut down the cultivated tree rooted firmly in his covenants and oaths to the patriarchs, he cuts off and grafts in branches, both natural and wild, appropriated to his righteous wisdom and mercy. Like Israel of old, the church continues to have both true believers and nominal believers...The tragic history of national Israel thus serves as a sober warning to the nominal church. Through church history God has sternly cut off wild branches and mercifully grafted in new ones, always preserving a few of the natural branches. The churches that formerly inhabited Turkey were warned in the letters of the Apocalypse that their lampstands would be removed (e.g. Rev. 2: 5). True to his word, God removed that lampstand, or branch, when they failed to heed his warning.⁸¹

Davis emphasizes the importance of asking the "so what?" of any passage we are attempting to interpret. "If what I study won't preach, there is something wrong with the way I study what I study."⁸²

Pratt provides a helpful diagram illustrating three different angles to the original meaning of a text.⁸³

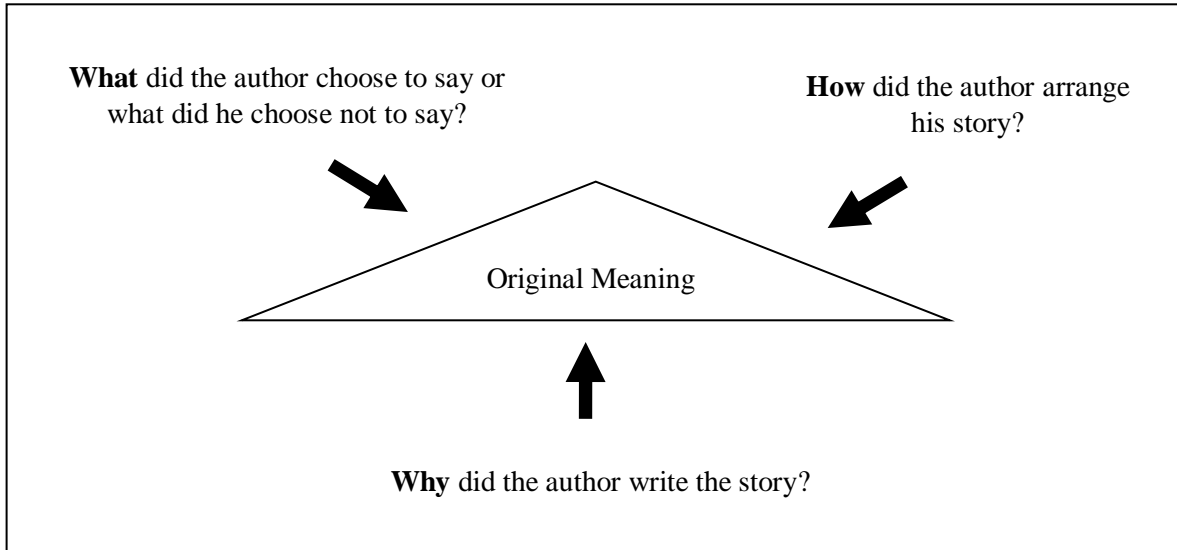
⁷⁹ Pratt, pp. 246-247

⁸⁰ Waltke, p. 134

⁸¹ Waltke, p. 330

⁸² Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, p. 7

⁸³ Adapted from Pratt, p. 125



Summary and Conclusion

As we can see from the above examples, asking the right questions from the text can go a long way toward giving us the correct meaning. Moreover, once we determine the author's meaning and purpose, we are on our way to preaching the text with the proper application which is in keeping with the author's intended purpose rather than some other application which is better suited to another text. The effectiveness of the application will be directly proportional to the accuracy of the interpretation. If we attempt to make an application which is not directly related to the text, the listener will simply say to himself, "Huh? Where do I see this in the story?"

Lesson Three—Structure Implies Meaning (Part I)

Introduction

In this lesson, we will continue exploring the structure of OT narratives and how structure implies the author's purpose for writing the narrative. The kind of structure often employed includes circular patterns or inclusions, contrasting patterns, reverse symmetry or chiasms, forward symmetry or parallelisms. (In fact, all structure involves some element of parallelism). Not only may we find a few verses in a story arranged in these patterns, but larger narratives (e.g. 1 Samuel 13—14 or Judges 14—16) may be arranged in parallel or chiasmic patterns. It takes a great deal of investigation of the text to see these patterns emerge, especially in larger narratives, but the rewards are worth it.

VI. The Structure of OT Narratives

A. Symmetry

We have dealt with this earlier under the question: How did the author arrange his story (or stories)? We will now explore this question in more detail. In many OT narratives, there are ideas which form a “conceptual balance” between the beginning and ending of the story.⁸⁴ The beginning part of the story may anticipate what will later happen at the ending of the story, or the ending will recall something which happened at the beginning of the story.

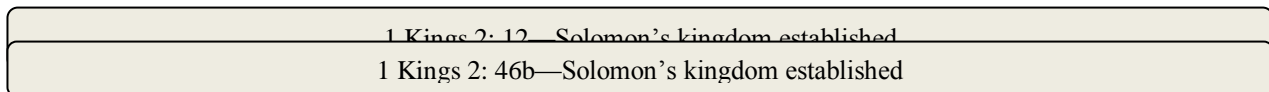
1. Circular patterns or inclusions

The story of Israel's defeat of Jericho begins in Joshua 2 and ends in Joshua 6. Two spies are sent into Jericho to scout the city. They find lodging with a harlot, Rahab, who hides the two spies rather than giving them up to the king of Jericho. Tension is introduced into the story when Rahab pleads with the spies to spare her and her family when Israel's armies come to destroy the city (2: 12-13). The question is raised: What will happen to Rahab's family when the battle is fought? Will the spies keep their word? This tension is resolved in 6: 22-25 when Rahab and her father's household are spared by Joshua's army. Thus, the whole story of Jericho, consisting of five chapters, begins and ends with reference to Rahab, the harlot who became the great-great grandmother of David (Mat. 1: 5-6). Thus, there is a circular pattern which starts with Rahab and ends with Rahab.

Circular patterns in OT narratives may also go by another name—**inclusions**. As stated earlier, an inclusion is a literary device in which a repeated phrase marks the beginning and ending of a literary unit.

⁸⁴ Pratt, p. 185

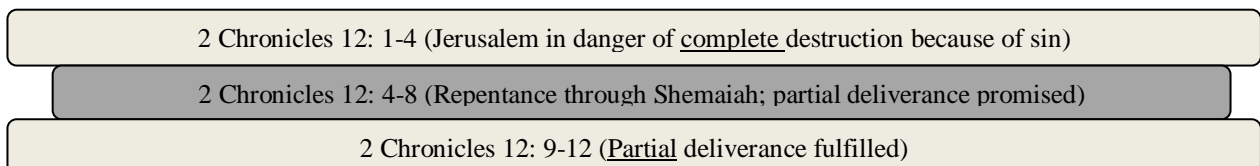
Consider the story of the consolidation of Solomon’s kingdom found in 1 Kings 2: 12-46. We read in v. 12, “And Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.” Following this statement, we find the stories of Adonijah’s failed conspiracy to take the throne and his execution, Abiathar’s banishment, and Joab’s and Shimei’s execution. At the end of the story we find the words: “Thus the kingdom was established in the hands of Solomon (v. 46b). Therefore, we see that the events which occurred between v. 12 and v. 46 explain how Solomon’s kingdom was consolidated (established) and are sandwiched between these two statements.⁸⁵ As mentioned above, the inclusion forms a “sandwich” or “hamburger” like two slices of bread with meat or fish in-between them.⁸⁶



The **inclusion** at the beginning and end of the story shows the author’s emphasis. Solomon’s treatment of Adonijah, Abiathar, et al, serves to show how Solomon’s kingdom was established. It is difficult, however, to determine whether Solomon had God’s approval for these actions or not. It is not explicitly stated by the author that God approved or disapproved, but the **inclusion** implies that Solomon’s actions were justified. If we look at the story more carefully, every one of these men could have avoided judgment (except Joab, the murderer) if they had simply listened to Solomon and obeyed his commands. Their unwillingness to obey signified that they would have been a continual threat to his kingdom.

2. Contrasting patterns

The story of Israel’s rebellion during Rehoboam’s reign reveals a contrasting pattern (2 Chronicles 12: 1-12). At the beginning of the story, Rehoboam and all Israel with him had forsaken God’s law. In response, the Lord abandons him and the nation into the hands of Shishak, king of Egypt. But the Lord then sends Shemaiah the prophet to rebuke Rehoboam. Rehoboam and the princes of Israel humble themselves before the Lord’s prophet, and in response the Lord does not allow Shishak to completely destroy Israel. Rather, Shishak makes Israel a vassal kingdom under his sovereignty. At the end of the story, “conditions were good in Judah” (v. 12). Thus, the story begins with Israel in imminent danger of being completely destroyed because they had forsaken the Lord, and it ends with Israel back in favor with the Lord and at peace with Egypt through repentance (although short-lived repentance).⁸⁷ This is also an inclusion, but the beginning and ending are contrasts rather than comparisons.

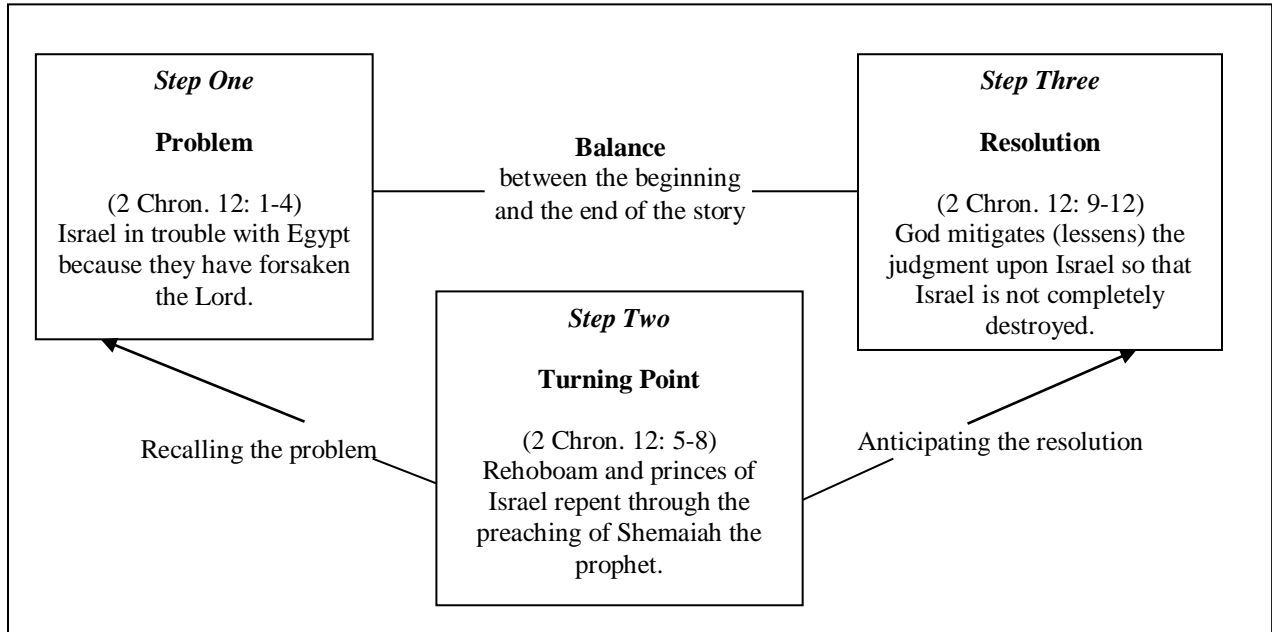


⁸⁵ See Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative—A Guide to Interpretation*, pp. 109-110, from whom I have cited this example).

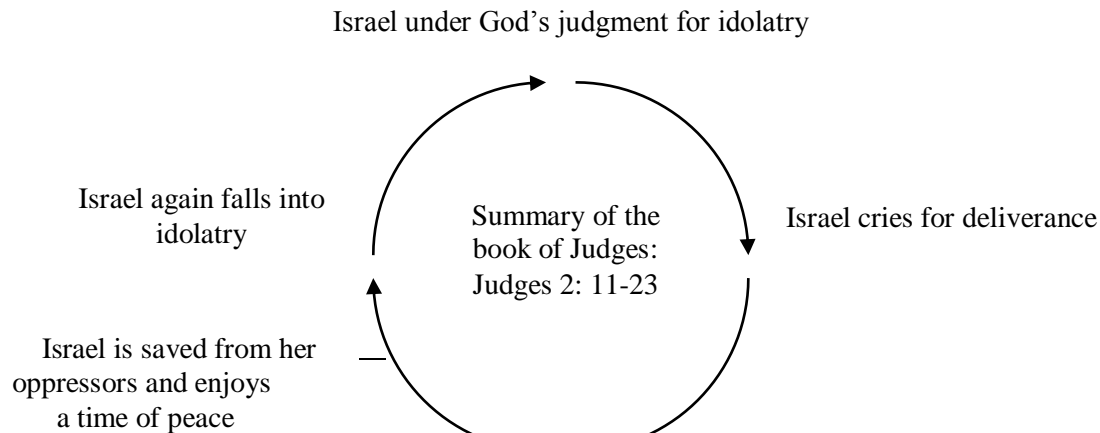
⁸⁶ I am well aware that most Africans do not eat sandwiches or hamburgers, but this seemed to be the best analogy.

⁸⁷ Pratt, pp. 187-189

Purpose (Why the writer wrote the story): The writer does this to emphasize that a bad state of affairs can be reversed through repentance and humility. He also demonstrates that although God mitigates⁸⁸ the judgment upon Judah for forsaking His law, Judah still suffers from a lesser judgment (symbolized by the removal of gold shields and the substitution of bronze shields of much less value). Although there was repentance, repentance did not remove all of the consequences for sin.⁸⁹ I have diagrammed the story as a three-step dramatic resolution which contains a problem, a turning point, and a resolution.⁹⁰ Pratt diagrams the story with more detail as a five-step resolution.⁹¹



The book of Judges offers many contrasting patterns of “dramatic resolution” in which a problem is presented at the first of the story and the resolution at the end of the story. The repetitive cycles of judgment and deliverance in this book begin with Israel under God’s judgment for serving false gods. Israel then cries out to God for help, and He answers their cries by sending them a deliverer, a judge, who



⁸⁸ Also evident in the story of David, who repented but still suffered the four-fold consequences of his sin.

⁹⁰ Pratt, p. 184

⁹¹ Pratt, p. 202

God hears Israel's cries and sends a
judge or deliverer

For a specific example of this cycle, read Judges 3: 7—4: 3. Notice the repetitive refrains:

“The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord...” (3: 7a)

“When the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them...” (3: 9a)

“Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD” (3:12)

“But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man...” (3:15a)

“Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years” (4:1-3).

Davis has pointed out that the resolution of “peace” (shaquat) does not persist throughout the book of Judges, but stops with the conquest of Gideon (8: 28). Past this point, the writer no longer says that Israel enjoys “peace”.

There is reason to underline 8: 28. It is the last rest note in Judges (see 3: 11, 30; 5: 31). After verse 28 the land no longer recovers its rest. This is the gift Israel loses, and enjoyment she forfeits. Contrary to some, Judges does not follow a recurring cycle of rebellion, repentance, rescue, and rest, but charts the progressive disintegration of a people who will not serve the God who saves them. People who by persisting apostasy despise Yahweh's gift will find that gift withdrawn.⁹²

This conclusion is also supported structurally. The stories at the end of Judges are arranged out of chronological order to highlight the moral degeneration of Israel in its chaotic state. The period of judges takes place from about 1370 BC to 1050 BC when Saul becomes king. In Judges 20: 28, Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was still the high priest when Israel is summoned to attack Benjamin for the atrocities reported in chapter 19. Thus, the events of Judges 20 occur at the beginning of the period of the Judges. If they had occurred at the end of the period of Judges, Phinehas would have been about 300 years old—not a likely scenario. Thus, the writer places this chaotic and desperately wicked series of events at the end of the book as the **epilogue** to emphasize the theme statement: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25 NASB). This thematic statement included the priests and Levites. Therefore, although there is problem-resolution structure in the book of Judges, the real problem—“no king”—is not resolved until the Davidic kingdom when God places a man “after His own heart” on the throne.

⁹² Davis, *Judges—Such a Great Salvation*, p. 116

From another perspective, we find that even a godly human king is not the final solution.

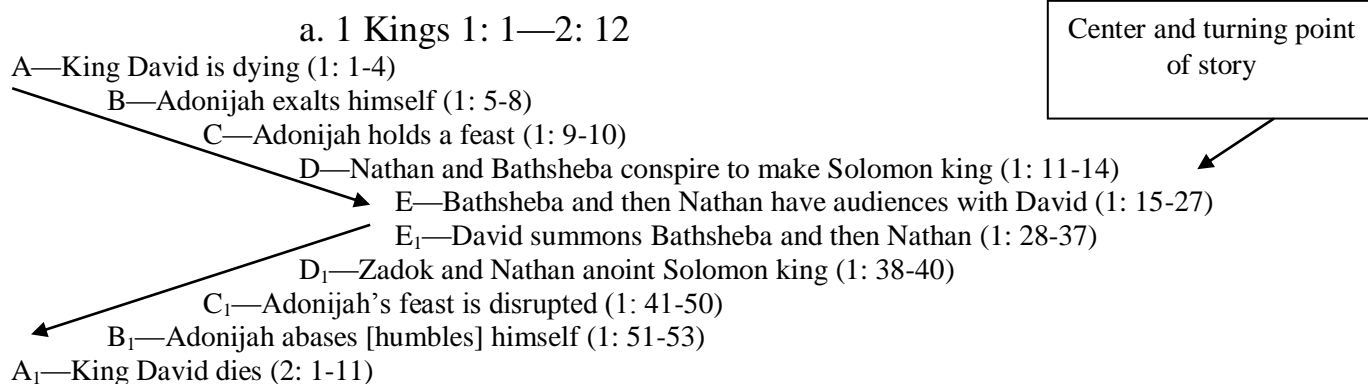
When the writer implies the lack of a king explains Micah's mess [cf Judges 18: 1], one could understand such an unqualified statement if the writer were living during David's reign or, at the least, the early part of Solomon's reign. But he could never have given such a naïve [gullible] explanation if he had lived in Solomon's later years or during the years of the divided kingdom when a godly king was a rare bird (occasionally found in Judah) [and not at all in Israel, the northern kingdom] and kingship generally had proven almost a consistent disappointment, the king himself often being the source of corruption. Our writer's no-king argument makes sense only if the writer lived at a time when Israel had had little historical experience with kingship and at a time when what Israel had experienced to that point had been—on the whole—positive.⁹³

Thus, the “no king” formula helps us date the book of Judges at the end of David's reign or the early part of Solomon's reign when he was ruling wisely. By the end of Solomon's reign (his apostasy), or after the divided kingdom, a Davidic king would not have seemed the final solution to Israel's problem. And, indeed, it wasn't.

This leads us naturally to the typology of the book of Judges in light of the subsequent history of Israel disclosed in Samuel and Kings. The solution to Israel's anarchy (chaos) was, in the final analysis, not a merely human Davidic descendent. These descendents also failed to restore Israel. Another Davidic king must arise, Jesus Christ, a perfect human king who was also God. Thus, Judges points us to the Gospels and the arrival of Israel's perfect king who brings spiritual order out of chaos—at least for those who believe in Him. Without the internal rule of Christ in one's life, every individual is a law unto himself “doing what is right in his own eyes”. But when Christ saves him, his spiritual chaos is dispelled and spiritual order is restored. He is no longer a man or woman with “no king”, but one who lives under the lordship of Christ. Eventually, Christ will return to continue His conquest over all creation, restoring the divine order and peace to the entire universe (Rev. 19).

3. Reverse Symmetry (Chiastic Symmetry)

Walsh has pointed out that a reverse symmetry (or chiasm) is simply “a series of nested inclusions” forming an ABC/C'B'A' pattern.⁹⁴ (p. 111). To illustrate this, consider the symmetry of 1 Kings 1:1—2: 12.



⁹³ Davis, *Judges—Such a Great Salvation*, p. 200, footnote; words in brackets mine

⁹⁴ Walsh, p. 113

The chiasmic structure shifts the emphasis to the center of the story, E and E₁, in which Bathsheba, Nathan, and David converse with one another about Solomon’s future as king. The reason this is called reverse symmetry is that the action of the story moves forward to the center and then reverses itself from that point (notice the arrows) forming a contrast. The definitive action of anointing Solomon as king (vv. 38-40) essentially contrasts the uncertainty of conspiring to make him king (vv. 11-14). The disruption of Adonijah’s feast contrasts the celebration of the feast. Adonijah’s humiliation contrasts his self-exaltation, etc.⁹⁵ A and A₁ form an inclusion. B and B₁ form an inclusion. C and C₁ form an inclusion, and so on. This is why this reverse symmetry is a series of “nested inclusions”—i.e. nested together within the story.

b. Judges 3: 7—16: 31

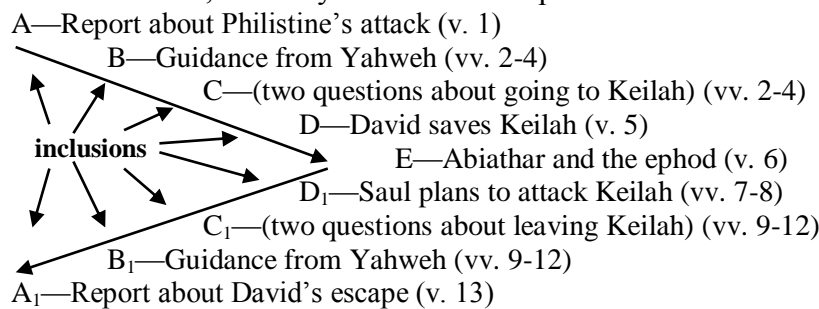
Following the NIV Study Bible (1987), Wolvaardt draws attention to the chiasmic structure of Judges 3: 7 to 16: 31.⁹⁶

- A Ehud—the lone hero
- B Deborah—a woman
- C Gideon—the ideal judge
- C₁ Abimelech—the anti-judge
- B₁ Jephthah—an outcast
- A₁ Samson—the lone hero

Gideon is the “ideal” judge not because he was perfect but because of his statement in Judges 8: 23, “But Gideon said to them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.’” (However, see 8: 31—Abimelech means “father is king”). Abimelech is the “anti-judge” because he had no calling from God and proved to be a ruthless leader, murdering his own half-brothers to achieve his goal (Judges 9). Deborah, a woman, and Jephthah, the son of a harlot, were unlikely candidates for God to choose as judges to deliver Israel. Nevertheless, God chooses the socially weak to shame the strong. Ehud and Samson are both presented as “lone heroes” who deliver Israel, but it is clear that Samson is not presented in a positive light (cf. Davis, *Judges*, for another view of Gideon).

c. 1 Samuel

In 1 Samuel 23, the story of David’s escape from Saul demonstrates a chiasmic arrangement.⁹⁷



Center and emphasis of story—God’s guidance

The comment in v. 6 about Abiathar and the ephod is probably not in chronological . Abiathar was probably already with David in Keilah when he inquired of the Lord in vv. 2-4. It is a side remark which serves as the center and emphasis of the story. The writer wishes to show that David was able

⁹⁵However, this explicit contrast is not always present in reverse symmetry.

⁹⁶ Wolvaardt, p. 215

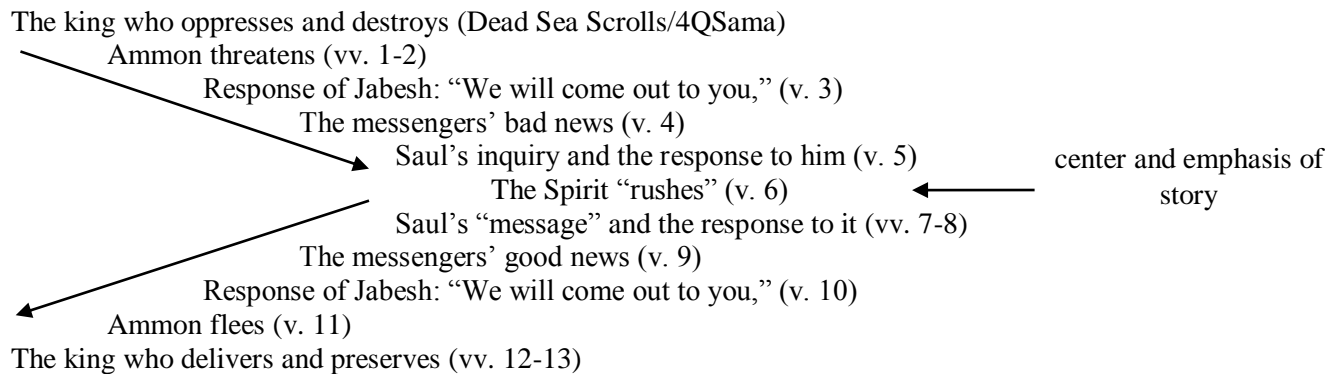
⁹⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel—Looking on the Heart*, p. 237; the diagram below is slightly modified

to avoid capture by Saul only because he enjoyed special guidance from God through the use of the ephod. In the second reference, the presence of the ephod is implied but not expressly mentioned.⁹⁸ The special guidance, in turn, proved to the reader that David was God's chosen king to take Saul's place.

Notice that the inclusions in this short episode repeat important concepts in the story—reports, guidance, questions, etc.—in reverse order. Thus, there is a reversal of the original activity in the story through steps D₁, C₁, and B₁, until we come to the final activity of reporting, A₁, which initiates the story.

d. 1 Samuel 11

Here's another example from 1 Samuel 11.⁹⁹ In this example the reader will notice a reference from the Dead Sea Scrolls/4QSama which would occur just before 11: 1.¹⁰⁰ The reference does not affect the centrality of v. 6. The outline below is slightly modified from Davis.



The rushing of the Spirit upon Saul is presented by the writer at the center of this episode, highlighting the reason for Saul's success. Davis also points out that the Hebrew verb *sālah* ("rush") is only used here of Saul (also 10: 6 and 10: 10) and of Samson in Judges 14: 6, 19 and 15: 14. The Spirit also "came upon" other judges but the Hebrew, "rush", is not used in those incidents. Thus, he writer depicts Saul as "a sort of super-judge" similar to Samson.¹⁰¹

This, of course, brings up a difficult **theological question**: How can the Spirit be mightily active in the life of an unbeliever? We have other examples in the Bible. Judas Iscariot could cast out demons and heal the sick (Lk. 10: 1-18; cf. Matt. 10: 1), but he was not a believer (cf. Heb. 6: 1-8). On Judgment Day, Jesus will disown many who claimed great spiritual gifts, gifts which Jesus will not deny, but will say to those who claimed them, "Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7: 23). The gifts and calling of both Saul and Samson were squandered through disobedience. Neither one accomplished what they could have done had they remained faithfully obedient.

⁹⁸ For other such uses of the ephod, see 1 Sam. 30: 7-8 and 14: 37.

⁹⁹ Davis, *1 Samuel*, p 118

¹⁰⁰ Davis, *1 Samuel*, p. 116

¹⁰¹ Davis, *Judges*, p. 118

But the main point of the structural analysis above is to show that the anointing of the Spirit upon Saul makes the entire difference between an ordinary farmer and a king who could rally the nation of Israel to defeat Ammon. In fact, salvation comes to Israel not because they have a king “like the other nations”, but because of the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰² By desiring a king like the kings of the other nations, Israel had rejected Yahweh’s kingship over them; yet, God graciously responds by putting His Spirit in Saul, at least temporarily. Purpose: The author of 1 Samuel is thus correcting Israel’s fallacy by giving the correct interpretation of Saul’s initial success as king. He was not successful because he was tall, handsome, and physically strong. He was successful initially because of the Spirit’s help. He makes further correction of this fallacy by later including the fact that the Spirit departed from Saul, thus leaving him powerless and ineffective against the enemies of Israel (1 Sam. 16: 14; 18: 12; 28: 15-16; 1 Sam. 31).

This is also true of Samson whose strength did not come through disciplined physical training but entirely from the Holy Spirit who empowered him to deliver Israel. The reader will notice that the writer gives us no physical description of Samson’s arms, legs, or chest (What the writer does not say.) For all we know, there was nothing special about his appearance which would have led one to believe that he was a body builder with 20 inch biceps. When he rashly revealed the secret of his strength, and his hair was cut, the Spirit departed from him and left him powerless.

One **application** of both stories (Saul and Samson): Spiritual gifts are no substitute for obedience. The modern church must avoid any false hope in our gifts or material resources, depending instead completely upon the Holy Spirit who may become grieved at our arrogance and withdraw His power. The lives of both Saul and Samson reveal a pattern of disobedience to the divine will, as well as the presence of divine gifts. The Bible specifically says that the Spirit departed from Saul (1 Sam. 16: 14). An equivalent statement is also made about Samson (16: 20), and it is evident that with the loss of supernatural strength there was also the departing of the Spirit. His entire life is an enigma.¹⁰³ Though gifted by the Spirit, he sought sexual gratification in a Philistine wife, thus violating God’s will concerning intermarriage with the Canaanites. None of his exploits seem to have been motivated by zeal for God or His people, only personal vengeance; and even in his final exploit, he asked God to avenge him because of his two eyes (16: 28). Had he lived obediently, he may have judged Israel for forty or more years instead of only twenty (16: 31). Jesus made it clear, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5 NASB).

e. 1Kings 17: 17-24

Reverse symmetry (chiasm) also occurs in 1 Kings 17: 17-24.¹⁰⁴

Setting (v. 17)Widow’s accusation against Elijah (v. 18)

Elijah takes her son away from her dead (v. 19)

Elijah’s prayer (v. 20) [Accusation against Yahweh]

Elijah’s action (v. 21a)

Elijah’s prayer (v. 21b) [Petition]

Yahweh’s answer (v. 22)

} Center point and
emphasis of the story

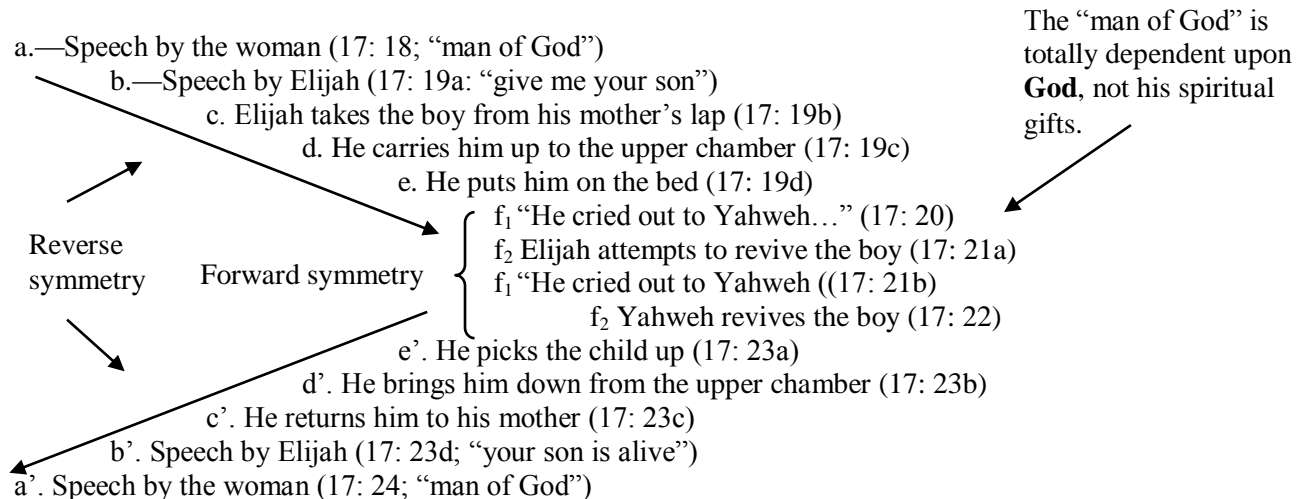
¹⁰² Davis, p. 119

¹⁰³ a mystery

¹⁰⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Wisdom and the Folly—An Exposition of the Book of First Kings*, p. 222

Elijah takes her son back to her alive (v. 23)
Widow's confession (v. 24)

Walsh outlines the passage similarly.¹⁰⁵ I have combined both of Walsh's outlines into one and modified them slightly.



As you can see from Walsh's analysis, the episode is a reverse symmetry but contains a central unit with forward symmetry showing progressive action (see below). He cries out to the Lord two times. The first prayer reflects the anguish of the boy's mother while the second prayer reflects Elijah's desperation. The text does not necessarily suggest that Elijah's repeated action of lying upon the boy ends in failure¹⁰⁶ or whether it is simply the chosen procedure of the prophet (like Naaman washing in the Jordan seven times instead of once). Nevertheless, the narrative progresses at the central point and then reverses from vv. 23 to 24.

f. 2 Kings 7

The structure of 2 Kings 7 is also a reverse symmetry or chiasm plus one portion of forward symmetry or parallelism (see below). Davis has provided the structure of vv. 3-11 below.¹⁰⁷ The setting (context) is found in 2 Kings 6: 24-33.

Lepers outside the gate (v. 3a)
 Decision (vv. 3b-4)
 Action (v. 5)
 Explanation (vv. 6-7)
 Action (v. 8)
 Decision (v. 9)
 Lepers back to the gate (vv. 10-11)

¹⁰⁵ Walsh, p. 180

¹⁰⁶ So Walsh, p. 180

¹⁰⁷ Davis, *2 Kings*, p. 123

The extended structure I propose below reveals both a chiasmic arrangement and parallelism. The subtle forward symmetry (parallelism) in E₃ and F₃ becomes more explicit beginning in v. 16b and continuing through v. 20 (A₂B₂C₂—A₃B₃C₃).

Notice the striking number of parallels. Aside from the obvious parallels, we have the following which may not be as obvious:

- (1) The leper's decision in E₁ and E₂ parallels the king's decision in E₃.
- (2) The biblical author's explanation of the army's evacuation in G₁ is paralleled by the unbelieving king of Israel's erroneous explanation in G₂.
- (3) The king's action in F₃ parallels the lepers' action in F₁ and F₂.
- (4) The "If they perish, then they perish; but they are no worse off" speech of the king's servants in E₃ parallels the "If we perish, then we perish; but we are no worse off" speech of the lepers in E₁.

We should also take note of the repetition of words in the story:

- (1) measure of fine flour for a shekel...two measures of barley for a shekel (vv. 1, 16b, 18)
- (2) the royal officer on whose hand the king was leaning (v. 2a); the royal officer on whose hand he leaned (17a)
- (3) and they said to one another (v. 3b); then they said to one another (v. 9a)
- (4) when they came to the outskirts of the camp (v. 5); When these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp (v. 8)
- (5) "Behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" (v. 2a); "Now behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?" (v. 19a)
- (6) according to the word of the LORD (v. 16b); just as the man of God had said (v. 17b); just as the man of God had spoken (v. 18a)
- (7) but the people trampled on him at the gate, and he died (v. 17b); for the people trampled on him at the gate and he died (v. 20)

Extended structure for 2 Kings 7: 1-20 (see full text version below)

- A₁—Elisha's prophecy concerning the price of food (v. 1)
 B₁—Unbelief of the royal officer (v. 2a)
 C₁—Elisha's prophecy of the royal officer's death (v. 2b)
- D₁—Lepers outside the gate (v. 3a)
 E₁—Lepers' decision (vv. 3b-4)
 F₁—Lepers' action (v. 5)
 G₁—Biblical author's explanation (vv. 6-7)
 F₂—Lepers' action—plundering the camp (v. 8)
 E₂—Lepers' decision (v. 9)
 D₂—Lepers back to the gate (vv. 10-11)
 G₂—King of Israel's explanation (v. 12)
 E₃—King's decision (vv. 13-14)
 F₃—Peoples' action (vv. 14-16a)—plundering the camp
- A₂—Fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy concerning the price of food (v. 16b)
 B₂—Unbelieving royal officer takes charge of the gate (v. 17a)
 C₂—Fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy of the royal officer's death (v. 17b)

vv. 16b-20
 reveals
 forward
 symmetry or
 parallelism

A₃—Fulfillment of Elisha’s prophecy concerning the price of food—repeated (v. 18)

B₃—Unbelief of the royal officer repeated (v. 19a)

C₃—Fulfillment of Elisha’s prophecy of officer’s death—repeated (vv. 19b-20)

The repetition in vv. 16b, 17b, and 18 emphasize the central point of the story which is found in vv. 6-7. Deliverance had come because of what the Lord had done. This deliverance is foreshadowed in Elisha’s prophecy about the reduced price of flour and barley—one shekel or a month’s wages¹⁰⁸—still expensive but drastically reduced from 80 shekels for a donkey’s head (6: 25). The king of Israel’s erroneous explanation of the Aramean military evacuation—“It’s a trap!”—is evidence of his unbelief just as the royal officer could not believe that the price of fine flour and barley could dip this low in light of the Aramean siege. The prediction of Yahweh’s prophet, Elisha, meant nothing to them. The punishment for despising the word of Yahweh and mocking His prophet—in the case of the officer—was death. This appears harsh, but the officer represented the king of Israel, and Yahweh wanted to send a message to the king (and to future readers) that disbelief was serious business. It is also possible that the repetitive phrases, “the royal officer on whose hand the king was leaning” (v. 2a) and “the royal officer on whose hand he leaned” (17a) indicate the officer’s egregious¹⁰⁹ evil influence upon the king—thus, the Lord’s judgment upon him.

One application among many applications: The passage suggests severe judgments upon confidants and aids who give political leaders immoral advice. Back in the 70’s, US president Richard Nixon was given poor advice about covering up the “Watergate” break-in during which republicans stole sensitive democratic documents about the up-coming election. As it turned out, some of these trusted “consultants” went to prison for their advice, and Nixon—forced to resign—did not have to run for a second term after all.

Below is the full text structure for 2 Kings 7: 1-20 (NASB)

A₁—¹Then Elisha said, "Listen to the word of the LORD; thus says the LORD, 'Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.'"

B₁—²The royal officer on whose hand the king was leaning answered the man of God and said, "Behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?"

C₁—Then he said, "Behold, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it."

D₁—³Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate;

E₁—and they said to one another, "Why do we sit here until we die? ⁴ "If we say, 'We will enter the city,' then the famine is in the city and we will die there; and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us go over to the camp of the Arameans. If they spare us, we will live; and if they kill us, we will but die."

F₁—⁵They arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Arameans; when they came to the outskirts of the camp of the Arameans, behold, there was no one there.

¹⁰⁸ Davis, p. 121

¹⁰⁹ Egregious means “outstanding for its negative qualities”

G₁—⁶ For the Lord had caused the army of the Arameans to hear a sound of chariots and a sound of horses, even the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, "Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us." ⁷ Therefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents and their horses and their donkeys, even the camp just as it was, and fled for their life.

F₂—⁸ When these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they entered one tent and ate and drank, and carried from there silver and gold and clothes, and went and hid them; and they returned and entered another tent and carried from there also, and went and hid them.

E₂—⁹ Then they said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent; if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king's household."

D₂—¹⁰ So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and they told them, saying, "We came to the camp of the Arameans, and behold, there was no one there, nor the voice of man, only the horses tied and the donkeys tied, and the tents just as they were." ¹¹ The gatekeepers called and told it within the king's household.

G₂—¹² Then the king arose in the night and said to his servants, "I will now tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know that we are hungry; therefore they have gone from the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, 'When they come out of the city, we will capture them alive and get into the city.'"

E₃—¹³ One of his servants said, "Please, let some men take five of the horses which remain, which are left in the city. Behold, they will be in any case like all the multitude of Israel who are left in it; behold, they will be in any case like all the multitude of Israel who have already perished, so let us send and see."

F₃—¹⁴ They took therefore two chariots with horses, and the king sent after the army of the Arameans, saying, "Go and see." ¹⁵ They went after them to the Jordan, and behold, all the way was full of clothes and equipment which the Arameans had thrown away in their haste. Then the messengers returned and told the king. ¹⁶ So the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans.

A₂—Then a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD.

B₂—¹⁷ Now the king appointed the royal officer on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate;

C₂—but the people trampled on him at the gate, and he died just as the man of God had said, who spoke when the king came down to him.

A₃—¹⁸ It happened just as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, "Two measures of barley for a shekel and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, will be sold tomorrow about this time at the gate of Samaria."

B₃—¹⁹ Then the royal officer answered the man of God and said, "Now behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?"

C₃—And he said, "Behold, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it." ²⁰ And so it happened to him, for the people trampled on him at the gate and he died.

4. Forward Symmetry or Parallelism

In a forward symmetry, the phrases which are linked together (e.g. A and A', B and B', etc.) occur in the same order in each sequence—rather than a reverse order—to form an ABC/A'B'C' pattern—the same pattern that we have termed parallelism. Walsh mentions two ways that forward symmetries differ from reverse symmetries:¹¹⁰

(1) They are open-ended and nothing limits the number of sequences which may occur. For example, we may find several sequences bundled together to form an ABC/A'B'C'/A''B''C''/A'''B'''C''' pattern, etc.

(2) There is no reversal or contrast in the pattern which returns the reader to the original idea—e.g. David dying—David dies. Rather than reversal, there is forward motion or progress with each sequence building upon one another and intensifying one another

The usefulness of forward symmetry is the **unlimited potential for repetition**, helping the reader discern the author's emphasis.

a. 1 Kings 11: 1-3

As an example of forward symmetry, consider the short story of Solomon's apostasy (1 Ki. 11: 1-3).¹¹¹

- | | |
|----|--|
| A | King Solomon loved many foreign women (11: 1a) |
| B | details about the "foreignness" of the women (11: 1b-2a) |
| C | "...they will surely turn away your heart to follow their gods" (11: 2b) |
| A' | Solomon clung to these in love (11: 2c) |
| B' | details about the number (cf. the "many" of 11: 1a) of the women (11: 3a). |
| C' | ...and his wives turned away his heart (11: 3b) |

The forward progression is demonstrated from the warning in 11: 2 (cf. Deuteronomy 17: 17) about the influence of his foreign wives to his actual apostasy in 11: 3.

b. Judges 14—16

112

- | | |
|--|------------|
| Episode One | (14: 5-20) |
| Solution—answer to riddle | |
| Failure—slaughter at Ashkelon | |
| Episode Two | (15: 1-6a) |
| Solution—Samson gone, peace restored, girl given to best man | |
| Failure—flaming foxes | |
| Episode Three | (15: 6b-8) |
| Solution—burn up Timnite woman and father | |
| Failure—slaughter by Samson | |
| Episode Four | (15: 9-17) |
| Solution—Samson bound, handed over | |

¹¹⁰ Walsh, p. 114

¹¹¹ Walsh, p. 114

¹¹² Davis, *Judges*, p. 178

Failure—"Jawbone Hill"	
Episode Five	(16: 1-3)
Solution—Ambushing the playboy	
Failure—portable gates	
Episode Six	(16: 4-30)
Major pattern:	
Solution—hair shaved	
Failure—tragedy at Dagon's Place	
Subsidiary patterns:	
Solution/failure—7 bowstrings	(16: 6-9a/9b)
Solution/failure—new ropes	(16: 10-12a/12b)
Solution/failure—loom	(16: 13-14a/14b)
Solution/failure—razor	(16: 15: -19a/19b-21)

The solution/failure parallel (forward symmetry) demonstrates that the Philistine's success in subduing Samson was, in actuality, non-success. Purpose: The true-life drama is a "biting satire" (Davis' term) against the Philistines who were enemies of Israel and, more importantly, enemies of God. Years afterward, the Israelite reader would have found much of the story uproariously funny—although ending in tragedy for Samson. Consider the humor in many of the episodes: tying foxes' tails together with a torch in between; killing Philistines with the fresh jawbone of a donkey—with the teeth still intact ("ouch!"); removing the city gates of Gaza; pulling a building down on top of the ranking Philistine rulers while they are celebrating Samson's undoing. All of this makes for interesting reading and is designed to poke fun at the enemies of God. While they are scheming to defeat His people, God is making sport of them.¹¹³ It's easy. God can kill a thousand Philistines by using one man and the jawbone of a donkey. He doesn't even need a sword.

Theology and Application: We "New Testament" Christians should not be scandalized that Biblical writers would use humor and satire to illustrate God's holy zeal for His chosen people, nor should we be embarrassed that God filled Samson with His Spirit for the express purpose of killing thirty Philistines (Judges 14: 19). If we are wondering "what Jesus would do", we need to distinguish between His first coming for forgiveness and salvation and His second coming to complete this salvation through the utter destruction of His enemies. Just read the book of Revelation; it's no picnic at the park. The prophetess Deborah sings a song of God's salvation in which she praises the gruesome deed of Jael in deceiving Sisera and then driving a tent peg through his head (Judges 5: 24-27). If we are inclined to consider Deborah's theology (or Jael's ethics) as sub-standard, we must then argue with the Apostle Paul.

judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.⁶ For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,⁷ and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.⁹ These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,¹⁰ when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:4-10 NASB)

¹¹³ Davis, *Judges*, pp. 179-180

In other words, if a person does not repent and embrace Jesus Christ, at death he will end up much worse off than someone with a tent peg through his head. This does not in any sense eliminate the necessity to “do good to all people” (Gal. 6: 10) or to “love your enemies” (Matt. 5: 44). It is also definitely not a call to return to the “holy war” tactics of the OT which have been replaced, thankfully, by the great commission of making disciples (Matt. 28: 18-20). It is also not a call to seek one’s own revenge (Rom. 12: 19-21). It is simply the realization of the now and the not yet of the kingdom of God and that God will one day come with righteous and holy anger against all those who have spurned His grace, rejected His Son, and persecuted His people, even as those of the OT era rejected Yahweh.

Furthermore, if we really believe that God will come in fierce judgment upon His enemies, we should become more zealous about warning people to flee from the wrath of God to come (Lk. 3: 7). That we are not so zealous indicates that we have relegated these stories to the realm of ancient archives no longer applicable for the people of God.

c. 1 Kings 17

Yahweh’s word: direction (vv. 2-3) and explanation (v. 4)

Prophetic obedience (v. 5)

Fulfillment (v. 6)

Inadequacy/ change (v. 7)

Yahweh’s word: direction (vv. 8-9a) and explanation (9b)

Prophetic obedience (v. 10a)

Fulfillment (v. 10b)

Inadequacy (vv. 10c-12)

Yahweh’s word: direction (v. 13) and explanation (v. 14)

Widow’s obedience (v. 15a)

Fulfillment (vv. 15b-16)

Inadequacy/ change (vv. 17ff.)

Davis explains.

Yahweh is at work preserving life and yet in every segment some frustration, some obstacle arises, that threatens to prevent his work: the wadi dries up (v. 7); or the channel of supply is herself destitute (vv. 10b-12); or death attacks one of their lives that has been preserved to date (vv. 17-18)...In vv. 17-18 death itself seems to assault Yahweh’s reputation as life-giver and this climactic difficulty must be resolved (vv. 19-22) as the previous hindrances (vv. 7, 10b-12) were. Verses 17-24 are simply interlocked with verses 2-16 and must not be separated from them.¹¹⁴

Forward symmetry gives way to reverse symmetry in the remainder of the story (vv. 17-24; see above under “reverse symmetry”).

d. 1 Kings 19¹¹⁵

a. Elisha spends the night in a cave (19: 9a)

b. Yahweh questions him: “What are you doing here, Elijah? (19: 9b)

c. Elijah answers at great length (19: 10)

¹¹⁴ Davis, *1 Kings*, pp. 220-221

¹¹⁵ Walsh, p. 181

- d. Yahweh gives Elijah a command (19: 11a)
 - e. The narrator describes a powerful theophany (19: 11b-12)
- a'. Elijah stands at the entrance of the cave (19: 13a)
 - b'. A voice questions him: "What are you doing here Elijah?" (19: 13b)
 - c'. Elijah answers at great length (19: 14 is identical to 19: 10)
 - d'. Yahweh gives Elijah commands (19: 15-16)
 - e'. Yahweh describes his coming victory over Baal (19: 17-18)
- e. 1 Samuel 13—14¹¹⁶

Jonathan's success—13: 2-4

Israel's fear—13: 5-7

Saul's folly (foolishness)—13: 8-15

Israel's distress—13: 16-23

Jonathan's success—14: 1-15

Israel's deliverance—14: 16-23

Saul's folly (foolishness)—14: 24

Israel's distress—14: 25-26

Jonathan's wisdom—14: 27-30

Israel's offense—14: 31-35

Saul's folly—14: 36-44

Israel's intervention for Jonathan—14: 45-46

In this example, the success and wisdom of Jonathan is contrasted with Saul's folly. Further, the welfare of Israel depends on the decisions of its leaders. While Israel is listening to Saul, it is fearful and distressed, but due to Jonathan's actions and decisions, it succeeds. The author must be demonstrating the need for godly, wise leadership, and he uses multiple episodes to do so. Jonathan was kingly material, but the sin of his father precluded (made impossible) his ascension to the throne.

Summary and Conclusion

As we see from the example of 2 Kings 7: 1-20, there are often smaller chiasms to be discovered within larger chiasms. As I studied Davis' suggested chiasm from vv. 3-11, I began to see the larger passage constructed similarly. The possibilities are virtually endless. Nevertheless, the most important thing is determining the original meaning for the original audience, and then crossing thousands of years of history to the 21st century congregation. The end-goal is not cleverness, but preaching. Your congregation wants to know how God's word can help them get through the next week, not how many chiasms and forward symmetries are in a given text. In this sense, structural analysis is like the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. As I heard one humorous preacher say one time, "Greek and Hebrew is like one's underwear. They sure are useful, but you don't want to show them off." The same would be true of structural analysis. It is surely useful for preaching, but it doesn't "preach".

¹¹⁶ Adapted from Davis, *1 Samuel—Looking on the Heart*, p. 147

Lesson Four—Structure Implies Meaning (Part II)

Introduction

In this lesson, we will continue with what we started in Lessons Two and Three, but with an emphasis on problem-resolution structure and the structure of large narratives. Some chiastic structures can be termed problem-resolution stories in which a problem presented at the beginning is resolved at the end of the story, like the story of two prostitutes in 1 Kings 3. The author may also use clusters of stories to accomplish his purpose, as the first seven chapters of 1 Samuel demonstrates. Parallel accounts may be either confirming or contrasting. In 1 Kings 2: 13-46a, all four episodes “confirm” the fact that Solomon’s kingdom became firmly established in Israel (1 Ki. 2: 12, 46b) while the parallel accounts in Genesis 38 and 39 contrast the moral behavior of Judah and Joseph.

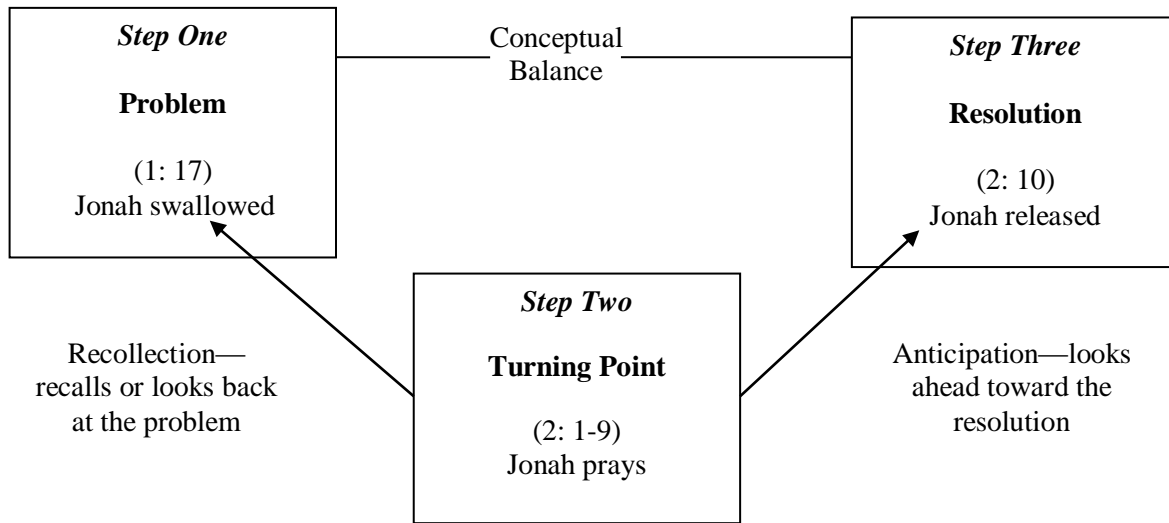
B. Patterns of Dramatic Resolution

Authors of OT stories often have various means of resolving problems which are introduced at the beginning of the story. Three-step resolutions are most common, but four-step resolutions also occur.

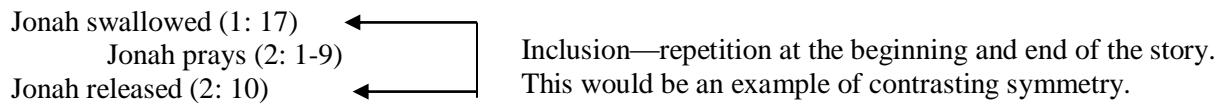
The dramatic problem sets the narrative in motion; rising action raises tension; the turning point shifts toward reversing the problem; falling action continues the unwinding of tension initiated by the turning point; and resolution wraps up the loose ends of the narrative.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Pratt, p. 200

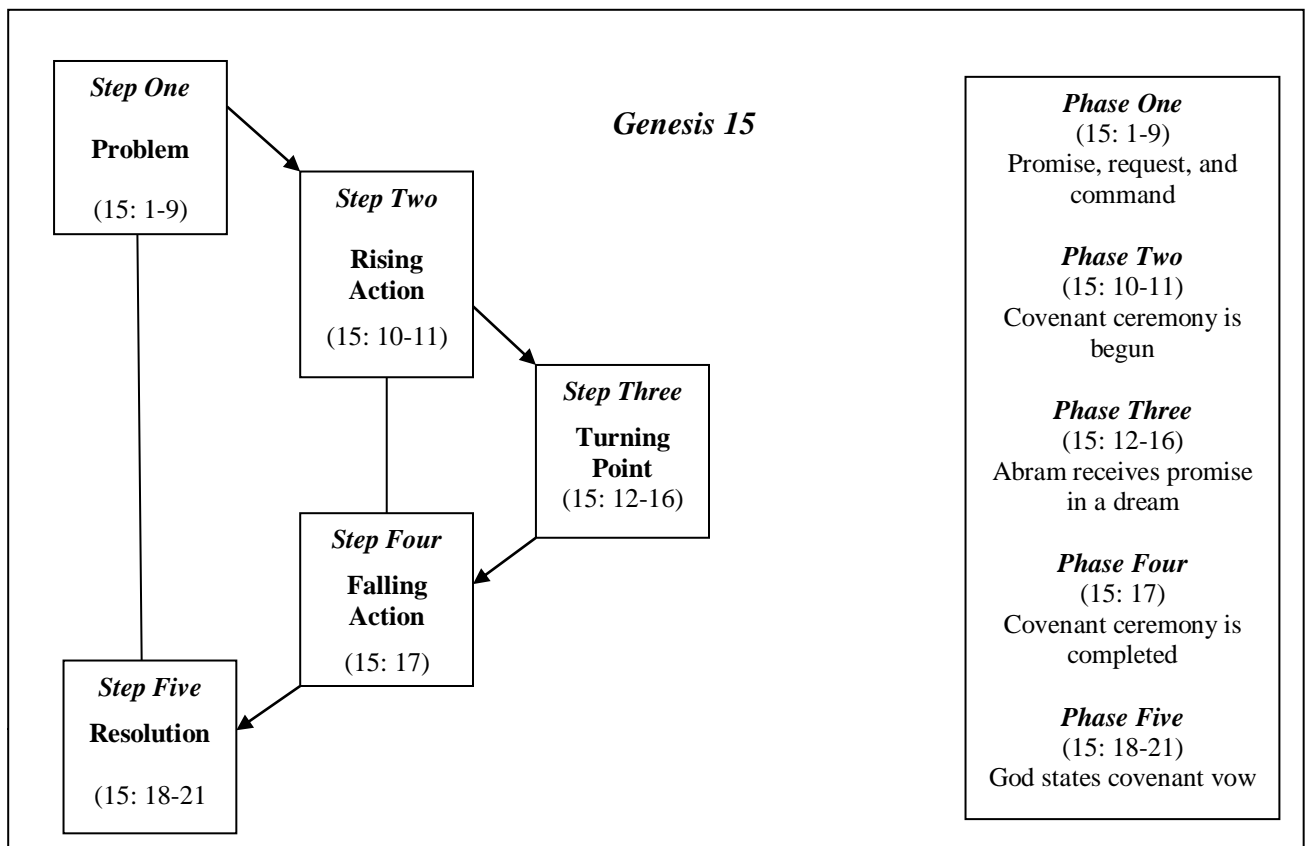
1. Jonah 1: 17—2: 10¹¹⁸



This story may also be diagrammed simply in the same way we have diagrammed other OT narratives:



2. Genesis 15: 1-21¹¹⁹

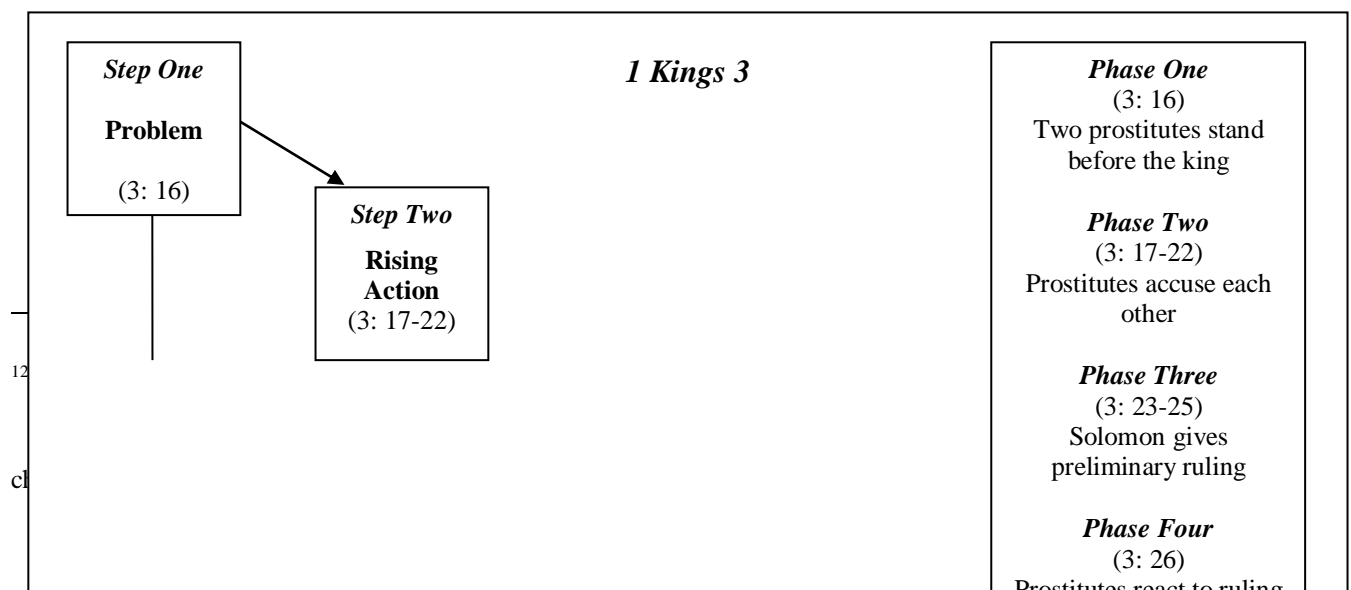


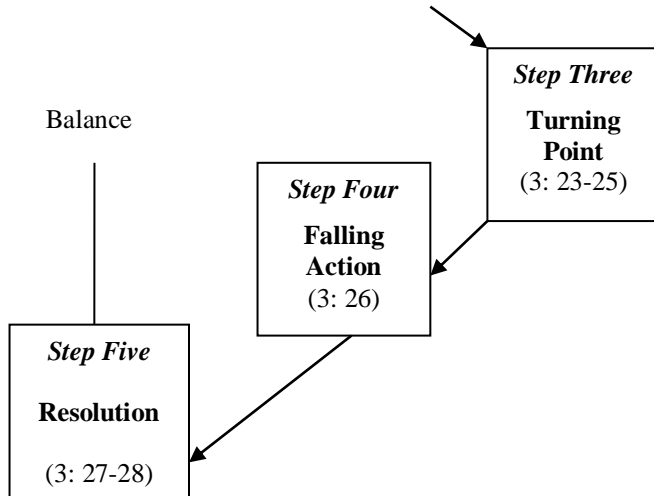
Theology: The problem is that God had promised Abram the land of Canaan but had given him no male heir with whom to possess it. The promise would be empty without a progeny—a people born from Abram’s line. The slaughtering of animals was part of the ancient suzerainty treaty format in which animals were slain and their carcasses split into two parts and laid opposite one another, forming a path between the halves of the animals. The subordinate party to the treaty would walk between the pieces taking upon himself the self-maledictory oath if he failed to keep the terms of the treaty. Abram was well-acquainted with this form of treaty; furthermore, since the treaty would be between him and the Lord, he assumed that he would be the one walking between the pieces taking upon his own life the self-maledictory oath in compliance with the treaty’s terms or stipulations. If Abram failed to keep these terms, his life would be forfeited.

But this is not what happens. The turning point comes in vv. 12-16 in which Yahweh confirms His promise to Abram of a seed extending to four generations which would inherit the land of Canaan. The promise is then confirmed in the falling action of v. 17 in which God, not Abram—who is still asleep—walks between the pieces, thus taking the self-maledictory oath upon Himself if He fails to carry out His promise of a land and a seed to Abram. Yahweh cannot lie, thus Abram knows for certain that Yahweh’s promise to him will be fulfilled. Thus, the tension rising at the beginning of the covenant ceremony begins to unwind or fall when God takes Abram’s place walking between the pieces of slain animals. The full resolution comes in vv. 18-21 with the full statement of the covenant promise. In the Hebrew text, the words, “the Lord made a covenant with Abram” literally reads, “the Lord cut a covenant with Abram” referring to the procedure of cutting the animals in half.¹²⁰

Typology: Yahweh walking between the pieces represented the suffering of Christ on the cross, thus taking upon Himself the curse of a broken covenant. God will most certainly fulfill His promise of a covenant seed, not merely the Hebrew nation, but a kingdom of priests and a holy nation of believers including both Jew and Gentile (1 Pet. 2; 9). By keeping the terms of the covenant, Christ purchased for Himself a seed from every tribe, tongue and nation (cf. Rev. 5: 9).

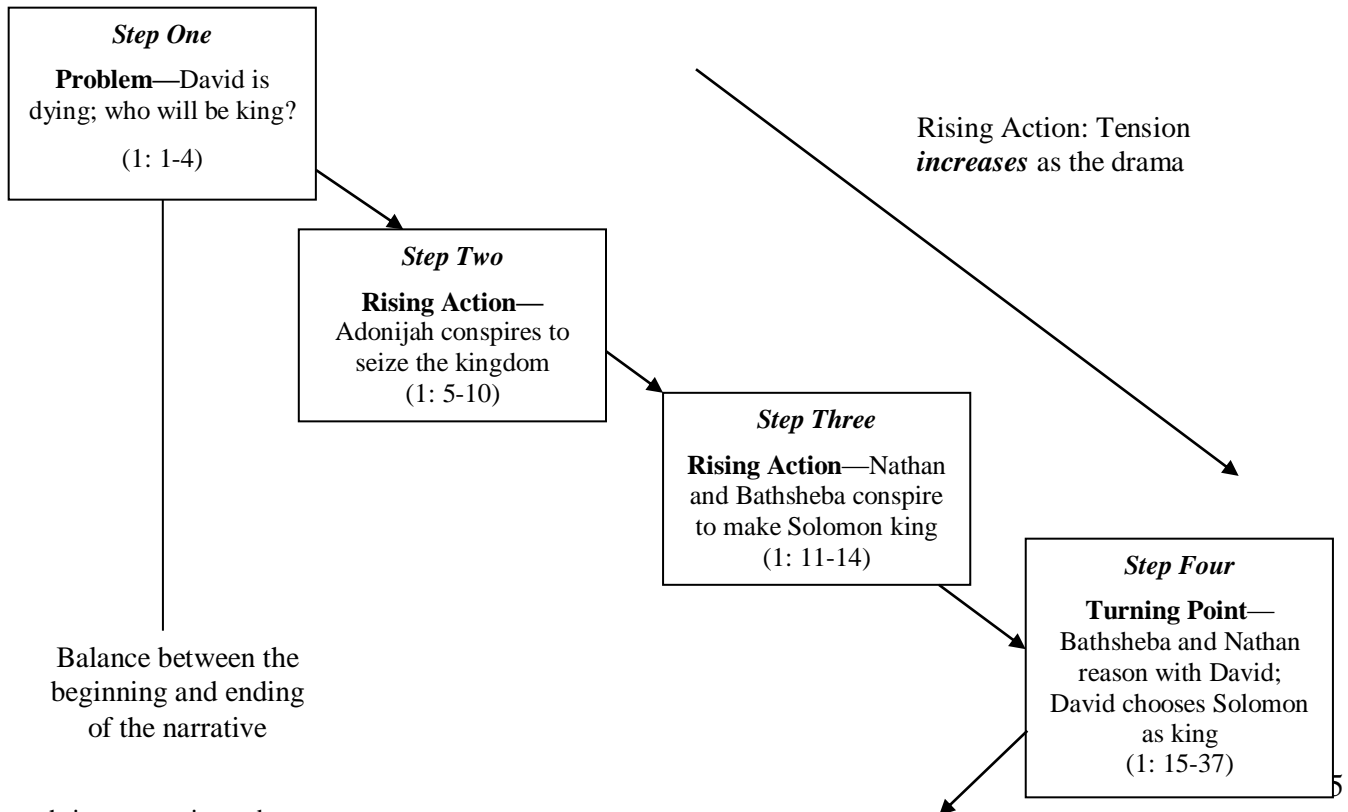
3.1 Kings 3

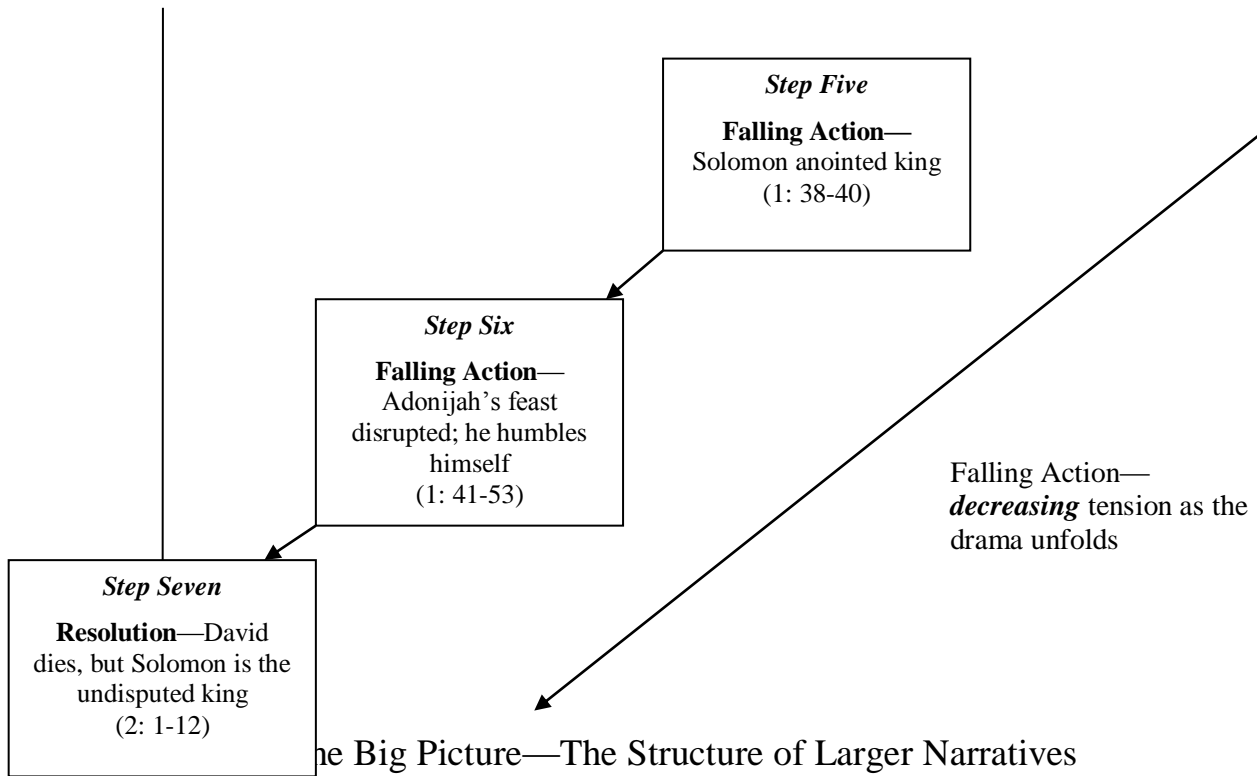




In the story of the two prostitutes, the problem is: Whose child is this? The tension builds (in the reader’s mind) when the prostitutes debate each other about the true identity of the child—the rising action. The turning point in the story occurs when Solomon suggests a solution—killing the child. Since the true identity of the child cannot be determined from either testimony, neither woman will have him. At this point, the objection from the true mother relieves the tension built up in the rising action thus producing a falling action in the narrative. In the falling action, it becomes obvious to Solomon who the true mother is, the one who wishes to preserve the child’s life even if she must give up her own child to another woman. Full resolution comes only when Solomon awards the child to the true mother.

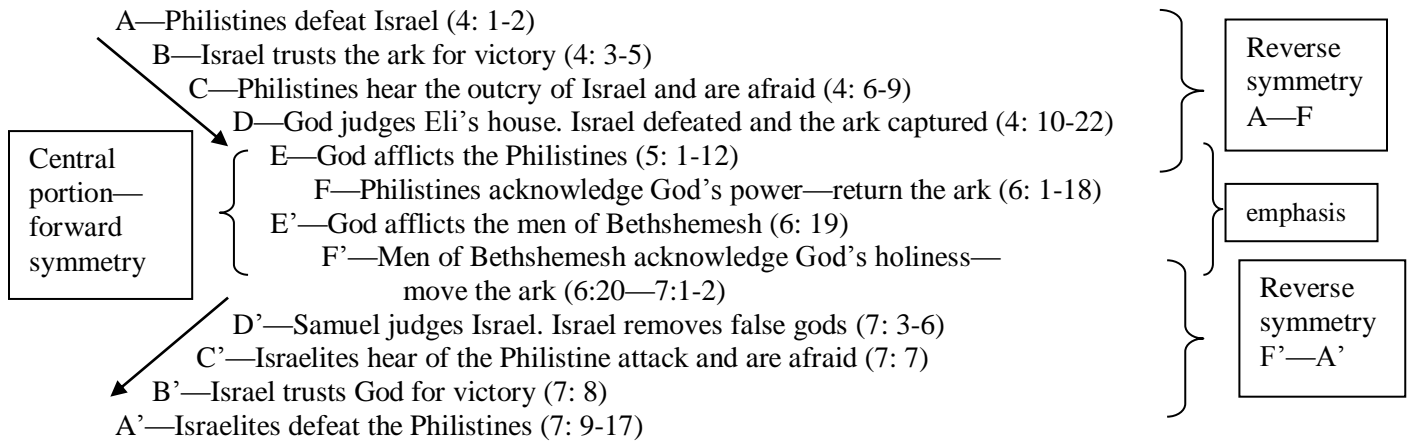
4. 1 Kings 1: 1—2: 12





We have already seen the structure of larger narratives in Judges 14—16 and 1 Samuel 13—14. Here are further examples, including whole books of the Bible. I would offer the following structure for 1 Samuel 4—7.

1. 1 Sam. 4—7



Israel was attempting to use the ark to manipulate God, as if He were just another Canaanite deity. Surely God would not allow Himself to be captured. On the contrary, God will not allow His people to put Him in a box, the ark. Just as he demonstrated His power against the Egyptians, He does so here against the Philistines, something their priests and diviners recognize (6: 7). Ironically, the affliction of the Philistines and their acknowledgement of God's power are paralleled by God's affliction of the men of Bethshemesh—His own people—and their acknowledgement of His holiness.

Often God must discipline His people severely so that they will treat Him with reverence rather than contempt. He is not an object of curiosity.¹²¹

Israel's attempted manipulation of God (chapter 4) gives way to forsaking their idols (chapter 7). Similarly, their defeat in the early part of the story is balanced by their victory over the Philistines at the end. **Thus there is conceptual balance between the beginning of the story and the end as well as conceptual balance throughout the chiasmic structure.** The writer wishes to teach his readers that God will fight Israel's battles only if there is true repentance. Holiness is the key to victory—not empty rituals. The holy majesty of God stands out in the entire narrative and forms the central portion of the structure suggested below. Notice that this central portion takes the form of a forward symmetry in which there is progress from the affliction of the Philistines to the affliction of the Bethshemites.

Yet another purpose in the story is to demonstrate the fulfillment of the word of the Lord against the house of Eli. Chapter 3 predicts the fall of Eli's house and the confirmation of Samuel's ministry. Chapters 4—7 fulfill these predictions.

One **application** among many: How could we apply this passage to the modern church? I might suggest that what the Israelites did is exactly what we attempt to do—to manipulate God and force Him to do what we want Him to do. We can do this through scheduled crusades, long prayers, changing the tone of our voice while praying, monetary gifts, any number of things. We can also attempt to put God in the box of our particular denomination, as if He cannot work outside that box with churches of other denominations. But God is unboxable. He will break out of our boxes and surprise us every time we attempt to restrain Him. He will also show us that He doesn't need us, but we need Him. He can take care of Himself. The passage also lends itself to the subject of African syncretism. If the professing Christian believes that Christ is one among many ancestors who may be manipulated with bribes and sacrifices, his real heritage is Philistine, not Christian.

2. 2 Samuel 21—24

I have already mentioned the non-chronological chapters of 2 Samuel 21—24. These chapters are also arranged as a chiasm in which the psalm and last words of David constitute the center.¹²²

- A. Narrative of expiation of Saul's murder of Gibeonites (21: 1-14; sin of Saul)
- B. Annalistic report of battles of David's heroes with Philistines (21: 15-22)
- C. Song of David (22: 1-51; retrospective or looking backward)
- C¹ Last Words of David (23: 1-7; prospective or looking forward)
- B¹ Annalistic report of battles with Philistines and list of David's heroes (23: 8-39)
- A¹ Narrative of expiation of David's census-taking (24: 1-25; sin of David)

3. Exodus 1—40

¹²¹ Incidentally, the number, 50,070, is not found in all Hebrew manuscripts. Some mention only 70 men. Besides, the small city of Bethshemesh could not have had a population this large. The original number is probably 70. Cf. Davis on *1 Samuel*, p. 65.

¹²² Davis, *2 Samuel—Looking on the Heart*, p. 216. A further note: The "annals" is an official record or chronicle of the king's administration, wars, building projects, etc., cf. Esther 6: 1)

The book of Exodus also has a simple thematic arrangement.¹²³

- (1) Ex. 1-18—“the God who delivers”
- (2) Ex. 19-24—“the God who demands”
- (3) Ex. 25-40—“the God who dwells”

Note: From this very simple outline, the reader has a framework for understanding the whole book of Exodus.

Note also that the structure of Exodus suggests the grand paradigm (model) for the Christian life. God delivers, and on the basis of that deliverance He demands a holy life. Law does not come before grace; grace comes before law. Further, God delivers and demands for the grand purpose of dwelling with His people. An overview of redemptive revelation indicates that God is redeeming and sanctifying a people so that they may dwell with Him, and He with them.

4. Exodus 25—31: 18 and 35—40

The exacting details of the tabernacle construction and protocol (procedure) for sacrifices can become very tedious to the reader, but interpreted in the context of God dwelling with His people, they provide a graphic display of God’s grace. “Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8 NASB). The privilege of God’s presence is forfeited in Ex. 32—34. While Moses is receiving the Law on the mountain, the people are playing the harlot with the golden calf. Chapters 32—34 record Moses’ intercession for the people of Israel ending with God’s agreement that His presence will continue with them. From Exodus 35 onward, the plans for tabernacle construction given to Moses on the mountain are completed. The book climaxes in 40: 34-38 with the confirmation of God’s willingness to dwell with them. The broad structure of the narrative is diagrammed below.¹²⁴

- A presence offered (25: 1-9)
 - Plans given (25: 10—31: 18)
 - A presence forfeited but restored (32—34)
 - Plans executed (35: 1—40:33)
 - A presence authenticated (40: 34-38)

Another chiastic arrangement with the emphasis at the center portion.

By the arrangement of the story, the author (Moses) emphasizes the unworthiness of Israel to enjoy the grace of Yahweh’s presence. Their idolatry takes center stage in chapter 32. Yet, also occupying the central portion—and the emphasis—of the narrative is Moses’ intercession (33—34), a type of the intercession of Christ. The presence of Yahweh is forfeited because of sin, but restored through the intercession of Moses imploring the grace of God. The plans for building the tabernacle, therefore, are not set aside because of the people’s failure, but fully implemented in the following chapters in elaborate detail.

I think you must see that structure of Exodus 25—40 to appreciate what is happening in this ‘tabernacle’ section. However, let’s come back to the keynote of this material—‘they shall make for me a sanctuary,

¹²³ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, pp. 80-83

¹²⁴ Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, p. 82

and I shall dwell among them’ (25: 8). What does that say to Israel? Simply that Yahweh craves to be among his people. *God cannot get close enough to his people!* This is almost more than we can believe.¹²⁵

Building the tabernacle, therefore, is the climax of the book which makes sense to the reader only within the context of deliverance, demand, failure, and restoration. Typologically, the Israelite’s forfeiture of God’s presence prefigures the failure of all people, Jew and Gentile; and the restoration through Moses’ intercession prefigures the grace of God in the gospel through the atonement of Christ and His continual intercession for His people. The restored universe (Rom. 8: 18-25) will be the dwelling of God with His people; moreover, as God employed Adam in cultivating the garden, and as He employed the Israelites in building the tabernacle, He will also employ glorified believers in cultivating the universe for His glory. Therefore, in the structure of Exodus, we see the foreshadowing of God’s eschatological plan for the new heavens and earth.

5. Daniel 1—7

Paying attention to the individual words and phrases in OT narratives is essential in determining their overall structure.¹²⁶

Chapter 2 ←		God who reveals	→ Chapter 5
Words emphasized	Number of times	Words emphasized	Number of times
tell	5	explain, explanation	2
make known, made known, making known	10	interpretation(s)	9
declare	12	make known	4
reveal(s), revealed, revealer	7	illumination, insight, wisdom, knowledge	8
knows, may know	2	declare	2
Chapter 3 ←		God who rescues	→ Chapter 6
Words emphasized	Number of times	Words emphasized	Number of times
deliver, delivered	5	deliver(s), delivered	
		delivering, rescue(s)	7
Chapter 4 ←		God who rules	→ Chapter 7
Words emphasized	Number of times	Words emphasized	Number of times
kingdom, king, dominion	10	king, kingdom, sovereignty	
ruler, rules	4	dominion	23

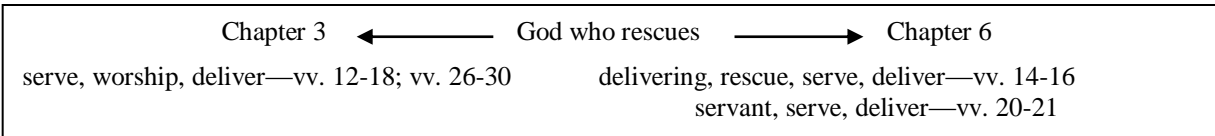
If the reader looks closely at chapters 3 and 6, he will also notice the close connection between the words “deliver”, “serve”, “servant” and “worship”. The juxtaposition¹²⁷ of these terms contributes to the author’s purpose in showing that God does not deliver all people indiscriminately, but those who worship and serve him. This is also shown by means of the contrast between Daniel and his accusers.

¹²⁵ Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, p. 83, emphasis his.

¹²⁶ Adapted from Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, pp. 55-56

¹²⁷ Setting side by side

While Daniel is delivered from the mouth of the lions, his accusers and their families are crushed and killed before they reach the bottom of the lion's den.¹²⁸



Considering the information above, chapters 2—7 reveal a forward symmetry.

- God who reveals (chapter 2)
 - God who rescues (chapter 3)
 - God who rules (chapter 4)
- God who reveals (chapter 5)
 - God who rescues (chapter 6)
 - God who rules (chapter 7)

6. 1 Kings 21—22

My examination of 1 Kings 21—22 has resulted in the following possibility.

- A—Ahab lusting for land—for Naboth's vineyard (21: 1-2)
 - B—Naboth refuses an alliance with Ahab against the Lord (21: 3-4; cf. Lev. 25: 23-28; Num. 36: 7)
 - C—Jezebel/Ahab plot against Naboth—lies in the mouths of Jezebel's witnesses (v.5-10)
 - D—The plot against Naboth succeeds; Naboth dies (21: 11-16)
 - E—Elijah's prophecy against Ahab and Jezebel (21: 17-26)
 - F—Ahab partially humbled (21: 27-29)
 - A₂—Ahab lusting for land—for Ramoth-gilead (22: 1-3)
 - B₂—Jehoshaphat accepts an alliance with Ahab against the Lord (22: 4; cf. 22: 44)
 - E₂—Zedekiah's false prophecy—Israel will win (22: 5-12)
 - E₃—Micaiah's true prophecy—Israel will be scattered (22: 13-18)
 - C₂—God plots against Ahab—a lying spirit put in the mouth of Ahab's prophets (22: 19-27)
 - E₄—Micaiah's prophecy against Ahab (22: 28)
 - D₂—God's plot against Ahab succeeds—Ahab deceived; Ahab dies (22: 29-36)
 - E₅—Micaiah's prophecy against Israel and Ahab fulfilled (22: 35-37)
 - E₆—Elijah's prophecy against Ahab and Jezebel partially fulfilled (22: 38)
 - F₂—Ahab completely humbled (22: 38)

In the forward symmetry of these two chapters, we discern God's justice. What goes around also comes around. What a man sows, he will also reap. This kind of "poetic justice" is common in the OT. Jacob deceives his father and is himself deceived by Laban. Ahab allowed Jezebel to sow lies about Naboth. He was later deceived by the lying testimony of his own prophets in whom God had placed a lying spirit. Moreover, as Naboth died as the result of lying witnesses, so Ahab dies as the result of the lying spirit. We will also notice that the narrative is **dominated by the prophetic witness** of Elijah and Micaiah. Zedekiah is the lone false prophet. Although not the primary emphasis of the story, notice that Micaiah subjects himself to the test of the true prophet (Deut. 18: 20-22). If

¹²⁸This fact, of course, brings up the question of whether the biblical writer approved of the execution of the accusers' families. However, the mere mention of this brutal, ancient practice does not imply approval. See Deut. 24: 16.

Ahab comes back alive from the battle, then Micaiah says that the Lord has not spoken to him, making him a false prophet (1 Kings 22: 26-28). The next time you hear someone “prophesying” the future, remind him of the consequences of being wrong. The OT prophets didn’t work on percentages. Their prophecies were true **every** time, not **most** of the time.

D. Clusters of Stories

As seen above, a series of stories may be clustered together to achieve the author’s purposes. 1 Samuel 2—3 relate the sin of Eli’s sons, Eli’s failure to discipline them, and the calling of Samuel as God’s prophet. 1 Samuel 4 concerns God’s judgment against Eli’s house and all Israel for its idolatry. 1 Samuel 5 relates God’s judgment against the Philistines; 1 Sam. 6, the Philistine’s recognition of the power of God as well as the Israelite’s recognition of the holiness of God. (Thus, God demands to be acknowledged by both Hebrews and Gentiles.) Finally, in 1 Sam. 7 God shows Himself strong if His people will trust Him and put away their idols. They are led to this conclusion by Samuel, the Lord’s confirmed prophet.

Solomon’s prayer for wisdom and understanding in 1 Kings 3: 5-15 leads to another cluster of stories through which the author highlights his wisdom.¹²⁹

- (1) a dramatic resolution concerning the two prostitutes (3: 16-28)
- (2) a report concerning Solomon’s bureaucracy (4: 1-19)
- (3) a report about Solomon’s economic success (4: 20-28)
- (4) a report about Solomon’s wisdom (4: 29-34)

Notice the difference between episode one and episodes 2-4. While a dramatic resolution presents a problem which is either resolved or left unresolved, a report simply presents the facts without citing a problem. There are no problems or tension presented in the reports about Solomon’s wealth or administrative abilities. They simply round out the cluster of stories proving that God granted Solomon the wisdom he sought.

Numbers 33: 50—36: 13 forms another cluster of episodes demonstrating the distribution of land given to the tribes of Israel.

E. Parallel Accounts

Parallel accounts resemble one another either in a contrasting way or a confirming way.¹³⁰

1. Confirming—one episode confirms the point of view of the other. One example of a confirming parallel are the parallel accounts of Adonijah’s execution, Abiathar’s removal from the priesthood, Job’s execution, and Shimei’s execution (1 Kings 2: 13-46a). All four episodes “confirm” the fact that Solomon’s kingdom became firmly established in Israel (1 Ki. 2: 12, 46b).
2. Contrasting—one episode qualifies or contrasts the other. The story of Joseph (Gen. 39)

¹²⁹ Pratt, pp. 213-215

¹³⁰ Pratt, pp. 215-216

forms a simple contrast with the story of Judah (Gen. 38).

Judah (Genesis 38: 1-30)	Joseph (Genesis 39: 1-23)
Association with foreign women (vv. 1-3)	Separation from foreign women (vv. 6b-12)
Sexual immorality (vv. 12-18)	Sexual morality (vv. 6b-12)
Victimizer (v. 24)	Victimized (vv. 13-20a)
Judgment of God (vv. 6-10)	Blessing of God (vv. 20b-23)
True accusation of woman (v. 25)	False accusation of woman (vv. 13-20a)
Confession of sin (v. 26)	Rejection of sin (v. 10)

Summary and Conclusion

Determining the structure of OT narratives is not an exact science. There is more than one possibility. However, the reader should be able to logically defend a particular arrangement of the material, making note of parallels that are both circular (synonymous) and contrasting (antithetical).¹³¹ The important thing is that we begin to see the OT narratives as well-arranged stories whose structures suggests their meaning and purpose, not a haphazard reporting of random events having no relationship to another. Attention to structure can considerably aid our understanding of the text and our ability to apply the text to the life of the church.

Lesson Five—On Stage with Biblical Characters

Introduction

In order to distinguish one OT narrative from another, we must have a strategy for doing so. In this lesson, I will discuss the method of dividing episodes and scenes by taking notice of the content within scenes, their purpose, and certain boundary markers provided by the author including grammatical clues, location, time, setting, participants, etc. As soon as we can determine the which scenes belong to the same story, we can then discern the structure of the story. By paying attention to episode and scene divisions, we are training ourselves to be careful observers—like an audience watching a movie takes note of all the activities of the participants, the different locations, dialogue, and so on. Careful observation is the key to interpretation.

VII. Scene Depiction in OT Narratives—Part I

How does the reader determine where one OT narrative begins and another one begins. How do we know where to start our examination of the text? Precisely what divides one episode in a story from another? First, some definitions may be in order.

In the study of NT epistles, the paragraph is the basic unit of analysis. In poetry, the strophe is the basic unit of analysis. That is, when we are analyzing epistles, we want to determine as accurately as possible where one paragraph ends and another begins. For those with good English study Bibles,

¹³¹ See McNeill, *Biblical Interpretation—OT Poetry*

this is often easy since the translators have actually done this for us. Where we have to be careful is assuming that they are correct in their paragraph divisions, but for all practical purposes, the translators, Greek and Hebrew scholars, have done our work for us better than we can do it ourselves. In poetry, the same thing holds true since the translators have clearly marked where one strophe ends and another begins.¹³²

With OT narratives, the basic unit of analysis is the episode.¹³³ Wolvaardt defines **episode** as “a chain of events which are related (often one event leading to another), having the same location, time and major participants.” This definition of an episode will guide the reader in grouping parts of an OT narrative together into an episode or scene. He goes on to explain, “A break in the events, a change of participant, location or time often indicates the beginning of a new building block [episode] within the structure of the narrative. An exception to this definition is an episode describing a journey. The location will constantly change but this alone will not indicate a new episode.”¹³⁴

Wolvaardt defines a **scene** as “a group of episodes” in which various indicators help us determine the divisions between episodes and scenes.¹³⁵ There are three basic indicators.

A. Content

If we can briefly summarize the content of a block of text, this is a good signal that the text belongs together into a single episode or scene.

B. Purpose

Does the block of text function well together to present a single purpose? For example, in our study of 2 Sam. 10—12, we have seen how those three chapters function together to emphasize the outward and inward battles David is fighting. By wedging the story of Bathsheba and Nathan’s confrontation between these outer battles (a “sandwich”), the author demonstrates his purpose in showing that David’s inner battles have more significance for the people of God than his ability to fight. However, the texts above are many scenes strung together. The question here is whether a group of verses function together to form a single idea or purpose. In our study of 1 Kings 1—Adonijah’s conspiracy to become king—we have seen that each episode achieves a particular purpose.¹³⁶

(1) Verses 1-4—David is old, weak, and dying. The purpose of the author is to alert the reader to the problem of who will succeed David as king. (Recall Pratt’s Problem/Resolution Dramatic Episode structure).

¹³² See McNeill, *Interpreting NT Epistles*, and McNeill, *Interpreting OT Poetry*.

¹³³ Bennie Wolvaardt, *How to Interpret the Bible—A Do-It-Yourself Manual*, p. 168

¹³⁴ Wolvaardt, p. 173, word in brackets mine

¹³⁵ Wolvaardt, pp. 173-174

¹³⁶ Adapted from Walsh, p. 113

(2) Verses 5-8—Adonijah is positioning himself to seize the kingdom, although without David’s authority. He places multiple chariots and horsemen before his own chariot as he rides proudly through the streets of Jerusalem. Moreover, he does this with the support of some very powerful men but without the support of other very powerful men. The author’s purpose in this scene is alert the reader to a very dangerous political power struggle between two important factions within the kingdom of Israel.

(3) Verses 9-10—Adonijah is still in the limelight, but the place and activity have changed. He is inviting those allied with him to a feast in celebration of his kingdom. The purpose of the author is to show that his conspiracy to become king is progressing to the point of an unofficial inaugural ceremony. Solomon is conspicuously absent from the party.

(4) Verses 11-14—Alarmed at what is going on, Nathan and Bathsheba conspire to make Solomon king. This block of verses function together to demonstrate that Nathan and Bathsheba are not going to sit by passively (without effort) and allow Adonijah to seize the kingdom unlawfully and have them put to death.

(5) Verses 15-27—This is a larger scene with two episodes (15-21 and 16-27). In the first episode, Bathsheba is with David in the bedroom alone (Abishag has probably left without being mentioned). After informing David of Adonijah’s conspiracy, Nathan comes in to confirm her words. Apparently, Bathsheba leaves the room while Nathan is conversing with David because David has to summon her (v. 28).

(6) Verses 28-37—This block of verses function together to confirm David’s choice of Solomon as king. Notice that Bathsheba is summoned first, then Nathan along with Zadok the priest and Benaiah (one of the mighty men of 2 Sam. 23). Three of the most powerful men in Israel, along with Bathsheba, are there to confirm David’s choice of Solomon as king.

(7) Verses 38-40—The conversation completed, the action of anointing Solomon as king—in fact—is now carried out, the purpose of this block of verses which make up this episode.

(8) Verses 41-50—Adonijah’s party becomes a nightmare when a he and his supporters hear of Solomon being seated on the throne of David. The scene ends with Adonijah running with fear to take hold of the horns of the altar—a place of presumed safety for a criminal facing the death penalty; but see Ex. 21: 14 which states that a guilty man could not find refuge even at the altar (C.F. Keil, 1 Kings, p. 25).

(9) Verses 51-53—This block of verses functions together to show Adonijah’s humility before Solomon. But as a subsequent episode demonstrates, his humility is outward only, not inward.

(10) Chap. 2: 1-11—David, who has been described as “old, advanced in age” (v. 1) and “very old” (v. 15), now dies. We suspected this from the repetition found in these two verses.

C. Boundary markers

Words, phrases, or whole paragraphs marking the beginning and ending of an episode or scene.

1. Grammatical markers

Words like “when”, “then”, “now” may serve as boundary markers between episodes and scenes. “Now” does not always mean at the same time but denotes a “change in the story line or flow of thought”.

Notice these markers from 1 Kings 1:1—2: 10

Now—vv. 1, 5, (vv. 12, 15, 18, 20 do not count as a markers), vv.41, 51.

When—vv. 23 (possible marker, but the episode has already started), v. 41 (this does not constitute a marker between episodes

Then—v. 11, 13, 16 (v. 13 and 16 do not denote a change of episode), 39

So—v. 38

We could continue with examples, but from these you can see that you have to be careful in drawing hasty conclusions. These words *sometimes* indicate changes in episodes but *not always*. You have to study the context and look for other markers which corroborate (agree) with these before forming a conclusion.

2. Change in participants, time, and place

(1)Time: at this time, one day, in those days, meanwhile, later on

(2) Place: when he had arrived (Judges 3: 27); and settled in the land of Nod (Gen. 4: 16)

(3) Participants: (Gen. 22: 3, 6). The scenes are different since in v. 3 we see Abraham, Isaac, and two young men, while in v. 6 we see only Abraham and Isaac.

This marker is more helpful in determining a change of episode or scene. In the 1 Kings 1:1—2: 10 story, notice the changes in participants.

Scene One

Verses 1-4—David and Abishag

Scene Two

Verses 5-8—Adonijah and the fifty men who rode before him (Note: this episode is mentioned as an antecedent action occurring many times before the crisis of this story. David is mentioned only because he never questioned the activity of Adonijah.)

Scene Three

Verses 9-10—Adonijah, his brothers or the king’s sons (by the same mother, not his half brothers), all the men of Judah who were servants to the king (a hyperbole or exaggeration)

Scene Four

Verses 11-14—Nathan the prophet and Bathsheba

Scene Five

Episode one of scene five

Verses 15-21—Bathsheba, David, and Abishag (Abishag's presence may or may not be important to the scene, and she probably leaves the room at this point, though we are not told. Her presence could indicate that Bathsheba is no longer in David's favor.¹³⁷

Episode two of scene five

Verses 22-27—David and Nathan (As Nathan enters the room, Bathsheba leaves the room; cf. v. 28)

Episode three of scene five

Verses 28-31—David and Bathsheba (As Bathsheba enters, Nathan leaves the room; cf. v. 32)

Episode four of scene five

Verses 32-37—Nathan, Zadok, Benaiah, and David

Scene six

Verses 38-40—Nathan, Zadok, Benaiah, the Pelethites and Cherethites (Benaiah's men; cf. 2 Sam. 20: 23), Solomon

Scene seven

Verses 41-50—Adonijah, his guests, Joab, Jonathan (the reporter)

Scene eight

Verses 51-53—Solomon and Adonijah, unnamed reporter

Notice that I divided Scene Five into four episodes since different participants were present in each of these episodes. However, they are the same scene because David is present during the whole scene and has not left his bed chamber. Thus, the same place or location—David's bed chamber—has influenced me to label vv. 15-37 as the same scene although the participants change during the scene making up different episodes.

By the same reasoning, vv. 5-8 and vv. 9-10 are not the same scene since Adonijah is seen in two different places. In vv. 5-8 he is riding ostentatiously¹³⁸ through the streets of Jerusalem; in vv. 9-10, he is having a feast. Although he is present, the scene is different.

3. Summary statements at the beginning or end of a unit

1 Kings 2: 10-12 are the summary statements of the narrative which sum up everything which has happened in this dramatic resolution. David dies, but Solomon's kingdom is established. Problem solved! For examples of other summary statements, see Judges 13: 1; 17: 6; 19: 1; 21: 25).

¹³⁷ Walsh, page unknown

¹³⁸ With much show

VIII. Scene Depiction in OT Narratives—Part II¹³⁹

Pratt defines scenes as “batches of closely related circumstances, actions, and characters that form the basic building blocks of Old Testament stories.”¹⁴⁰

A. Two obstacles to dividing scenes

1. Our hermeneutical orientation

We fail to regard scenes as the basic units of Biblical stories because we think in segments which are much too small for OT narratives—words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. We cannot read OT narratives as if they were NT epistles. The genre is different. The meaning is discovered as we examine broader sections of scripture.

2. The OT stories themselves do not clearly mark the scene divisions but “move smoothly from one scene to the next.”¹⁴¹

We must learn to detect scene and episode divisions ourselves from the clues given by the author. Since there is no absolute answer to this question, flexibility is necessary in dividing scenes.

B. Three clues to dividing OT narratives into scenes¹⁴²

1. Changes in time

OT stories are often not presented in straight-forward chronological time, but the stories are interrupted by events which are either subsequent, simultaneous, or antecedent to the time in which the story takes place.

a. Subsequent action

One scene is separated from the other due to a lapse of time between the two events (words and phrases like “the next day”, “morning”, “evening”, “months”, “after”). Such words give us clues about something taking place after the scene in question. One exception to these obvious markers are the little-noticed words, “and/then” which may denote immediate action after the event or action after a long period of time. Esther 5: 1 is an example of subsequent action. Three days after Esther told Mordecai to assemble the Jews of Susa for prayer and fasting, she appears before King Ahasuerus.

b. Simultaneous action

¹³⁹ Pratt, pp. 152-164

¹⁴⁰ Pratt, p. 151

¹⁴¹ Pratt, p. 152

¹⁴² There will be some repetition here from Part I based on Pratt’s book *He Gave Us Stories*.

While one scene is taking place, the author may retrace his steps to another action or event taking place at the same time. “While”, “in the mean time” and other expressions are used to signify simultaneous time. One example is Esther 4: 15—5: 5. After being told by Mordecai to petition the king’s favor concerning the Jews, she commanded Mordecai to assemble all the Jews of Susa to fast and pray for three days and nights before she approached the king. Thus, while she appeared before the king without being summoned, at the risk of her life, all the Jews in Susa were having a prayer meeting. Their fasting and praying were taking place simultaneously (at the same time) with the queen’s petition to the king. Taking note of this fact puts a new perspective on the queen’s meeting with the king. God took note of the prayers of His people and answered their prayers by saving Esther’s life.

Another example of simultaneous action is the story of Judah in Genesis 38. We don’t know the exact chronology, but some or all of the events in Judah’s life in Gen. 38 were taking place while Joseph was a slave in Egypt. At the same time Judah is forsaking the law concerning the marriage of his son to the widow of his deceased son—and possibly at the same time he is having sexual relations with someone he thinks is a prostitute (Tamar, his daughter-in-law)—Joseph is resisting the sexual advances of the wife of his Egyptian master (Gen. 39). The positioning of these two stories side by side in Gen. 38 and 39 highlight the contrast between Judah and Joseph.

c. Antecedent action

Antecedent action is action completed before the current scene or the scene being examined. 2 Chronicles 12: 1-4 gives us an example. Notice the text.

When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel with him forsook the law of the LORD.² And it came about in King Rehoboam’s fifth year, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem³ with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people who came with him from Egypt were without number: the Lubim, the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians.⁴ He captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 12:1-4 NASB)

In v. 2, Shishak came up against Jerusalem. In v. 4, the writer tells us what he did before he came up against Jerusalem. He captured the fortified cities of Judah.¹⁴³

Another example of antecedent action occurs in Judges 8: 28-32. Gideon (also called Jerubbaal) had successfully subdued the Midianites. Having finished his work, he retires to his own home (v. 29). This is followed by the report of the birth of Abimelech to Gideon’s concubine (vv. 30-31). The birth of Abimelech had taken place years earlier; for after Gideon dies at a ripe old age (8: 32), Abimelech is quick to step into the void and seize power in Israel (9: 1). The report of his birth years earlier is necessary for us to know who this man is who now wishes to seize power.

We have also seen antecedent action in the story of Adonijah. In 1 Kings 1: 6 implies that Adonijah had made a habit of his prideful behavior before the present story and that David had never confronted him in spite of it. Thus, this is activity which had occurred before the present crisis.

¹⁴³ Pratt, p. 154

“In sum, temporal breaks between scenes occur in three ways: gaps between subsequent events, shifts to simultaneous actions, and regressions to antecedent events.”¹⁴⁴

2. Changes in setting

Three changes in setting help the reader determine the boundaries between scenes.

a. Differences in place.

There are 11 changes of place in the story of Adonijah: David’s bed chamber, the streets of Jerusalem (implied in vv. 5-8), the feast in Adonijah’s house (implied in vv. 9-10, the undisclosed location of the conversation between Bathsheba and Nathan, David’s bed chamber (again), the city streets going to Gihon, Gihon itself, the throne of David, Adonijah’s house (again), the altar, David’s bed chamber (again).

There are four changes of place in Esther 5. First, the queen enters the inner court of the king’s palace (v. 1). In verse 5, the scene changes from the inner court of the palace to the place where Esther had prepared a banquet for the king and Haman (presumably her private living quarters in the king’s palace. The queen would not live in the king’s harem with the rest of his concubines.) The scene changes again in v. 9 when Haman sees Mordecai in the king’s gate. It changes a fourth time in v. 10 when Haman goes to his own house.

We may think it tedious to keep up with all these changes in setting, but this is necessary to keep up with what is going on in the story.

b. Differences in environmental descriptions

These may include “darkness to light, cold to heat, or draught to rain.” The differences can also include comments about the geography, animal and plant life, and buildings (Pratt, p. 155). Examples would include Genesis 15: 11-12,

The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. (Genesis 15:11-12 NASB)

In v. 11, Abram was active in driving away the birds from the animal carcasses he had killed, but in v. 12, he had fallen asleep as the sun was going down.

Notice the following environmental changes,

Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. (Genesis 12:10 NASB)

So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people,¹⁵ and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the

¹⁴⁴ Pratt, p. 154

priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest),¹⁶ the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho. (Joshua 3:14-16 NASB)

c. Differences in characters

This is the same as the difference in participants treated above in Part I. It should be mentioned that characters or participants are not only people, but would also include the presence of God or angels (e.g. the story of Abraham and the three “men” who appeared to him in Gen. 18. One of those “men” was a theophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

3. Changes in mode of narration

Sometimes a scene division can be detected through changes in mode of narration—“the degree to which the writer’s presence is felt” by the reader. Sometimes it seems as if the writer is speaking directly to the reader. He has walked out onto center stage, so to speak. At other times, the writer has placed himself in the background and is not noticed by the reader. He has remained backstage. When the writer remains backstage, he allows the participants in the story to “tell the story through their own thoughts, words, and actions.” Pratt mentions four modes of narration: authorial comments, description, straight narration, and dramatic depiction.

a. Authorial comments

These are explanations or evaluations which come up in the story. Moses, the writer of Genesis, adds his own commentary in Gen. 2: 24, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24 NASB). We find another example in Joshua 3: 15,

...and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), (Joshua 3:15 NASB)

This authorial comment introduces the miracle—and change of scene—which takes place in v. 16,

...the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho. (Joshua 3:16 NASB)

When the Jordan was not overflowing its banks, it was 90 to 100 feet wide and up to 12 feet deep, but when it overflowed its banks in the days of harvest—the timing of Israel’s crossing—it could become a mile wide and much deeper. Added to this was the undergrowth of bushes and tall grass which

grew abundantly while the river was contained within its banks. It would have been like crossing a jungle covered with water.¹⁴⁵

In Judges, the author feels that it is necessary to identify the city of Jebus as Jerusalem for the Israelite reading this book over 300 years after the events occurred. While the name Jebus would not be recognizable, Jerusalem would be.

But the man was not willing to spend the night, so he arose and departed and came to a place opposite Jebus (**that is, Jerusalem**). And there were with him a pair of saddled donkeys; his concubine also was with him. (Judges 19:10 NASB, emphasis mine)

The clearest clue for this scene division is not the authorial comment but the change of place; however, the change of place is highlighted by the authorial comment.

The authorial comment below helps us understand the context of Abram's faith in the promise of Gen. 15: 18. His land would reach far and wide, but as yet, he had no children to fill it. It also marks a scene division since it divides the covenant ceremony in Gen. 15 with the account of Abram taking Hagar as his wife in Gen. 16.

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates...." (Genesis 15:18 NASB)

Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no *children*, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. (Genesis 16:1 NASB; note: "children" is implied in the Hebrew, thus the italics)

There are numerous authorial comments in the OT narratives which take the form of a repetitive formula, "to this day". Such comments explain why certain customs arose in Israel or other cultures or why a place had a certain name.

But when they arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.⁵ Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod **to this day**.⁶ Now the hand of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories. (1 Samuel 5:4-6 NASB, emphasis mine).

The authorial comment marks a scene division between v. 4 and v. 6. In v. 4 the reader is in the house of Dagon, but in v. 6 he is in the streets and houses of the inhabitants of Ashdod who are suffering from tumors.

"And who will listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike."²⁵ **So it has been from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.**²⁶ Now when David came to Ziklag, he sent some of the spoil to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, "Behold, a gift for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD: (1 Samuel 30:24-26 NASB, emphasis mine)

¹⁴⁵ Davis, *Joshua—No Falling Words*, p. 38

In 1 Sam. 30: 26, David goes to Ziklag; thus, the authorial comment above in v. 25 alerts the reader to the change of scene taking place in v. 26. Note also the word “now” which often serves to alert the reader to a change of scene.

Consider the story of David bringing up the ark from Kiriath-jearim (1 Chron. 13; cf. 2 Sam. 6).

David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, even with songs and with lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals and with trumpets.⁹ When they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, because the oxen nearly upset it.¹⁰ The anger of the LORD burned against Uzza, so He struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark; and he died there before God.¹¹ **Then David became angry** because of the LORD'S outburst against Uzza; and he called that place Perez-uzza **to this day.**¹² **David was afraid of God that day,** saying, "How can I bring the ark of God home to me?"¹³ So David did not take the ark with him to the city of David, but took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite.¹⁴ Thus the ark of God remained with the family of Obed-edom in his house three months; and the LORD blessed the family of Obed-edom with all that he had. (1 Chronicles 13:8-14 NASB, emphasis mine)

Notice the changes of scene in this passage. David, accompanied by throngs of Israelites, is celebrating as he brings back the ark of the Lord from Kiriath-jearim to the city of David (cf. 1 Sam. 6: 21—7: 2 and 2 Sam. 6: 12—a period spanning 20 years). But the scene changes from joy to sorrow when they come to the threshing floor of Chidon (change of place). Uzzah tries to steady the ark, and God strikes him dead for his efforts. There is another scene change afterwards in v. 11, “Then David became angry...” David is angry with God for killing Uzzah. David reasons, “What does God think He is doing, spoiling my day of rejoicing?! Doesn’t God know that I am doing something good by bringing back the ark?” God’s anger burns against Uzzah; now, David’s anger burns against God!

In v. 12, there is another scene change. David is no longer angry, but afraid. Apparently, he has had enough time to think about what happened to Uzzah and to recall the mistakes that he has made in bringing up the ark. Twenty years ago, the Philistines had returned the ark by placing it on a cart drawn by milch¹⁴⁶ cows. Nothing happened to the Philistines for sending the ark back on a cart. They didn’t know any better, and God extends mercy. But David should have known better; only priests should carry the ark, not dumb animals (Deut. 31: 9; Ex. 25: 14; 37: 5; 1 Chron.)! The irony is that 20 years after God smote the 70 men of Bethshemesh for gazing into the ark, David would forget this object lesson of God’s holiness. To some extent, he is responsible for Uzzah’s death because of his carelessness, and this frightens him. This God is a holy God, and perhaps it is not the right time to bring the ark to him (v. 12). Perhaps God would do the same to him as He did to poor Uzzah. The scene changes again in v. 13 when David takes the ark to the house of Obed-edom. (Let him deal with this holy God!) Finally, when David hears that Obed-Edom has been blessed by the Lord for three months, he is ready to retrieve the ark and finish what he started—bringing the ark to the city of David.

¹⁴⁶ Milk-giving cows

In the example above, v. 11 (an authorial comment) marks a scene division between the incident of Uzzah's death and the taking of the ark to the house of Obed-edom (vv. 11-14). Notice that the common formula is used, "to this day."

One **application** of 1 Chron. 13: Good motives are not enough. Although our motive for doing something may be pure, what we do and how we do it are also important. Before we get angry with God for spoiling our joy in ministry, we might ask ourselves what we may have done to displease him even in the midst of ministry. God is a holy God, and we should not expect him to bless us for violating His law, regardless of how good and spiritual our actions or motives seemed to be at the time. On the other hand, we may do the right things the right way for with the wrong motives (e.g. for our own glory rather than the glory of God). It is always tempting to push our own agendas for prideful reasons.

Consider the authorial comment below from Joshua 5.

So Joshua made himself flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. ⁴ **This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them:** all the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, died in the wilderness along the way after they came out of Egypt. ⁵ For all the people who came out were circumcised, but all the people who were born in the wilderness along the way as they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised. ⁶ For the sons of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, that is, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished because they did not listen to the voice of the LORD, to whom the LORD had sworn that He would not let them see the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷ Their children whom He raised up in their place, Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them along the way. ⁸ Now when they had finished circumcising all the nation, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. (Joshua 5:3-8 NASB, emphasis mine)

The authorial comment above marks a scene change between v. 3 and v. 8. After they were circumcised, the men remained at camp until the wounds of circumcision were healed. Verses 4-7 provide the explanation of why it was necessary to circumcise even the grown men who were soldiers. They were not circumcised by their faithless parents in the wilderness. Covenant obedience in circumcising the nation must precede victory in battle. God will not fight for Israel if they remain ritually unclean and in violation of covenant requirements.

Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him. ⁶ **His father had never crossed him at any time by asking, "Why have you done so?" And he was also a very handsome man, and he was born after Absalom.** (1 Kings 1:5-6 NASB, emphasis mine)

This authorial comment prepares us for another narcissistic¹⁴⁷ Absalom-like figure who attempts to usurp the kingdom through charm and charisma. But it performs another function in the story. It shows that David had been negligent in disciplining Adonijah, just as he had been with Absalom. These two highly privileged sons had spiraled out of control, and David had not done anything about it—either when he was younger or now that he is old and close to death.

b. Description

¹⁴⁷ Narcissism is self-worship.

These resemble authorial comments, but they provide less explanation.

⁴So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. (Genesis 12:4-5 NASB; see also Gen. 16: 16 and 17: 1)

The description of Gen. 12: 4b serves as a scene division between Abram leaving Haran and his entering the land of Canaan in v. 5.

⁶So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." (Genesis 39:6-7 NASB)

The description in Gen. 39: 6 gives us a “heads up” on what happens next in the story, Potiphar’s wife looks with desire upon Joseph because of his outward appearance. The descriptive comment also divides the scene in v. 6 with the scene of her seduction in v. 7.

Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country. (Genesis 14:10 NASB)

Moses was not content to merely say that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell into some tar pits. He wanted to explain that the valley was “full” of the deadly things.

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. (Genesis 18:11 NASB)

This description—given as a side comment in the narrative—explains why Sarah laughs, although it does not excuse her laughter—“Is anything too difficult for the Lord?”

Notice that in all the examples given, the NASB prefaces the remarks with “now”. This is not always the case, but the reader should be alert to authorial comments and descriptions whenever he sees the word “now”. The same word is also used this way in the NIV.

c. Straight narration

In this mode, the author allows us “to look more directly on the action taking place.” In Esther 1: 1-12 the author gives us a straight narration of events until he introduces the king’s speech in v. 13. This alerts us to a scene division in v. 13. From v. 13-20, the king has a consultation with his most trusted counselors.

Esther 2: 5-23 is also written in straight narrative, allowing the reader to determine what is going on. Vashti has been deposed and Esther has been selected as queen. In straight narration, we do not find quotation marks which indicate the direct speech of the characters. In Esther 9: 1-11, there is a straight narration of events describing how the Jews turned their planned annihilation into a victory. The scene changes in v. 12 when the king addresses Queen Esther. Thus, we easily detect a scene division as soon as the king begins to speak. The scene consisting of the conversation between the

king and queen continues through v. 13, but in v. 14 the author continues with a straight narration of events through v. 32 with occasional authorial comments.

d. Dramatic mode

In dramatic mode, the author allows the characters “to speak, think, and interact for themselves.” Because of this direct discourse, the author moves behind the curtains of the stage, so to speak, and remains hidden from the audience while the actual participants take front center stage. When dramatic mode is being used, you will find many quotation marks in the text along with “and he/she said” or with the name given, “And Esther said”. In the examples mentioned above, the parts of the story which are not straight narration are dramatic mode. The dramatic mode is found in 1: 13-20 in the king’s consultation with his counselors and in 9: 12-13 in the king’s conversation with Queen Esther. In fact, most of the book of Esther is presented to the reader in dramatic mode with direct discourse between the different characters.

C. Summarizing scenes

When summarizing scenes and episodes, we must make them **as simple as possible** without inaccuracies. We cannot include all the details which the author has provided. Rather, we must summarize the data into the main idea of the episode or scene. This will help us identify the building blocks of the story. Second, the **connection** between one scene and the next should be expressed in our summaries using words like **because of, before, meanwhile, however**, etc. When we set the scenes alongside each other, we get a sense of their interconnections and how they form a chain of events.¹⁴⁸ The following examples of summarization are given from Esther 3: 1—4: 2. I have summarized each scene **after** the Biblical quotations taken from the NASB. **Bold words** in the summaries indicate connecting words which connect a scene to the previous scene.

¹**After these events** King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who were with him. ²All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage.

Scene One—[Straight narrative]—**After** Esther becomes queen, Haman is promoted by the king and paid homage at the king’s gate, but Mordecai refuses to pay homage to Haman.

³**Then** the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's command?" ⁴Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew.

Scene Two—[Straight narrative]—**The reason** Mordecai said he refused to pay Haman homage was that he was a Jew, and this reason is relayed to Haman by the king’s servants.

⁵**When** Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. ⁶But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

¹⁴⁸ Pratt, p. 164

Scene Three—[Straight narrative]—**After** the king's servants told Haman that Mordecai was a Jew, he decided to kill not only Mordecai, but the whole Jewish race residing in the Persian Empire.

⁷ In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.

Scene Four—[Straight narrative]—By casting the lot, Pur, Haman **decided upon** the best time to carry out his conspiracy to exterminate the Jews.

⁸ **Then** Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain. ⁹ "If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries." ¹⁰ **Then** the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹ The king said to Haman, "The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please."

Scene Five—[Dramatic mode]—**After** deciding when to kill the Jews, Haman then submits his plan to King Ahasuerus by slandering the Jews and bribing the king with a huge sum of money. (10,000 talents of silver was two-thirds of the annual revenue of the Persian Empire; see notes in study Bibles.) The king agrees with the plan.

¹² **Then** the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. ¹³ Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder. ¹⁴ A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day.

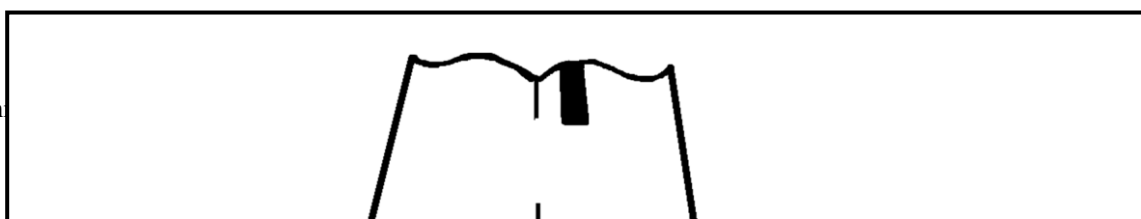
Scene Six—[Straight narration]—**After** the king agrees to Haman's plan to kill the Jews, he has the plan written into an edict (law) which was published throughout the kingdom of Persia.

¹⁵ The couriers went out impelled by the king's command **while** the decree was issued at the citadel in Susa; and **while** the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion.

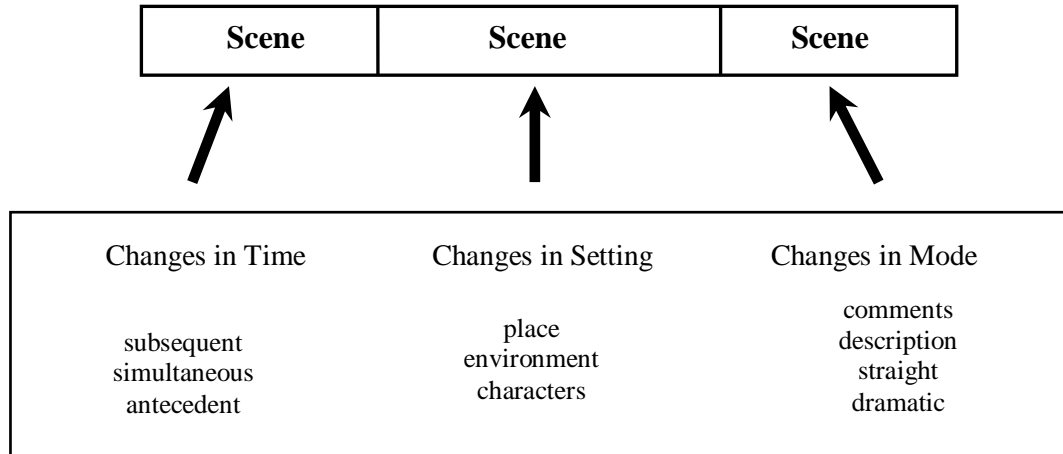
Scene Seven—[Straight narration]—**While** the published decree was causing a great uproar in Susa, King Ahasuerus and Haman sit down to drink wine.

¹ When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. ² He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.

Scene Eight—[Straight narration]—When Mordecai learns of the decree, he puts on sackcloth and Ashes and mourns in the city streets as far as the king's gate.



Narrative



The diagram above helps us remember the clues for scene divisions.¹⁴⁹

IX. Space and Time in Scenes¹⁵⁰

A. Spatial variations.

Some events in the history of the OT are magnified by the authors more than others. Sometimes the authors provide a panoramic view of history and at other times a close-up view of history.

1. Panoramic

This is a broad, sweeping view of an OT event which provides only a few details. One example would be the brief account of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah during Hezekiah's reign.

Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. (2 Kings 18:13 NASB)

Note the brevity (briefness) of this account. The author gives no details about which fortified cities were seized or how long it took Sennacherib to seize them.

¹⁴⁹ Modified slightly from Pratt, p. 158

¹⁵⁰ Pratt, pp. 164-167

2. Close-up

In contrast to the report above, the account of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem is presented in slow motion close-up. Beginning in 2 Kings 18: 14 and continuing through chapter 19, we find a detailed account of Hezekiah's willingness to pay tribute to Sennacherib, Sennacherib's treacherous refusal to honor the covenant agreement, Rabshakeh's threatening speech and blasphemy, Hezekiah's humble petition to Yahweh for protection, Isaiah's assurance of Yahweh's protection, and the report of how Yahweh destroyed the Assyrian army and, later, Sennacherib.

Other examples of close-up views would be Abraham's ordeal on the mountain with Isaac (Gen. 22), Elijah's experience with the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17: 10-24), and Micaiah's confrontation with Ahab (1 Kings 22). In each of these accounts, there is a large degree of **dramatic dialogue** which heightens the intensity of the story.

In the story of Elijah running for his life from Jezebel, the writer gives us an inward close-up view of Elijah's heart and mind (1 Kings 19). After defeating the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he realizes that essentially nothing had changed among the ruling elite of Israel who were still intent on Baal worship—Jezebel and Ahab in particular. For this reason, he is filled with sorrow over Israel's apostasy and zeal for God's covenant, not cowardice. In the conversation with Elijah, God agrees with his indictment of Israel as a covenant breaker and makes arrangements for the succession of leadership in Aram and Israel as well as for Elijah's successor, Elisha, who will carry on Elijah's work.¹⁵¹

Obviously, if the writer provides only scant (few) details of an event, he is minimizing its relative importance in comparison to other events going on around it. The close-up views, both outward and inward, demonstrate the writer's emphasis on these events to accomplish his specific purpose.

B. Temporal Variations

OT writers tell their stories in fast-mode or slow-mode, depending on what suits their purpose. In **direct dialogue**, the action slows down to **real time**, but most OT narratives are fast-paced. The author's pace alerts the reader to the emphasis in the story. For examples, the account of Ehud's assassination of King Eglon in Judges 3: 14-26 is almost slow-motion, and the spies conversation with Rahab in Joshua 2: 17-20 give a detailed account of the oath made to her. Any change in pace from the normal pace of the story—especially a dramatic slowing of the pace—signals an emphasis.¹⁵²

C. Imagery¹⁵³

In comparison to other literature, the OT narratives spend little time on creating visual images for their readers (one exception is the story of Eglon's assassination in Judges 3). Most of the time, we get the "bare bones" of an episode which is occurring very rapidly in the text of Scripture; and since

¹⁵¹ See Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings—The Wisdom and the Folly*, for an excellent treatment of this episode in Elijah's life.

¹⁵² Pratt, pp. 166-167

¹⁵³ Pratt, p. 169

we see so few examples of detailed imagery, we often overlook it when it occurs in the text. But when it does, we should pay careful attention to it.

1. Visual Imagery.

Notice the description of the armies arrayed against Joshua and Israel. From this, we get a visual image of a massive army, too numerous to count, camped at Merom.

They came out, they and all their armies with them, as many people as the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots.⁵ So all of these kings having agreed to meet, came and encamped together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. (Joshua 11:4-5 NASB).

In 1 Samuel 17, considering Goliath's size (three meters plus), the weight of his armor (57 kg), and the weight of his spear head (7kg), it would appear that David, puny in comparison, was helpless in the face of such a formidable foe. Goliath probably weighed at least 300kg himself, though the Bible does not tell us. Likewise, the description of the armies against Joshua and Israel (Joshua 11) gives the reader the impression that puny Israel was hopelessly out-classed as a military power. But that is just the point the author is making. Historically, the people of God have always been out-classed by their unbelieving foes in man-power, techniques, worldly wisdom (Lk. 16: 8), and money. Our material and human resources always appear small in comparison to the seemingly endless resources of our enemies—Satan and his people. Nevertheless, Jesus has promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the offensive onslaught of the church as the church preaches the gospel, ministers to the poor and the oppressed, and influences people into the kingdom of God.

In Judges 15: 4-5, the writer leaves us with a vivid (and humorous) image of Samson's vengeful action against his father-in-law for giving away his wife to another man. We can just see all those foxes running through the grain fields with flaming torches stuck between their tails! What confusion!

Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned the foxes tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails.⁵ When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves. (Judges 15:4-5 NASB)

Notice also the following scene from Samson's exploits.

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily so that **the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire**, and his bonds dropped from his hands.¹⁵ He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it.¹⁶ Then Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, **Heaps upon heaps**, With the jawbone of a donkey I have killed a thousand men." (Judges 15:14-16 NASB; emphasis mine)

As Samson contracted the muscles in his arms, we can see the ropes beginning to unravel and break, like a rope burning into two pieces strand by strand. Likewise, we can picture Samson swinging the jawbone and killing man after man after man until piles ("heaps") of Philistine soldiers were scattered on the ground.

Compare the descriptions above with the one in Judges 15: 8.

He struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam. (Judges 15:8 NASB)

Oh, well. Not much imagery here, is there? Thus, when we do see it, we should pay attention to it because the author has a purpose in using it.

2. Auditory Imagery

Sometimes the author helps us **hear** the action of the story.

So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands.²⁰ **When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers**, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, "**A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!**" (Judges 7:19-20 NASB; emphasis mine)

With a little imagination, we can hear the trumpets and the breaking of clay pitchers by 300 men, as well as their shouts in unison (together), "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" The breaking of the pitchers would possibly sound like the clattering of weapons together, but there is also visual imagery in the text. As soon as the pitchers were broken, the torches inside the pitchers would be instantly revealed to the Midianites; and since the 300 men were divided into three companies (7: 16), the Midianites would think they were surrounded by thousands of troops, not just 300.

In 1 Samuel 15: 1-3, Samuel gives Saul the explicit command of the Lord to destroy Amalek along with all his people and even his animals, but as Samuel enters Saul's camp after the defeat of Amalek, he hears something.

Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have carried out the command of the LORD."¹⁴ But Samuel said, "**What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?**" (1 Samuel 15:13-14 NASB; emphasis mine)

While Saul was trying to convince Samuel of his obedience, his voice was drowned out with the loud noises of sheep and cattle which had not been killed as part of the ban—things dedicated to the Lord (cf. Josh. 6: 17-18).

As we read Ezra 3: 12-13, we can hear the commotion of all the young and old people who were witnessing the laying of the temple foundation in 536 BC.

Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy,¹³ **so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.** (Ezra 3:12-13 NASB; emphasis mine)

Many people were weeping loudly, and others were shouting loudly for joy. All these sounds were mixed together creating a confusing cacophony¹⁵⁴ of sound.

3. Tactile imagery.

Another kind of imagery is touch. As we read the story of Samson's capture (Judges 16: 21), we can feel the excruciating pain of this experience.¹⁵⁵

Then the Philistines seized him and **gouged out his eyes**; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison. (Judges 16:21 NASB; emphasis mine)

We all know the pain of getting a small speck of dust in our eyes. We can think of nothing else around us until we remove it! But what is it like to have your eyes gouged out?

In Daniel 3, just how hot was the furnace Nebuchadnezzar prepared for those who refused to bow down to his image?

For this reason, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. (Daniel 3:22 NASB)

Answer: Hot enough to kill the soldiers ordered to throw them into it. Do you feel the heat? In other words, the furnace was so hot that even being near it meant certain death—that is, certain for all except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Did you ever wonder how big the stone was that David slung at Goliath, and how fast it was flying through the air? Answer: Big enough and fast enough to sink into his skull when it hit him.

And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone **sank into his forehead**, so that he fell on his face to the ground. (1 Samuel 17:49 NASB; emphasis mine)

Davis informs us just how big and fast these “smooth stones” (17: 40) were.

Such stones would range from two to three inches [5 to 7 and ½ cm] in diameter and, when flung by an accomplished warrior [and David was an expert slinger], could reach speeds of 100 to 150 miles per hour [160 to 240 kilometers per hour], all of which could make for a stunning victory.¹⁵⁶

I would like to say “ouch!” at this point, but I really don't think Goliath felt anything for more than a split second. After that, he was, at the very least, unconscious and barely alive, after which David cuts off his head. Cutting off his head was probably not necessary to kill him. He would have been dead in a few more seconds anyway. But by severing his head, David showed the Philistines that their hero was, indeed, “ka-put” (dead). There have been no historical records of any warrior going into battle with his head cut off.

¹⁵⁴ Harsh, dissonant or confusing

¹⁵⁵ Pratt, p. 172

¹⁵⁶ Davis, *1 Samuel*, p. 187, citing the work of J.K. Hoffmeier, “Weapons of War” (ISBE; revised edition; 4: 1040)

4. Olfactory imagery.

Even a sense of smell is included in OT narratives. When Noah offered burnt offerings to the Lord, the Lord smelled it.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ The LORD smelled the **soothing aroma**; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. (Genesis 8:20-21 NASB; emphasis mine)

From the New Testament, notice how John alerts the reader to the stench¹⁵⁷ of Lazarus' dead body in the following text.

So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, **for he has been dead four days.**" (John 11:38-39 NASB; emphasis mine)

By the second day, the body would have begun to decompose and stink, but Lazarus had been dead, not two days, but four days. When the stone was rolled away, can you smell the terrible odor from Lazarus' decomposing body? The stench was all the more reason to convince the on-lookers that the profound miracle of resurrection had taken place. You might imagine the conversation floating around the town, "Was Lazarus really dead?" "Yes, I smelled him."

5. Gustatory imagery.

A good example of the sense of taste is from 2 Samuel 6: 19.¹⁵⁸

Further, he distributed to all the people, to all the multitude of Israel, both to men and women, a cake of bread and one of dates and one of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed each to his house. (2 Samuel 6:19 NASB)

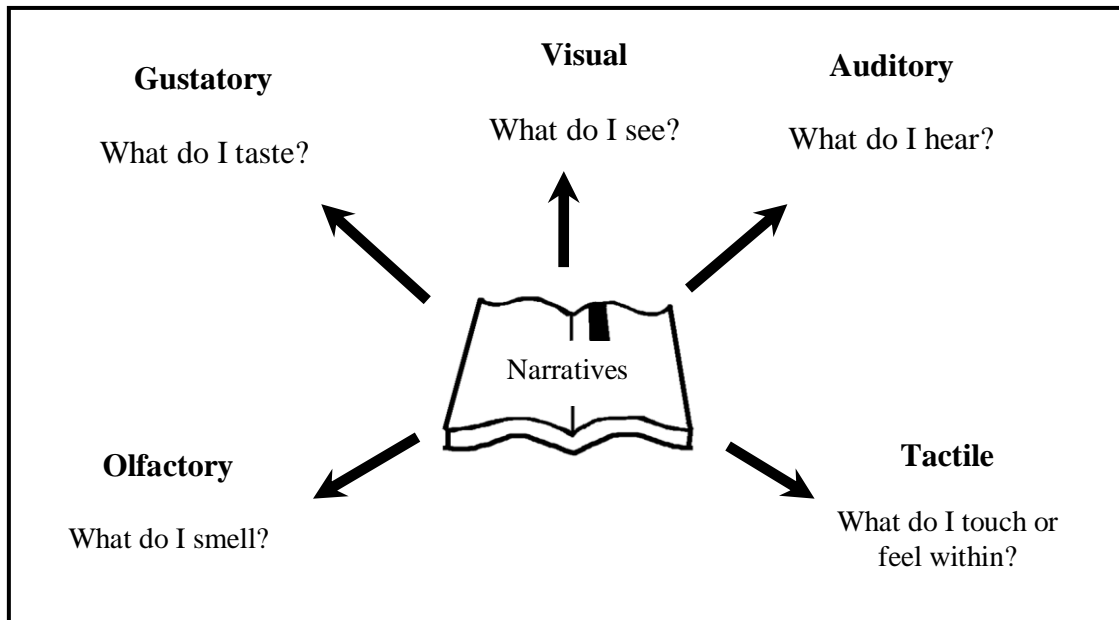
If you have never had bread or cake with raisins or dates in it, you may have a difficult time "tasting" this verse, but to those who have, the gustatory description may make your mouth water. There may be typology here. David prefigures Christ who gives the people bread and shows his concern for the poor.

Since we don't find such visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory images in all OT narratives, we should make a point of noticing them when we find them, and asking why they are there. The writer must have wanted the reader to see, hear, feel, smell, and taste the things he was describing. This gives us a greater appreciation for the story, as well as enhanced ability to understand it.

The illustration below will be helpful in alerting us to these sensations.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Foul smell

¹⁵⁸ Pratt, p. 173



Summary and Conclusion

Learning how to divide OT narratives into scenes and episodes may at first seem unnecessary and tedious, but the long-term dividends (rewards) will be substantial. The reader will learn to appreciate the art of the writer, but more importantly, he will be more equipped to pay closer attention to what is happening in the story and why the writer chose to write this story rather than another one. In other words, paying attention to scenes will help us discern the mind and will of God, His priorities, His attributes, and what He wants from His people. The careful reader will also be confronted with many surprises, like the stories of Ehud, Samson, and the famine against Israel (2 Sam. 21). When we get to the point where we believe we have God figured out, we discover there is always something new to learn through OT stories. God is not a predictable, tamed pet we keep around the house. He is the “Lion of Judah”, and lions are never safe.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Pratt, p. 174

¹⁶⁰ This is a reference to C. S. Lewis’ fictional book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, in which Aslan the lion depicts Jesus Christ. One of the children asks another talking animal character, Beaver, if Aslan is “safe”. Beaver responds, “Of course he is not safe! But he is good.”

Lesson Six—Getting Technical

Introduction

Did you ever wonder how scholars date the books of the Bible? As far as the OT goes, we have no stated authors in the first few verses of the first chapter like we do in the NT epistles. We may safely assume that the prophets were written by the prophet whose name appears in the book or by his scribal assistant (cf. Jer. 36: 26; 45: 1)—ignoring the arguments for second and third Isaiah, which for our purposes I will dismiss as unsubstantiated speculation.¹⁶¹ We know Paul wrote his letters, but we do not have the names of those who wrote Samuel, Chronicles, etc. We do have superscripts in the Psalms attributing psalms to David and others, as well as the explicit mention of the proverbs of Solomon.

We do not have any exact dates given to us in the books which allow us to pinpoint the time of composition or the original audience of the writer. However, by carefully examining the internal evidence of these compositions, as well as secular manuscripts, scholars have determined earliest likely dates and latest likely dates of composition. Determining dates and audiences will help the

¹⁶¹ For a scholarly defence of a singular author to the prophecy of Isaiah, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*

interpreter greatly in discerning the purpose for which the book was written and how to apply the individual passages to modern readers.

Then, there is the matter of systematic theology versus biblical theology. Which one more accurately reflects the way Scripture organizes itself? According to Pratt, neither. Both are necessary for the bible student, but both systematic and biblical theology attempt to organize the bible in one way or another. The following lesson is very technical, but make an effort to wade through this material to appreciate the scholarly labor of others. Relief is available. Your study Bibles will always give you some possible dates, and maybe possible authors, of these OT narratives.

X. Identifying the Writer and His Audience

Why is it important to identify the writer and his audience? Sometimes this will help us understand the reason for writing the book which, in turn, helps with interpreting the book. However, we have to be willing to accept the fact that OT narrative books do not explicitly identify the authors or the audiences. This is not the case in the NT with the Pauline, Petrine, and other epistles, in which not only the author, but the audience is identified in the first chapter. For some reason, the Holy Spirit did not direct the OT authors He inspired to identify themselves or their audiences. In some cases, there are very few clues, and we just have to be content with this omission. Perhaps this was the Spirit's way of universalizing the applicability of the text for all generations. However, there are often subtle clues in the text which help us in the identification of author and audience, and these clues are put there for a purpose. The following is a synopsis of Chapter 10 of Pratt's *He Gave Us Stories*.

A. The Earliest Likely Date of Composition

1. The latest events recorded in the book

Unless we are talking about OT prophecies which predict many future events taking place after the book is written, an OT book cannot have been written before the latest events recorded. For example, the books of First and Second Kings were originally one book, and the last major event recorded in 2 Kings was the release of King Jehoiachin from Babylonian prison in the 37th year of his exile from Judah (2 Kings 25: 27). We know from 2 Kings 24: 17 that Zedekiah was the successor to Jehoiachin and from 2 Kings 25: 2 that Zedekiah reigned 11 years in Jerusalem before the Babylonian take-over. Therefore, Jehoiachin (exiled in Babylon) was released from prison 26 years after the destruction of the temple and the major deportation of the Jews to Babylon, about 561 BC.¹⁶²

So what's the point? The author of Kings must have written with the exiled Jewish nation in mind, both Judah and Israel. The nation was now living in exile because of disobedience to the covenant. In light of the audience, we are better equipped to interpret the purpose and intent of the author of Kings, namely, the exposure of the sins of the exiled nation and its former kings.

¹⁶² Pratt, p. 236; also see "Timeline" in McNeill, *Major and Minor Prophets*.

The book of Chronicles (originally one book) by the same reasoning, must have been written sometime after the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chron 36: 23). We know from external sources that this decree was issued about 538 BC, some 49 years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Therefore, these books were also written for the exiled community.¹⁶³

The “earliest likely date” theorem does not work with some books. Genesis was written by Moses who could not have written it until at least 400 years after the events of Genesis took place (Gen. 15: 13).

In Ruth 4: 22, the genealogical mention of David suggests the kingdom of David as the earliest possible date the book could have been written. There is nothing in the book which suggests the prophetic prediction of David’s kingdom, thus the writer must have authored the book during or after David’s reign.

By comparing Joshua 15: 13 with Judges 1: 8-10, we will see that the abbreviated account of giving Caleb the land of Hebron is extended in Judges. Thus, the earliest possible date of Joshua was after Caleb actually conquered Hebron, not before; otherwise, the author of Joshua would not have known that the name of Kiriath-arba had been changed to Hebron.

Now he [*Joshua*] gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh a portion among the sons of Judah, according to the command of the LORD to Joshua, **namely, Kiriath-arba**, Arba being the father of Anak (**that is, Hebron**). (Joshua 15:13 NASB; words in brackets and emphasis mine)

Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.⁹ Afterward the sons of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country and in the Negev and in the lowland.¹⁰ So Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (**now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba**); and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai. (Judges 1:8-10 NASB; emphasis mine)

Also compare Joshua 15: 15-17 with Judges 1: 11-13 and Joshua 19: 47 with Judges 18: 27-29.

Then he went up from there against the inhabitants of Debir; now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher.¹⁶ And Caleb said, "The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him Achsah my daughter as a wife."¹⁷ Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, captured it; so he gave him Achsah his daughter as a wife. (Joshua 15:15-17 NASB)

Then from there he went against the inhabitants of Debir (now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher).¹² And Caleb said, "The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife."¹³ Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife. (Judges 1:11-13 NASB)

The territory of the sons of Dan proceeded beyond them; for the sons of Dan went up and fought with Leshem and captured it. Then they struck it with the edge of the sword and possessed it and settled in it; and **they called Leshem Dan after the name of Dan their father**. (Joshua 19:47 NASB; emphasis mine)

¹⁶³ Pratt, p. 236

Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire.²⁸ And there was no one to deliver them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it.²⁹ They **called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father** who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish. (Judges 18:27-29 NASB; emphasis mine)

Thus, the Joshua accounts could not have been written earlier than the **identical or similar accounts** in Judges. Furthermore the evaluation of the elders who outlived Joshua is almost identical in each book, leading Pratt and other scholars to the conclusion that Joshua was completed no earlier than one or two generations after Joshua died.¹⁶⁴

Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel. (Joshua 24:31 NASB)

The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel. (Judges 2:7 NASB)

If we are correct in dating Joshua one or two generations after his death, **we may conclude certain things about why the book is written:** (1) to encourage the Israelites to continue their holy war against the Canaanites—see chapter 1, (2) to encourage them to honor the allocations of land given to each tribe and to practice unity between the tribes—see chapter 22, (3) to encourage them to be obedient to the covenant stipulations—see chapters 23-24.¹⁶⁵

One **application:** As we can see from the history of Judges, Israel failed in all three charges given them in Joshua. But can the modern church claim any greater success? All the stories of the OT are written as examples for us because we are so prone to the same errors (1 Cor. 10: 6, 11). The church is not a complete failure, otherwise Jesus' promise in Matt. 16: 18 would not come to pass with the certainty with which the promise is made. On the other hand, the church (you, me, and Christians before us) has been far from a complete success in its "holy war" against unbelief—namely, the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28: 19-20). Israel failed to be aggressively obedient in their responsibilities to eradicate the Canaanites whom God had devoted to destruction for unspeakable immorality. Christians fail to aggressively evangelize and promote personal and civil justice and righteousness in their respective communities and countries. While Western nations have spent billions of dollars sending troops and weapons to fight political battles, they have spent only pennies—in comparison—sending missionaries, Bibles, teachers, etc. While the US has no legitimate claim as a "Christian" nation, it has certainly had the opportunity—through 400 years of Christian teaching—to become a nation with a consistently Christian world-view. But the church in the US has largely failed in its obligation of "possessing" the land, and many of its Christian sons and daughters are now dying in Iraq and Afghanistan as combatants rather than missionaries. Are we reaping the consequences of our failures, and would we have had a greater effect upon Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Muslim nations if over 4,500 missionaries had died there while making disciples? Something to think about.

¹⁶⁴ Pratt, p. 289

¹⁶⁵ Pratt, p. 289

2 Samuel 11—20 records the troubles which plagued the dynasty of David after his sin with Bathsheba. Chapter 23 of the book records the last words of David. Therefore, the books of 1 and 2 Samuel (originally one book) could not have been written earlier than these events.

¹⁶⁶

2. Anachronisms

These are expressions or concepts which are out of date within the context of the book. Sometimes the author uses a concept common in his own day and inserts this concept into the historical record much earlier than his day. For example, the “daric” or “drachma” mentioned in 2 Chron. 29: 7 did not exist in David’s day, but came into existence much later (Pratt, p. 237). (Few of us, me included, would be able to catch an anachronism as subtle as this one. Maybe I can find another one for an example.)

3. Authorial comments

We have already made note of Ruth 4:7 and the custom of removing the sandal. The author had to explain this custom to an audience living much later that had forgotten this custom. Therefore, Ruth was written at a much later date than the date of the events described in the book, the period of the Judges.

In Judges 19: 10, Jebus is identified as Jerusalem for a later audience who would not have recognized the name, Jebus.

Likewise, the writer of 1Kings described the custom of Baal prophets to an audience living in exile who were not familiar with the antics¹⁶⁷ of Baal prophets.

So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. (1 Kings 18:28 NASB)

Better to be a disciple of Christ than a prophet of Baal! Do I hear, an Amen?

The authorial comment in 1 Samuel 27: 6 indicates that earliest possible date for the composition of that book is after the divided kingdom in 933 BC; otherwise, he would not have known about the kings who ruled only over Judah rather than all Israel.¹⁶⁸

So Achish gave him Ziklag that day; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. (1 Samuel 27:6 NASB)

The formula statement repeated in Judges indicates that the earliest likely date for this book was during the monarchical period of the kings.

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 17:6 NASB, emphasis mine)

¹⁶⁶ Pratt, p. 292. See also the authorial comment on 1 Samuel 27: 6 below.

¹⁶⁷ Odd behavior

¹⁶⁸ Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, p. 196. Note also the formula statement, “to this day”, namely, the day the author was writing the book.

This formula would make sense only to the Israelite who had lived during the days of the monarchy, either the Davidic or Solomonic. If Judges had been written before the monarchy, the reader would have responded, “Well, we still don’t have a king, and everyone is still doing what he wants to do.” As I have noted below, the formula would also make little sense to someone who had experienced the difficulties attending David’s reign after his sin with Bathsheba or one who had experienced the apostasy of Solomon. The reader may have said, “Well, David and Solomon are also flawed characters, doing what is right in their own eyes.” Again, **having at least some approximate date for the composition of a book helps the reader understand the historical context in which it is written and the author’s purpose for writing it.** Judges is written in defense of Israel’s monarchy. The anarchy during Judges proves that Israel needs a godly king. Why? Three reasons: (1) without a king to lead them, the tribes did not persevere in their obligations to conquer and possess the land of Canaan, (2) the judges brought Israel only temporary relief from the cycles of apostasy and judgment, and (3) even the Levites, the religious leaders, did what was right in their own eyes and failed to provide religious and social stability in Israel—as evidenced by the epilogue of chapters 17-21.¹⁶⁹

B. The Latest Reasonable Date of Composition

1. Earliest reference to the book in other OT books.

We know that latest reasonable day of composition for Deuteronomy was before Nehemiah since Nehemiah refers to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy (Neh. 1: 8-9).¹⁷⁰ Most evangelical scholars believe that Moses wrote the book some 1000 years before Nehemiah, but this reference at least limits any **reasonable** date to no later than 450 BC.

The book of 1 Kings picks up the story where 2 Samuel ends (compare 2 Sam. 23: 1, “the last words of David” with 1 Ki. 1: 1, “Now king David was old”). Furthermore, the prophecy concerning the demise of Eli’s house (1 Sam. 2: 27-36) is fulfilled in 1 Kings 2: 27. Thus, 1 Ki. 2: 27 is an **allusion**, a backward glance, to the book of 1 Samuel. The book of Kings (originally one book) was written during the years of the exile in Babylon (see discussion above). Reasoning from the reference in Kings back to Samuel, the **latest** likely date of Samuel could have been during the exile about the same time Kings was written. While there is a reference to Solomon as the son of David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam. 12: 24, he is not mentioned as the future king of Israel. The theme of Samuel is that Israel should continue to place their hope in the Davidic dynasty of kings in spite of David’s failings. But why, considering his failures? Because God chose him over the dynasty of Saul and promised him a continuing line of sons to be king over Israel (2 Sam. 7). Furthermore, David accomplished a great deal in his reign even in the face of trials (2 Sam. 21-24).¹⁷¹

But if Samuel was written as late as the exile, why should any Israelite put their hope in the Davidic dynasty considering the fact that many Davidic monarchs were rotten apples? Same reason—God chose the Davidic monarchy. Further, not all the kings of the Davidic line were bad; some were good for the most part—Asa, Uzziah, Jotham, Josiah, Hezekiah, et al. Further, the writer of Kings places his approval upon the Davidic dynasty at the very end by telling the story of Jehoiachin’s release

¹⁶⁹ Pratt, pp. 290-291

¹⁷⁰ Pratt, p. 238

¹⁷¹ Pratt, p. 292

from prison (2 Kings 25: 27-30). The subtle hint in this passage is that although God has punished Israel and Judah, He is not finished with them nor is He finished with the Davidic dynasty. Zerubbabel, who is the political leader of the returned exiles in 536 BC (see Haggai, Zechariah, and Ezra) is a descendent of Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah (1 Chron. 3: 19). Zerubbabel is a very positive figure in all three of the books mentioned and serves as a type of Christ. Thus, the release of Jehoiachin is a foreshadowing of the fact that God still favors the Davidic dynasty and will raise up a descendent of David to sit upon his throne. And, indeed, He did! Christ Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven ruling and reigning in a kingdom which will have no end.

2. The absence of important events

The author of Kings most likely wrote before the author of Chronicles since he omitted the edict of Cyrus in 538 BC to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. This assumes that no Israelite author would have omitted such an important event had he known about it—a reasonable assumption.¹⁷² (cf. 2 Chron. 36: 22). Thus, the latest likely date of 2 Kings is before the edict of Cyrus in 538 BC.

The genealogy of Ruth stops with David (4: 22) and does not mention Solomon or other Davidic descendents, suggesting the kingdom of David as the latest reasonable date of composition (cf. Ruth 4: 22).¹⁷³

3. The ideology of the book

We have dealt with this point earlier. The ideology of the book of Judges is the need for a king so that everyone would not do what was right in his own eyes. But what if the kings of Israel did what was right in their own eyes without regard for the law of God? In other words, what if the writer had known about Solomon's apostasy? Would he then be so optimistic about the presence of a king? Would he be convinced that a human king could clean up the problems in Israel? Therefore, it is not likely that the latest reasonable date for Judges would be beyond the **early** part of Solomon's kingdom, before his apostasy. By the same reasoning, it is entirely possible that the author wrote before David's sin with Bathsheba or at least before the glaring problems in the Davidic family when his kingdom looked much brighter.¹⁷⁴

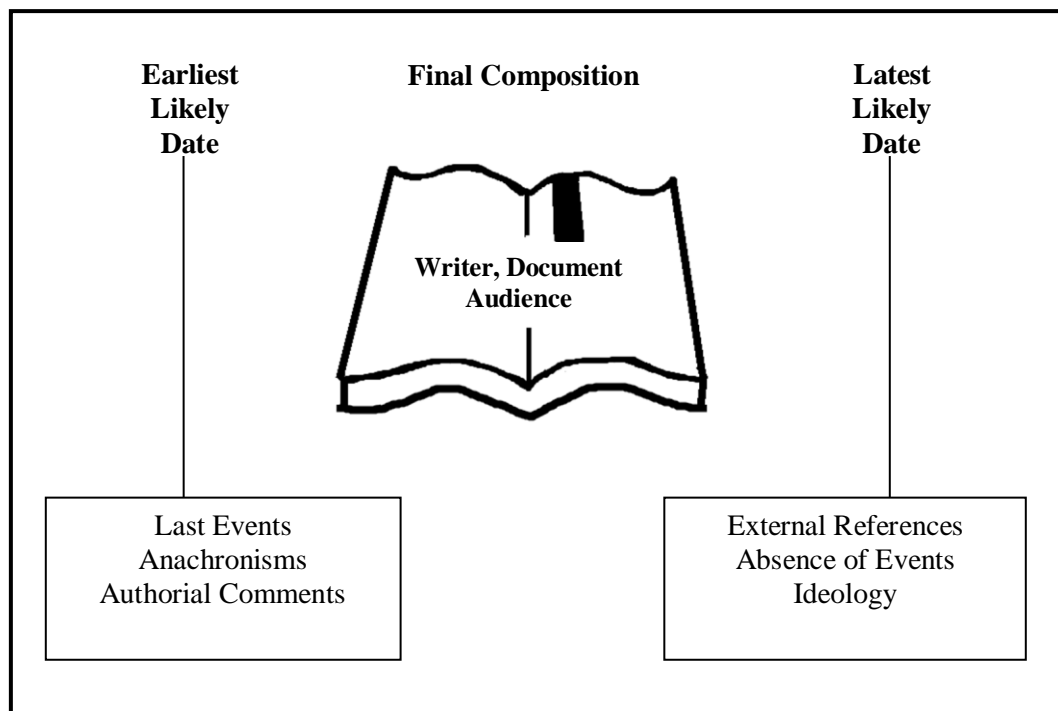
The ideology of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (originally one book in the Jewish canon) is obedience to the law of God. Expressions like "law of Moses", "law of the Lord", "law of the God of heaven", "laws of your God", "law of your God", "according to the law" occur eight times in Ezra in addition to the emphasis upon the law in chapters 9 and 10. In Nehemiah, references to the law of God occur 21 times. Israel and Judah had been taken into exile for disobedience, and they had been graciously returned to the land for the purpose of being obedient. Yet, for all God's restorative grace, the people were still wayward—evidenced by their marriage to foreign women who were not converts to Judaism (Ezra 9—10; Neh. 13), their Sabbath breaking (Neh. 13), and their usury—charging interest rates to the poor, resulting in their enslavement (Neh. 5).

¹⁷² Pratt, p. 238

¹⁷³ Pratt, p. 238

¹⁷⁴ Pratt's view, p. 239

The ending of both books leave the original reader (the exiled nation) with a depressing, unoptimistic view of the future of the Jewish nation. Unless there is a significant paradigm shift in covenantal obedience, there is very little hope for the nation. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are, therefore, a warning to the exiled community and the returned exiles in Jerusalem that Israel will continue to exist under the oppression of foreign powers if they persist in violating the law of God. For the modern reader, the books provide the negative spiritual context for what happens during the ministry of Christ. Following the steps of their past rebellious history, the Jewish people are generally unprepared to receive the gospel, leading to Roman oppression and the second destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. Pratt gives us a helpful diagram for establishing the range of possible dates for composition.¹⁷⁵



XI. The Role of Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology

¹⁷⁵ Pratt, p. 239

I have previously commented on the danger of approaching OT texts exclusively from the point of view of systematic theology or ethics (see above under “Literary Analysis”). I did not wish to imply that systematic theology or ethics are unimportant or even that they are not some of the dominant concerns for students of the OT, because they are. I only wished to warn that it is easy for us to impose our preferred system of theology upon a text without carefully looking at the text itself, thus hindering more objective analysis—“more objective” because **complete** objectivity is impossible. All of us approach the Bible with certain presuppositions intact which we have formed from personal study or from the received teaching of others.

Now I wish to add another warning in the opposite direction. We must not throw our theological traditions—our systematic and historical theology—out the window when attempting to interpret an OT text. It is one thing to say that our theology must not dominate the exegetical process; it is quite another to say that traditional theology has no contribution to make in the interpretation. Our theological traditions have come down to us through hundreds of years of exegetical examination of Old and New Testament texts aided by the Holy Spirit. Our theological tradition is not infallible, but it is certainly worthwhile—much more worthwhile than the interpretation of a single scholar or group of scholars. Some scholars have gone to the extremes of eliminating the contributions of systematic theology.¹⁷⁶

Before we continue, it may be helpful to distinguish between the two disciplines of systematic and biblical theology. **Systematic theologians** attempt to discover the doctrinal themes of the Bible (the doctrines of God, man, sin, Christ, salvation, etc.) and formulate them into a coherent (logical), consistent whole. This is possible because God is self-consistent, never contradicting Himself either in the revelation of His nature in OT narratives or His ethical commands in the OT or NT. **Biblical theologians** attempt to discover the progress of redemption from the beginning of revelation to its culmination in Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, followed by the continuing elaboration of Christ’s salvific event in the epistles through the Revelation of John. Thus, the study of Biblical theology is the exploration of how God progressively (not all at once) revealed Himself through history from Adam until Christ, who is the fullness of God. Systematic theology, on the other hand, views the whole panorama of revelation at a glance and explores how OT revelation sheds light on NT revelation and vice versa (the other way around) without too much consideration of when or how in redemptive history a certain truth is revealed. Biblical theology views revelation in stages, e.g. how God revealed Himself first to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, etc., noting the differences in these epochs of revelation.

The discipline of “biblical theology” is now dominating the interpretation of many scholars to the exclusion of systematic theology. Biblical Theology began as a movement by critical scholars who maintained that OT narratives should be read with a “historical orientation”. To do this, Pratt remarks, the interpreter must

...discard the scholastic concept of the Bible as a resource for doctrine and to treat Scripture primarily as a resource for reconstructing God’s progressive redemption of humanity....Many leading twentieth-century critical interpreters focused their efforts on understanding the mighty acts of God recorded in the Bible.

¹⁷⁶ Pratt, pp. 79-84

...Biblical Theology assumed that this redemptive-historical orientation was central to the Bible itself.... “The Hebrew language was one of action, and the God of the Hebrews was understood as One who acted”.¹⁷⁷

Continuing his analysis of this movement, Pratt points out certain inconsistencies which give us pause about adopting any singular perspective governing OT hermeneutics to the exclusion of other perspectives.

During the 1960’s the Biblical Theology movement came to an abrupt halt among critical scholars, who raised questions against the concept of divine activity in history. Barr and Gilkey pointed out the inconsistency of theologians speaking as if God actually acted in history while explaining the majority of such records in natural scientific terms. As Gilkey argued, critical Biblical theologians tried to “have their cake and eat it too...”.¹⁷⁸

First of all, then, the Biblical Theology movement started off as a discipline among liberal scholars who later abandoned the discipline in favor of naturalistic explanations of miraculous events (see quote below). Why should theologians labor over explaining what God was doing in the Red Sea event, or the plagues of Egypt, if it was not really God doing these things? The fact that the movement was initiated by critical (liberal) scholars is itself not a refutation against this hermeneutic. All truth, after all, is God’s truth. However, its origin is reason for caution.

While critical Biblical Theology is nearly obsolete [replaced by natural scientific explanation], it continues to influence evangelicals today. The most important figure in the evangelical branch of the movement was...Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949). His *Biblical Theology: The Old and New Testaments* has been one of the most influential evangelical works in Old Testament hermeneutics in this [the 20th] century. We find the two tendencies of critical Biblical Theology in Vos. On the one hand, Vos made redemptive revelatory acts of God his central concern. He divided Old Testament history into five epochs: 1) the Pre-Redemptive era, 2) the Noahic period and the developments leading up to it, 3) the period between Noah and the great patriarchs, 4) the Mosaic period, and 5) the Prophetic period. He focused on the form and content of divine revelation unique to each era.

On the other hand, Vos affirmed that redemptive history was the Bible’s “**own revelatory structure**” and the “main stem of revelation.”...A redemptive-historical approach is not imposed on Scripture; it comes from the Bible itself. Vos warned against going too far with this view. But many of his followers have gone beyond him to suggest that the historical orientation of Biblical Theology represents **the Bible’s own theological patterning**. Contrary to the **logical categories** of systematic theology, they assume that **historical categories reflect the Bible’s own inner coherence**....Most Biblical theologians insist that systematic theology must embrace the discoveries of a redemptive-historical approach, but they seldom argue as strongly that the logical constraints of systematic theology must restrain redemptive-historical analysis....¹⁷⁹

In other words, the restrictions placed upon systematic theologians preventing them from imposing their systems upon the Bible **must also be applied to biblical theologians** lest the Scriptures be forced into their own rigid organizations of Biblical history.

This one-sided emphasis did not present serious problems in evangelical circles for several decades. It appears that traditional theological outlooks restrained Biblical Theologians from straying too far. But as

¹⁷⁷ Pratt, p. 79

¹⁷⁸ Pratt, p. 80

¹⁷⁹ Pratt, pp. 80-81, emphasis mine

the movement has gained momentum in recent decades, Biblical interpreters have felt free to ignore systematic theology more and more. **It is common to find Biblical Theologians overlooking the relevance of systematic theological questions for the interpretation of Old Testament stories.** “Biblical writers were not giving us a system of doctrine,” they say, “We must look for the redemptive-historical focus, not an abstract system of ideas”.¹⁸⁰

For example, some biblical theologians would not be concerned with the question of Rahab’s lie or whether the OT legislation against homosexuality was applicable for today’s believer. They would also not be concerned with the question of God’s immutability (unchangeableness) when dealing with Ex. 32: 14, “So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.” **Their concern would focus exclusively upon what God was revealing about Himself in a particular salvation event**, whether or not it conflicted with His revelation of Himself in other salvation events. But this would seem to beg the question of whether the interpreter is capable of determining what, exactly, God is revealing. This brings into the investigation the question of whether some salvation events and revelations of God and about God can be rightly interpreted without reference to other events and revelations—the question of systematic theology.

To avoid this dangerous tendency, we must first recognize that **redemptive history is not the central concern of many portions of the Old Testament.** Wisdom literature—Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, some Psalms—for instance, has little interest in redemptive history [see also Ex. 21-24]. Although a connection between history, law and wisdom appears in covenantal structures, the fact remains that wisdom books hardly devote themselves to reporting redemptive history.

Beyond this, as Vos himself noted, **Biblical Theology does not reflect the Bible’s most dominant organizing principle.** Biblical Theology uses an historical model as opposed to a logical model, but it still organizes the Old Testament. The extent of this rearrangement can be seen when we recognize that **the basic units of Scripture are not historical epochs, but books.** We do not find the Old Testament organized “First Chapter of History,” “Second Chapter of History”, and so on. On the contrary, it is arranged in literary units: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus...Operating out of a redemptive-historical framework, Vos derived three epochs in Old Testament history from the first unit of the Bible, the book of Genesis. He then went on to include four books in the period of Moses and the rest of the Old Testament books in the single prophetic period. This kind of analysis hardly appears to coincide with the pattern of revelation given in Scripture.

Beyond this, the many ways in which evangelical Biblical Theologians divide the Old Testament into periods lead us to suspect that Biblical Theology does more than simply uncover the internal structures of the text. There is little agreement as to how Old Testament history should be viewed. Vos divided the history of the Old Testament into seven periods. Some follow his pattern [Robertson], but others deviate significantly [Kaiser and Van Gemeren].

With so many different arrangements, we can see how much Biblical Theology reorganizes the Bible. **Biblical Theology follows a historical pattern that reorganizes the Bible just as much as, if not more than, the logical patterns of traditional theology.**¹⁸¹

Having stated his reservations, Pratt nevertheless expresses appreciation for the contributions of Biblical Theology on “equal footing” with systematic theology and suggests a both/and approach to OT interpretation.

¹⁸⁰ Pratt, p. 81, emphasis mine

¹⁸¹ Pratt, pp. 81-82; words in brackets and emphasis mine

The great value of a redemptive-historical approach is its ability to help us reassess the meaning of Old Testament narratives. **It is easy to be so preoccupied with systematic theological questions that we miss much of what these stories teach.** We force them into our theological system, never noticing how they challenge our preconceptions. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to go to the extreme of ignoring traditional theological concerns. **The writers of Old Testament narratives gave their readers a system of beliefs through their texts.** They were concerned with **logical patterning** of beliefs as well as with the history of revelation. To understand their stories properly, we must set them within the framework of logical parameters as well as historical development.

As a result, we must not set either Biblical Theology or systematic theology above the other; we must put them on equal footing. Both can misrepresent Scripture and both can reflect the teaching of Scripture. Both outlooks are ways of synthesizing material into useful formats, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. As we learn to employ both methods, we will grow in our understanding of Old Testament narratives.¹⁸²

Waltke offers his conviction that

...the center of the Old Testament, the message that accommodates all its themes, is that Israel's sublime God, whose attributes hold in tension his holiness and mercy, glorifies himself by establishing his universal rule over his volitional creatures on earth through Jesus Christ and his covenant people. This in-breaking of God's rule involves battling against spiritual adversaries in heavenly places and political, social, and religious powers on earth and destroying them in his righteous judgment while saving his elect....

To put it another way, the Bible is about God bringing glory to himself by restoring Paradise after humanity lost it through a loss of faith in God that led to rebellion against his rule.¹⁸³

However, Waltke offers this caveat¹⁸⁴ in agreement with Pratt.

To systematize, however, all the biblical materials to the procrustean¹⁸⁵ bed of this message, would falsify their intention. The proposed center accommodates the whole, but the whole is not systematically structured according to it. A cross-section approach to develop that message through various stages in Israel's history would not do justice to the rich biblical material.¹⁸⁶

He suggests that Jesus' prayer captures the center of the biblical message better than anything else, "Your kingdom come". Moreover, God establishes this kingdom over His elect people progressively through the Abrahamic, Sinaitic, Davidic, and New Covenants—a kingdom whose goal is and always has been to produce heart obedience to God's rule, bringing salvation from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. Eschatologically, this kingdom will establish God's sovereignty over the whole human race, all opposition being eliminated at the final judgment.¹⁸⁷

Summary and Conclusion

¹⁸² Pratt, p. 82, emphasis mine

¹⁸³ Waltke, p. 144

¹⁸⁴ A caveat is a warning.

¹⁸⁵ Procrustean means something which is designed to secure conformity at any cost

¹⁸⁶ Waltke, p. 144.

¹⁸⁷ Waltke, pp. 144-146

Much of the dating of OT narratives comes from intensive investigation of internal evidence within the books themselves. Although exact dating is difficult to attain, it is helpful in determining the purpose for which the book is written and the effective preaching of individual narratives. We can rest assured that whatever information we cannot attain is not essential in the equipping of God's people.

Systematic theology and biblical theology are both useful in organizing the teaching of the Bible. Neither is infallible, and neither can ignore the findings of the other.

Lesson Seven—Samples of OT Theology

Introduction

In a short course on interpreting OT narratives, we can only hit a few highlights of OT theology, “sampling” a few major themes. For those students who are voracious readers—most of you, I hope—Waltke's monumental work, *An Old Testament Theology*, is must reading, all 969 pages of it, not counting a 21 page bibliography. (Daunting, but it won't take Methuselah's life-span to read it.) The title is humble but also realistic—*An Old Testament Theology*. A very short book, *The Word Became Fresh—How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts* (154 pages) by Dale Ralph Davis, is more easily and quickly read and is a very good place to start in one's understanding of OT themes and how to preach from the OT. As far as the preacher-scholar combination, I don't know anyone who juggles these two tasks better than Davis. I sat under Davis' preaching for about three months and have read all of his OT commentaries listed in the bibliography. He writes like a preacher, and the applications are amazing.

The following lesson elaborates on the “Quad Promise” (treated by Davis) and other doctrinal themes including God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, the importance of keeping covenants, etc. Remember, I can only give you sample tastes of OT theology, but by giving you samples, I trust you will look for more complete menus throughout the OT. We then move on to a short discussion of Old Testament realities that are redefined in the New Testament. In the last section I rely heavily on Waltke. Many of the promises made to the OT people of God would be false unless their spiritual fulfillment is understood. God promises David that his throne would endure forever, but Israel has not had a conventional Davidic king since Zedekiah was executed by the Babylonians. Nevertheless, Jesus, a descendent of David, comes into Galilee preaching, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom

of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15 NASB). His kingdom is not of this world and not the one expected by the first century Jews, but it is still a kingdom—one of cosmic proportions. Isaiah prophesied a time of universal peace for all men and animal life, but it is clear from the newspapers that this time must receive its ultimate fulfillment in the new creation (Isa. 9 and 11). Connecting the dots between the OT promises and prophecies with NT realities will enable the student to preach the NT like a Christian rather than a Jewish rabbi who is still looking for a merely human, nationalistic Messiah who will bring back the glories of the Davidic kingdom. Rabbis fail to recognize the greater glory of David’s son. I also breach the complicated subject of continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants. For those who wish more information, see my *Synoptic Gospels* and the discussion on the Sermon on the Mount as well as my *Doctrine of Man* posted on the website, christcommunitystudycenter.org.

XII. Theology of OT Narratives

A. The “Quad Promise”

Each OT writer had an agenda or purpose for his writing—the “intended message” of his text. The intended message is what Davis calls the “theology” of the text. As an example, the “Quad Promise” of Genesis 12: 1-9 consists of the promise of people, protection, program, and place.¹⁸⁸

People [seed]

‘I will make you into a great nation’ (v. 2)

‘To your seed...’ (v. 7)

Protection / Presence

‘I will bless your blessers and the one despising you I will curse’ (v. 3a)

Program

‘In you all the families of the ground will be blessed’ (v. 3b)

Place

‘To the land that I will show you’ (v. 1)

‘To your seed I will give this land’ (v. 7)

But before we explore these four areas, consider our past discussion: IV. Important Questions to Ask in Determining the Meaning of a Text; B. How did the author arrange his story (or stories)? Consider how Moses (the author of the Pentateuch) arranges Genesis 3—12. Genesis 3 is the account of the Fall. Genesis 4—5 recounts the murder of Abel and Lamech’s poem about killing a man. Genesis 6—9 give us an account of how bad mankind had become before God decided to wipe everyone out with a flood except Noah’s family. Genesis 11 demonstrates that in spite of the flood—and in spite of the fact that the flood was “recent” history to some of the people mentioned in Genesis 10—the hearts of men had not changed. They gather together to “make a name” for themselves in defiance of God and His command to scatter throughout the earth and cultivate it for His glory, not theirs (Gen. 11). Concerning these chapters, Davis remarks,

Here we start with Genesis 12. And that is a problem because no sane person can explain why there is a Genesis 12....There [in Gen. 3-11] you find a world that is repeatedly pleased to do without Yahweh’s kingship and fellowship, a world that was then cursed, destroyed, and scattered. After Genesis 1-11, the

¹⁸⁸Davis, *The Word Became Flesh*, pp. 31-32

end should come; the Judge should appear; the lava of divine judgment should petrify the world. Why does Yahweh give to this world that mocks, defies, and rejects him a promise of blessing (the root for ‘bless’ is used five times in 12: 2-3)? God insists in blessing this world with Abraham (and his seed) as a channel of blessing. Yahweh will start yet again with one man as the funnel of redemption until the time when it is clear that the slaughtered Lamb has purchased and preserved the church from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (cf. Rev. 5: 9). But it’s inexplicable; why should Yahweh give a rip about this world?¹⁸⁹

Therefore, we see once again how the arrangement of OT narratives suggests the theology or intention of the author. At the end of Genesis 11, we encounter a world once again ripe for cataclysmic judgment, but rather than judgment, the world is blessed with the family of Abraham—progenitor of Jesus Christ and all true believers.

1. Genesis 12: 10-20

When Abram must leave Canaan and journey to Egypt, the covenant promise of the seed (people) is threatened by Pharaoh’s taking Sarai as a potential wife. Although Abram’s previous analysis of the danger is accurate (v. 12), his solution lacks faith in the promise of 12: 3a, “And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse” (NASB). God did not need Abraham to protect His covenant seed from extinction before it ever began. In the end, Abram’s “solution” has no bearing on the deliverance of Sarai from Pharaoh’s embrace. Rather, in accordance with His word in v. 3, God sends some kind of affliction on the house of Pharaoh. In spite of Abram’s lack of faith in God’s ability to perform His covenant promise, God blesses him with deliverance and the continuing opportunity to father an heir through Sarai, whom God would not permit to fall into the hands of Pharaoh. Thus we see in this story the inviolable¹⁹⁰ promise of people and protection.¹⁹¹

2. Genesis 20

Genesis 20 presents a similar situation for Abraham and Sarah in Gerar. Abimelech, king of Gerar, accustomed to getting what he wanted whenever he wanted it, takes Sarah into his harem for future use.¹⁹² But he does not get the opportunity of sleeping with her before God says to him, “You’re dead!” (v. 3) Once again, the father of all believers does not believe God can deliver him without human assistance despite what He had done earlier with Pharaoh (Gen. 12). How easily we forget God’s former deliverances, as if He cannot do it again and again! Does God ever get too tired of fulfilling His promises (Ps. 121: 4)?

If God chides Abraham for his faithlessness, the author does not mention it. Rather, he lets Abimelech do the honors (vv. 9-10). It’s a terrible disgrace to be chided by a Philistine for your sins. Therefore, the focus of the text is not even Abraham’s unbelief or cowardice but God’s faithfulness in bringing about His promises—protection, presence, and a future seed from Sarah (vv. 1-8) and manifold blessings (vv. 14-16; “program”), and the opportunity of being a blessing (vv. 17-18; “program”).

¹⁸⁹ Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, pp. 31-32, words in brackets mine

¹⁹⁰ That which cannot be violated

¹⁹¹ Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, pp. 33-35

¹⁹² This is how pagan kings treated women—as playthings—but not how Christian men should treat women.

3. Genesis 23

In this story, we have the account of Abraham buying a burial plot for his deceased wife, Sarah. One would think that the emphasis of the story would center on Sarah's death, but this is not the case. Instead, the story centers on Abraham's negotiation with the Hittites to purchase the plot. Keep in mind that God had promised Abraham the entire land of Canaan, so this first small parcel of land seems a bit small in light of the promise. However, to Abraham it was the beginning of the fulfillment of a place for the people of God.¹⁹³ Consider further that Abraham knew it would be long after he and Sarah were dead—400 years in fact—before their descendants would occupy Canaan; therefore, it was an act of faith for him to bury Sarah in a strange land that was not presently his. Thus, the story puts the emphasis on the promise of land and Abraham's implicit¹⁹⁴ belief that God would bring the promise to pass.

¹³God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed **four hundred years**." ¹⁴"But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions." ¹⁵"As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age." ¹⁶"Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Genesis 15:13-16 NASB; emphasis mine)

One **application** among many: There are millions of internally displaced Christians in Africa who would benefit from a sermon on Genesis 23. They have been driven from their land and have no permanent place to lay their heads. The story of Abram buying a burial plot for Sarah should give them hope. For all practical purposes, the promise to Abraham of land seemed remote, but he persevered in faith believing that one day this promise would be fulfilled. Likewise, many Christians living today in squalid refugee camps may put their trust in the irrevocable¹⁹⁵ promise of Christ, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth". "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." ³"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also" (John 14:2-3 NASB).

4. Genesis 26

Isaac's situation in Genesis 26 is almost identical to Abraham's in Genesis 20. The focus of the text is the four-fold promise (or a portion of it) given to Abraham and now passed on to his lesser descendent—"lesser" because Isaac never plays a dominant role in any of the narratives of Genesis except this one.¹⁹⁶

"Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham." ⁴"I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 26:3-4 NASB)

¹⁹³ Davis, *The Word Became Flesh*, pp. 35-37

¹⁹⁴ Unquestioning

¹⁹⁵ That which cannot be revoked

¹⁹⁶ Davis, p. 38

All four elements of the “quad” promise are explicitly mentioned in these two verses. God will be with Isaac, and He will bless him and his descendents (protection/presence); He will multiply his descendents (people); He will give him and his descendents the land (place); and by his descendents all the nations of the earth would be blessed (program). Immediately following this promise, Isaac lies about the identity of Rebekah (v. 7). This time, there is no supernatural appearance to Abimelech (as in Gen. 20), only a providential glance out the window (v. 8)—what most people would call “chance”. Abimelech could not retain his kingdom by being stupid, so he reasons to himself, “Men don’t hug their sisters like that!” What follows is another chiding from a Philistine king, but once again there is no mention of any chastisement from God on the matter. Instead, Isaac reaps a hundredfold crop and becomes a rich man (vv. 12-13). (Application: God’s people get far more than they deserve. Salvation is based on grace, not merit.) Isaac may not be determined to do what is right, but God is determined to fulfill His promises to Abraham and his descendents in spite of Isaac.

What is encouraging to us is that Yahweh presses all the provisions of his promise upon Isaac. It’s encouraging because Isaac is no Abraham. Isaac, it seems, never gets anything all to himself. In both Genesis 25 and 27 he shares the spotlight with others. Pioneering Abraham, hairy Esau, and slick Jacob all eclipse him. Genesis 26 is the only chapter Isaac gets all to himself—and even here Esau had to get his foot in the last verses (vv. 34-35). But Yahweh gives his full promise even to his ordinary servants...Genesis 26 does not intend for you to lament over how children of parents who lie will likely do the same but to hearten you by showing you a God still keeping his promises **even when his servants may not be all-stars.**¹⁹⁷

I have emphasized the phrase above simply because this is where most of us live. Most of us will never receive notoriety as famous Christians about whom biographies are written, but God chose to build his kingdom upon the labors of average people like you and me. This is encouraging, and it keeps us from sitting in the bleachers as mere spectators watching what a few well-known believers are doing.

5. Genesis 29—30: 24

Where do we find the focus of this text? We could easily become fascinated with the war between Leah and Rachel which, in turn, would naturally lead to an extended discussion concerning the evil of polygamy. We could also turn to a discussion of the tenderness of God toward those who are disadvantaged and despised. Jacob loved Rachel, but the Lord saw that Leah was unloved.

Either of these discussions would be valid and useful for our edification. We could legitimately reason from the text that it is foolish to believe that a man can love two women with exactly the same passion—especially in Jacob’s case when he never wanted Leah in the first place! Being the sinful, selfish beings that men are (me included), it is challenging enough to love one woman as Christ loved His church. Sensitive readers hurt with Leah when she says, “...surely now my husband will love me” (Gen. 29:32 NASB). Must a wife bear children, particularly sons, to “earn” the love of her husband? In the African context, in which many men value offspring far more than their wives, such a sermon would certainly “preach”.

¹⁹⁷ Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, p. 38, emphasis mine

We can also see from the text that our God is a God who loves the unloved. Leah was not loved by Jacob, but God loved her and favored her over Leah. This teaches us that God does not relate to His people on the basis of how others relate to them. God is not running a popularity contest, and His acts are not swayed by the majority opinion. He is not just the God of “winners” but “losers”; and if we understand our Bibles, we know that we all are losers in one sense or another.

But really, none of this is the main focus of the text. If we are consciously aware of the promise of a seed to Abraham, we will recognize that the story is bringing this promise to realization. And how is God doing this—through the perfect family? No, He is doing it through the poor, dysfunctional marital relationships between Jacob and his two wives.¹⁹⁸

One **application** among many: The story gives hope to God’s dysfunctional people (also known as His sinful people). Neither we nor our families have to be the perfect picture of spirituality for God to still use us to accomplish His purpose.

6. Joshua 1

Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying,² "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel."³ "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses."⁴ "From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory (Joshua 1:1-4 NASB).

God had given them land which reached as far west as the Euphrates River—a massive piece of real estate. Much of this land was conquered during Joshua’s lifetime, but a large portion of it remained unconquered due to unbelief. Subsequent history indicates that many of the tribes never possessed the whole allotment of land granted to them. “Never in her history did Israel occupy the extent of territory described in Joshua 1: 4.”¹⁹⁹

Application: How should we preach this text in the modern church? First, we see that the Lord promised the land, “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you...” But notice the condition of this statement. To claim the land, they must “tread” upon it, meaning that they must occupy it through the labor of war and conquest. God will not simply hand it over to them without their obedient participation in His plan or faith in His promise. In the same way, Jesus promises conquest and dominion to His church.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.¹⁹ “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20 NASB)

This is nothing less than the promise of victory for His church. “All authority” has been granted to Christ both in heaven and earth. Because of His atoning victory on the cross, the back of Satan’s

¹⁹⁸ Davis, p. 41

¹⁹⁹ Davis, *Joshua—No Falling Words*, p. 17, footnote

kingdom on earth has been broken (Lk. 10: 18), and the gates of hell will not prevail against the church that Christ has commissioned to continue His kingdom conquest (Matt. 16: 18). The question remains: To what extent will the church faithfully fulfill this commission to disciple the nations and teach them obedience to the commandments of Christ? Will the church imitate the disobedience of the Israelites by failing in our discipling commission, or will it proceed with persistent confidence in preaching the true gospel and expecting God to produce the results?

7. Joshua 1: 12-18

The two tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had received their portion of the land on the east side of the Jordan River—the Transjordan. The temptation was that they would enjoy their allotment without helping the other nine and one-half tribes conquer the Canaanites on the west side of the Jordan. Joshua commands these two and a half tribes to help the western tribes conquer their territories. It is important that the author introduce this story here since the separation becomes a major episode later in Joshua 22, taking up the entire chapter.

In Joshua 22, when the Transjordan tribes set up a memorial for their future children, it is misinterpreted as idolatry, but the reason given by the Transjordan tribes is that this memorial will be a witness between their tribes and the tribes of Israel on the west side of the Jordan that they were part of the whole nation. They were afraid that, in time, the other tribes would consider them religious outcasts from Israel who had no portion in Yahweh or the Abrahamic Covenant. Their reasoning pleased Phinehas the priest who brought back word to the other nine and a half tribes that nothing wrong had been done.

Application: How would you preach this text to the modern church? The central feature of the text is the unity of the tribes of Israel. Although they were separated by the Jordan River, they were united in one faith. Today, the church exists all over the world. It is separated by oceans, seas, mountains, deserts, and political systems and boundaries. Most importantly, it is separated by hundreds of years of culture. But such things are not supposed to divide the people of God. We are one people with one God, one faith, and one baptism united together by Jesus Christ. But further, Christians of all cultures should be united in the way they think. We should be willing and able to interpret and challenge their respective cultures with the teachings of Scripture.

Africa has been, and continues to be, torn apart by tribal hatred—Rwanda, Congo, South Sudan, Kenya—even among those who profess faith in Christ. It is fairly obvious to the average evangelical that these professions are hollow: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20 NASB). The story of Joshua 22 could be preached as a rallying cry for all believers who are one in Christ Jesus—faith in Christ being more fundamental than tribal affiliation. Later, as we have seen from our brief glance at Judges, this tribal unity fell apart with tragic consequences for God’s people.

B. Human Responsibility and the Sovereignty of God—1 Samuel 5—6

Having brought the Ark of the Covenant into battle to force God’s hand, Israel learns quickly that God cannot be manipulated into giving them victory. The ark is not some magical trick to be fetched from the tabernacle whenever extra help is needed. There is no inherent power in the ark; there is

only a powerful God. As soon as the Philistines think that they have captured the Israelite God, they find out that He is not a safe roommate for Dagon, for the next morning Dagon was face down before the ark (v. 3). At this point, the irony just begins, for then the devotees of Dagon—rather than renouncing their faith in him—proceed to set him back on his feet. But what kind of god is this that his worshippers must help him to his feet?²⁰⁰ The humor continues when we read that Dagon falls on his face again, and his head and hands are severed from his body (v. 4). What good Philistine would have believed this could happen? Dagon lost his head!

Yahweh has a point to make. False gods actually need their devotees and cannot manage without them, but God needs nothing from His. “If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains” (Psalm 50:12 NASB).

It is axiomatic in paganism that the gods are dependent upon man. Part of the old Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic contains a flood story. Utnapishtim, who survives the flood in a boat, offers a sacrifice at the end of the ordeal. He relates how the gods smelled the aroma of his sacrifice and drink offering and how “the gods gathered like flies over the sacrifice.” If gods and goddesses did not have food and drink (supplied by the sacrifices of their devotees), they, like anyone, began to languish. But with the destruction of mankind during the flood and with Utnapishtim marooned in the boat for the duration, it had been weeks since the divinities had had a proper meal. Hence their greedy response to Utnapishtim’s sacrifice. That is conventional paganism. Note its assumption: the gods depend on man to sustain them.²⁰¹

In every city the ark is taken in this story, disorder and suffering prevail until the men of the Philistine cities cry out for relief. Relief comes only when they send the ark away on two cows. Yahweh does not like to be “captured”; He enjoys His absolute freedom. Israel’s God is quite different from all other gods. He can take care of Himself quite well without all the armies of Israel to protect Him.

C. Keeping Covenant—Joshua 10: 1-15

In this story, Joshua has been petitioned by the Gibeonites to protect them against the kings of the Amorites. Because of the covenant made with the Gibeonites earlier (Josh. 9), the Israelites are obligated to Gibeon as a vassal state regardless of the fact that the Gibeonites lied to them about their location. This fact alone has serious implications for the making of covenants. Joshua and the elders should have consulted the Lord before making this covenant, but even if made under false pretenses, the covenant remains in effect nevertheless (cf. 2 Sam. 21, in which God sends a famine on the land for King Saul’s violation of this covenant). At any rate, Joshua and Israel go to war with the Amorites in defense of Gibeon.

So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the valiant warriors.⁸ The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you."⁹ So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. (Joshua 10:7-9 NASB)

First, Joshua responds to the requests of the Gibeonites before he receives the Lord’s assurance of victory. Is this presumptuous? No. Joshua didn’t need the Lord to tell him to fight the Amorites.

²⁰⁰ Davis, *1 Samuel*, p. 60

²⁰¹ Davis, *1 Samuel*, pp. 60-61

He was bound by covenant to do so; therefore, He didn't need special guidance to do what he was obligated to do. This flies in the face of many Christians who are waiting for special guidance or a warm feeling to do something that is expressly commanded in Scripture. By the way the author arranges the story, he demonstrates the Lord's approval of Joshua's actions. Rather than correcting Joshua for going to war without His express command, He rewards Joshua's decision by assuring him of victory, even fighting for Joshua by sending hail stones upon the Amorites. I have offered one possible structural interpretation below.

Setting and context: Covenant made with Gibeonites (9: 1-27)

A Amorites attack Gibeonites (10: 1-5)

B Gibeonites petition Joshua for help (10: 6)

C Joshua listens to the Gibeonites (honors covenant)—assembles army; leaves Gilgal (10: 7)

D Yahweh promises victory—"Do not fear them." (10: 8)

E Joshua responds to Yahweh's promise—marches from Gilgal (10: 9)

A' Yahweh attacks Amorites (honors covenant obedience) (10: 10-11)

B' Joshua petitions Yahweh for help—"May the sun stand still." (10: 12)

C' Yahweh listens to Joshua—sun stands still (10: 13, 14b)

D' Yahweh confirms promise of victory (10: 14)

E' Joshua and his army return to Gilgal (10: 15)

Joshua is honoring the covenant made with Gibeon, and Yahweh is honoring his promise to fight for Israel if they obey His law. The whole episode demonstrates that God will show Himself strong on behalf of those who keep their promises, while 2 Sam. 21 demonstrates that He will curse those who don't keep their promises. Further, notice that the divine assurance of victory did not keep Joshua from marching all night to spring a surprise attack on the Amorites. His responsibility to follow good military strategy is not suspended by the sovereign promise of victory. Yahweh would use good military strategy as a means of accomplishing the promise. God's sovereignty does not suspend human responsibility; it establishes it.

D. The Sanctity of Human Life—Numbers 35

The provision for the cities of refuge were made earlier during Moses' administration (Num. 35). Anyone guilty of involuntary manslaughter²⁰² could flee to the nearest city of refuge to avoid the revenge of the man's relatives (Deut. 19: 5-6; Num. 35: 11). Providing this refuge would hopefully prevent the injustice of the manslayer being executed by the avenger of blood before the case was examined. If the man did not intentionally kill another, then the crime was not murder, but carelessness. However, if the slayer purposely murdered a man, fleeing to the city of refuge would avail him nothing since a court case would follow to determine innocence or guilt (v. 24). If innocent of murder, the manslayer must still bear some degree of responsibility for being careless. He must remain away from his home in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest (v. 25) or else risk being killed by the avenger of blood who will not be held accountable for his death. This, of course, could take many years, and the manslayer could very well die of old age in the city of refuge before being able to return home. The reason given for these regulations follows in vv. 33-34.

²⁰² Killing someone by accident

‘So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.’³⁴ ‘You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD am dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel’” (Numbers 35:33-34 NASB).

If we consider such regulations cruel and harsh, our attitude may say a lot more about ourselves than it does about God’s law. Very few people today in any society are executed for capital crimes of murder, rape, etc. All this proves is that mankind is casual about the sanctity of human life. Emotional pleas are commonly made for the life of the murderer and his family without any regard for the life of the victim and his family. But God is not so casual. The blood of the innocent man pollutes the land, and no expiation can be made other than the blood of the one who committed the crime. If a person killed intentionally and was proven guilty, then he must forfeit his own life. But the careless person who killed unintentionally cannot simply shrug his shoulders and say, “I’m sorry, please forgive me.” He must remain away from his home for the duration of his life or the duration of the life of the high priest. This would naturally have the effect of deterring carelessness. (If your axe is loose on the shaft, you would tighten it. It takes a lot less time and trouble to tighten an axe head than to flee to a city of refuge.)

Through the village court system in Rwanda (gacaca), perpetrators of the genocide have admitted their guilt and asked for forgiveness without suffering death or incarceration for their crimes. Over 30,000 have been detained in prison for 15 years, but their incarceration has not been commensurate²⁰³ with the crime of murder. While we may legitimately applaud the Rwandan government’s attempt to solve a seemingly impossible problem of administering justice, the blood of the innocent still pollutes the land. It makes one wonder if there is an underlying current of revenge and hatred which will one day erupt anew in an ocean of violence. One would hope not, but since justice has not been served for the victim’s families, those who long for justice may believe that personal revenge outside of legal avenues is the only solution. Better to have a justice system which takes God’s word seriously and thus avoids the pollution of innocent blood which has not been properly expiated (paid for by the blood of the murderer). Having stated the problem, I am not anxious to propose the practical solution in a situation in which the court system cannot realistically try the number of cases that would be potentially assigned to it.

Numbers 35 not only illustrates the sanctity of human life, but it points us to Christ. Only at the death of the high priest can the manslayer return to his home. No other ransom would be sufficient (v. 32). The implication of this is that, somehow, the life of the high priest provides atonement for the slain victim—provided he was killed accidentally.²⁰⁴ The theological analogy is that all mankind, because of sin, is banished from the presence of God and alienated from the community and will not be permitted to return to God’s fellowship and the fellowship of the community apart from the atoning death of the High Priest, Jesus Christ. The Numbers passage, thus, presents us with a picture of the necessity of the atonement.

E. The Repentance of God—Does God Ever Change His Mind? —1 Samuel 15

²⁰³ Equal or proportionate

²⁰⁴ So also Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch, The Fourth Book of Moses*, p. 235

When King Saul spared Agag and the best of the animals of the Amalekites, he disobeyed the explicit orders of Yahweh. In the context of this disobedience, the Lord said, “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands” (1 Samuel 15:11a; NASB). In the English language, the idea of regret has the connotation²⁰⁵ of making a bad decision and then living to regret that we had made this decision. If we regret something we did, and if we had the opportunity and ability, we would not make the same decision. Of course, our regrets are based on lack of knowledge, wisdom, and possibly ability. We continually make mistakes in judgment. But can this be so with God who is infinitely wise and powerful? Can He make any decision—like making Saul king—and later regret that He had done so? Could God have acquired any more knowledge and wisdom about Saul that would have allowed Him to make a better decision? Furthermore, can God who is omniscient²⁰⁶ (all-knowing), and who has declared the end from the beginning (Isa. 46: 10), foreordain a decision which He later wishes He never made?

Later in the story, Samuel informs Saul that God had torn the kingdom from Saul and given it to someone else. Further, his removal was irrevocable²⁰⁷ because God never changes His mind. “Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind” (1 Samuel 15:29 NASB). Thus, in v. 11 God regrets making Saul king, but in v. 29 he will not change his mind about removing Saul. God is not a man that he would change His mind about a previous decision. Interestingly, in the Hebrew both expressions, “regret” and “change...mind” are translations of the same word, *nacham* which has the meaning, “to feel sorry” or to “console oneself” (BibleWorks). It is the same word used in Gen. 6: 6 before the Lord destroyed the earth with a flood, “The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (Genesis 6:6 NASB). Such passages are explained by theologians in terms of anthropathism— ascribing to God a human emotion.²⁰⁸ This is true in the present case, but the purpose of the writer is not to tantalize us with intriguing theological questions about how an omniscient God can regret something. The focus of the text is God’s sorrow. Davis points out that the word *nacham* is used 29 times in the OT and always with this emotional element of sorrow—sorrow over human sin. To say that God does not change²⁰⁹ is not the same as saying that He has no feelings. The only reason that man has an emotional element is that he is made in the image of God.²¹⁰

F. New Testament Redefinitions of Old Testament Realities

In the story of Joshua, the kingdom of God invades the unholy land of Canaan through holy war. Victory belongs to God alone, but God employs Israel to fight with Him. We can see in this the picture of the kingdom of God breaking into this unholy world. In the final judgment, the enemies of God will be utterly eliminated (cf. Joshua 11: 12, 20²¹¹), but in the meantime, the church engages in the holy war of making disciples which must include teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded us (Matt. 28: 18-20). Sinners will be “destroyed” not through “holy crusades” and physical execution, but through regeneration, repentance, and faith. The old man will be buried and

²⁰⁵ Suggested meaning

²⁰⁶ All-knowing

²⁰⁷ Could not be revoked

²⁰⁸ See my treatment of man as the image of God, “Emotion” in *The Doctrine of Man*.

²⁰⁹ The immutability of God

²¹⁰ Davis, *1 Samuel*, pp. 160-161

²¹¹ Cited in Waltke, p. 523

the new man will rise to newness of life. Just as God employs Israelite soldiers to participate with Him in expelling the Canaanites, God employs His elect people, the church, in expelling the kingdom of Satan from this world—an alien kingdom that invaded the world at the time of the fall, but one whose very nature is foreign to God’s original purpose and without legitimate claims to this world.

Unless they drive the Serpent/the Canaanites out of the Garden/the Land, the Serpent/Canaanite defilement will drive them out. Peaceful coexistence with this spiritual enemy is not an option.²¹²

Moreover, even as Israel failed repeatedly in its task of occupying the land allotted to them by expelling the Canaanites (Judges 1, with the refrain “did not drive out”), the church repeatedly fails to “occupy” new territory through lack of faith, misplaced priorities, and idolatry. There are vast portions of the globe where Christ is virtually unknown to billions of people. Many have never yet had an opportunity to believe in a gospel they have never heard. Jesus’ rebuke should ring in our ears, “...when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18: 8).

Occupation of Canaan was arduous, dangerous labor. Many thousands of Israelites lost their lives in the process. Likewise, the church should not expect the world of unbelievers to lay down their weapons without much labor and sacrifice. If the world hated Christ, it will hate us. “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14: 22b). “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4: 7). The land of Canaan was never completely taken during the whole history of Israel. The New Testament gives us a similar picture of the already and not yet of the kingdom. The Revelation of John does not seem to imply that every stronghold of Satan will be subdued when Christ returns. Rather, there will still be hostility to His rule that will only be vanquished by the direct intervention of Christ’s power (without in any way relieving the church of its responsibility).

Retention of the land of Canaan required obedience to the covenant stipulations—the Law of Moses. Just as the blessings of the covenant had come upon Israel through obedience and conquest, the curses of the Law would be their lot if they chose to disobey by intermarrying with the Canaanites and following their gods (Joshua 23: 12-16; cf. Deut. 27-28). Likewise, Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with the beatitudes, “blessed are they”, but ends the sermon with a warning to those who profess to know Him but do not do His Father’s will (Matt. 7: 21-23).²¹³ Only those who produce fruit by acting on His words are true believers who inherit the kingdom (Matt. 7: 19, 24-27). This is not salvation by works, but salvation by grace through the kind of faith that produces good works (James 2: 14-26)—the only kind of faith taught in the Bible. If individual churches (and their members) persist in syncretistic religion by living as unbelievers and following false gods (money, sex, and power), God will remove their lampstands (Rev. 1—3).

In the old dispensation, Israel consisted of both those circumcised in the flesh and those circumcised in their hearts as well. In the new dispensation, the church consists of those baptized only with water and those baptized by the Spirit as well. The true people of God are invisibly united by having circumcised hearts and being baptized by the Spirit into Christ, though the latter grace was not revealed before Christ inaugurated the new age....

²¹² Waltke, p. 544

²¹³ The Sermon on the Mount clearly follows the covenant renewal format of Deuteronomy.

...the unified understanding of God's people as consisting of believers and unbelievers entails that when the nominal church degenerates to the extent that it abrogates the objective and eternal standard of God's Law and becomes, as it were, the synagogue of Satan, it too is under God's wrath and punished individually and corporately, temporally and eternally (see the fates of the seven churches in Asia Minor [Rev. 2—3], and apostolic warnings in the New Testament [e.g., Rom. 11: 18-21; 1 Cor. 10: 1-13; Jude 3-7]). Nevertheless, there has been and always will be at least a remnant of true believers.²¹⁴

Europe is now a wasteland of abandoned cathedrals, and the church in the United States is rapidly succumbing to Canaanite culture. The form of religion has remained in established main-line churches, but the substance has long perished. Who will be next?

Nevertheless, although individual churches and regional churches may fail, the universal church of Jesus Christ cannot finally fail because it depends ultimately on God (Matt. 16: 18). The mode of administration of the Old Covenant was the giving of the Law at Sinai, but the new mode of administration is the writing of the law upon the heart by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3; Jer. 31; Heb. 8).

...the old covenant depended on Israel's promise to keep the covenant's laws, but the new covenant is based on God's will to implant those laws on the heart. This switching of the obligee [the one obliged to obey] from unfaithful Israel to the faithful God in connection with regeneration is such a great transaction that God put aside forever the former mode of administering his covenant and made the latter mode of its administration eternal (Heb. 8: 6-13). In other words, the best of all worlds is now possible.

When Moses exhorted Israel to write the covenant commandments on the heart, surely he did not mock them with a command they could not perform. The godly, like David, recognized their inability to circumcise their own hearts, and, like David, asked of God, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me...and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me" (Ps. 51: 10-12). In other words, **the provisions of the new covenant were always available to true Israel**, but it was not God's mode of administering old Israel as a nation.²¹⁵

This is the only way we can account for the fact that the new covenant is "better" than the old. If individual professing Christians can fall into apostasy—and they can (Heb. 6: 1-8; 2 Tim. 4: 10)—and if individual and regional churches can become "synagogues of Satan" (Rev. 2: 9; 3: 9)—and they do—how is the new covenant better than the old one? Could it not be argued that there is no difference, since many in the new covenant church fall away just as they did in the old covenant? But this fails to reckon with the fact that the administration of grace (John 1: 17) by means of the Holy Spirit defines the mode of administering the new covenant and that the Holy Spirit is the believer's guarantee of inheriting the covenant promises (Eph. 1: 14). The Spirit is the pledge of our inheritance because the Holy Spirit guarantees **continued belief** in the promises of God and **sanctification** in every true believer. He also guarantees that the true church will never lack a visible representation on earth.²¹⁶

On the contrary, the nation of Israel as a religious entity—and as the elect people of God—has no such visible representation today. Israel is a secular state and nothing more. It has no further role in

²¹⁴ Waltke, pp. 322-323. Elsewhere, Waltke cites the parable of the sower (Matt. 13: 1-23) as evidence that "only a fraction of those who outwardly accept Jesus Christ as Messiah persevere and bear good fruit..."(p. 442)

²¹⁵ Waltke, p. 440, words in brackets and emphasis mine

²¹⁶ Even as we have seen during the dark days of church history when only a few insignificant sects preached the true gospel

salvation history.²¹⁷ The Old Covenant governing national Israel made no provision for compliance or inward change.

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4 NASB)

Therefore, the Old Covenant was “doomed to failure from the start, as foreseen by Moses (Deut. 30: 1-3) and Joshua (24: 14-27)” because Israel was never able to keep the terms. Judgment and exile for the whole nation was inevitable.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, individual Israelites availed themselves of God’s unfailing promise to Abraham through repentance and faith. Though losing the promise of the land and the glory of the Davidic kingdom along with the unbelieving majority during the exile, they still clung to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant vouchsafed²¹⁹ through God’s oath.²²⁰

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,¹⁴ saying, “I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.”¹⁵ And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.¹⁶ For men swear by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *given* as confirmation is an end of every dispute.¹⁷ In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. (Hebrews 6:13-18 NASB)

The land promises of the OT are therefore **redefined** as life in Christ both now and eternally,²²¹ and they belong not to the physical descendants of Abraham but to His spiritual descendants. Were it not so, then the unconditional promises to Abraham would have fallen to the ground at the apostasy and judgment of the Israelite nation—finalized in 70 AD with the destruction of the temple.²²² Remaining in the land of Canaan was conditional upon obedience, but God’s promise to Abraham was confirmed by God’s oath against Himself if He failed to carry out His word to bless Abraham and make Him a great nation (Gen. 15).

Therefore, the failure of Israel is not the failure of the Abrahamic Covenant,²²³ which receives its ultimate fulfillment and confirmation in the New Covenant. The true descendants of Abraham are believers who have their type in the faithful remnant of Israel whom God preserved according to His immutable plan (1 Kings 19: 18).

²¹⁷ Waltke, p. 571

²¹⁸ Waltke, p. 437

²¹⁹ To vouchsafe means to grant (or vouch) that a gift is safe.

²²⁰ Romans 11 indicates that there will be a spiritual awakening among the Jewish people, so much so that Paul hyperbolizes this awakening with the words, “and so all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11: 26). But this does not imply the reconstitution of national Israel as the elect nation, even less the rebuilding of the temple or the reinstatement of animal sacrifices. Future Jews will be saved the same way Abraham was saved, “Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6 NASB)

²²¹ Waltke, p. 560

²²² “No New Testament passage predicts or cites an Old Testament prophecy that [the temple] will be rebuilt” (Waltke, p. 567).

²²³ Although it does mark the failure of the Mosaic Covenant. In Galatians 3, Paul seems to explicitly

But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. (Romans 9:6-8 NASB)

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about Elijah*, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³ "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." ⁴ But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. (Romans 11:1-5 NASB)

For this reason, Paul says that "For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us" (2 Corinthians 1:20 NASB). Whatever is promised to OT Israel is redefined and elevated to a new status in the New Covenant for the true believer. Were this not so, then Jesus' promise in the beatitude would be hollow, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." We all know that this is not true in this present evil age (Gal. 1: 4) in which many believers are mistreated and oppressed while the whole earth appears to be owned and ruled by the politically and economically powerful who care nothing for the kingdom of God. But things are not as they appear, for those in Christ Jesus will inherit a new earth characterized by righteousness, and the unholy and profane will not be admitted into the New Jerusalem.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. (Revelation 22:14-15 NASB)

The inheritance promised to the Israelites is fulfilled in the inheritance now given to those who believe in Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 7: 5; 13: 19; 20: 32; 26: 18; Gal. 3: 18; Eph. 1: 11, 14, 18; Eph. 5: 5, in which the word, *kleronomia*, or a derivative, is used in each verse.²²⁴

The NT is replete²²⁵ with other **redefinitions** of OT realities. The function of Levi as the priestly tribe belongs to every believer (1 Pet. 2: 9). The church is the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6: 16).²²⁶ The temple is fulfilled in the body of Christ, the church, in which both believing Jews and Gentiles are being fitted together as living stones constructing the dwelling of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2: 19-22; 1 Pet. 2: 5). Holy war has become the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations who will obey Jesus' commandments (Matt. 28: 18-20). It is ultimately fulfilled at the final judgment when Christ comes to destroy all who have rejected the measure of truth allotted them—whether the gospel or the witness of God in creation (Rom. 1: 18-32). Swords, spears, bows and arrows, shields, horses and chariots, have given way to the "armor of God": truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the Bible, and prayer (Eph. 6: 11-18). Physical weapons are no use against the mighty, hostile forces of evil in heavenly places.

²²⁴ The word is often used to translate "inheritance" in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT

²²⁵ Plentifully supplied

²²⁶ It is impossible exegesis to interpret "Israel of God" as a separate category from the Christians in Galatia composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul has gone to great lengths in this letter to show that believers are "sons of Abraham" by faith, that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, and that if we belong to Christ we are heirs of the Abrahamic promise (Gal. 3). For him now to distinguish between the church and national Israel would be completely hostile to his purposes.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. (Ephesians 6:12 NASB)

Moreover, the gifts of the spirit given to the church are not designed “to establish a geopolitical kingdom” on earth. Joshua and David were gifted for conventional warfare, but the church was given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, gifts of mercy, administration, generosity, etc.²²⁷ Rather than a small strip of land in Palestine, the church is given the entire earth as its domain, although we will not fully inherit one square inch of it until the consummation. The “not yet” of the kingdom promises are true for the NT believer as they were for Abraham, et al (Heb. 10: 39—12: 1). Jesus’ kingdom is “not of this world” (John 18: 36). Concerning this redefinition, Waltke remarks,

The New Testament redefines most Old Testament motifs or themes. In the new dispensation the covenant people of God are not marked by circumcision as in the old, but by their doing God’s will (Matt. 8: 21-22 [Luke 9: 59-60]; Matt. 12: 46-50 [Mark 3: 21, 31-35; Luke 8: 19-21]; Luke 11: 27). Jesus does away with Sabbath-keeping as a religious obligation and “redefines” it according to its true intent: a time to heal, to do good, and to enjoy spiritual rest (Matt. 12 [Mark 2]; *passim*). As for the purity of food, Jesus taught in contrast to the rabbis that real purity pertains to the state of the heart, not to what goes into one’s mouth (Matt. 15 [Mark 7]).

Jesus as the Author of Torah²²⁸, has the right to redefine Old Testament terms and themes according [to] the divine Author’s intention. Orthodox Jews, both in apostolic times and today, believe that by their defining the Old Testament woodenly²²⁹ and by their holding firmly to their traditions, God will reward them by inaugurating the kingdom of God. According to the Jewish view, the kingdom of God will cater²³⁰ to their carnal desires and gratify their nationalistic pride. Jesus calls on the nation to repent of this way of thinking: to renounce their old securities with their corrupt priesthood and hypocritical righteousness....If the Jewish nation did not repent of their old allegiances and carnal interpretations and trust him, Jesus warned, they were headed for certain judgment: the fire and sword of a soon approaching Roman army. History has validated Jesus Christ, not Judaism. His temple (body) was raised; the Jerusalem temple was razed.²³¹

Summary and Conclusion

Much of what we know about God is learned from OT narratives which are written to capture the imagination of God’s people. Moreover, much of our understanding of the ultimate goal and destination for God’s people is learned from the OT. God continues to pursue His promise of people, land, protection/presence, and program to this day, and will not cease working out this plan until the culmination of His promise in the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21—22). By understanding the continuing relevance of the “quad promise”, we understand that we are one with the faithful remnant of Israel, those who were chosen according to God’s gracious choice. Although the promise of land is spiritualized in Christ for the present, there will come another day in which our inheritance in Christ will also have an enduring physical and material manifestation.

²²⁷ Cf. Waltke, pp. 562-563

²²⁸ Law

²²⁹ Rigidly

²³⁰ Accomodate

²³¹ Waltke, pp. 560-561

But beyond the metanarrative of the salvation story, we have in the OT narratives memorable lessons guiding us through our earthly sojourn. Surrounded by moral relativism,²³² we have bedrock teaching in the OT about the sanctity of human life, keeping covenant contracts (including marriage covenants), sexual fidelity, and the dynamic between God acting (sovereignty) and our acting (human responsibility).

Lesson Eight—Snapshots

Introduction

God gave us not only stories, but snapshots within these stories. A type is a snapshot²³³ in the OT which portrays some other OT or NT reality. Although Abram's deliverance in Genesis 12 is itself a type of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, types generally refer to NT fulfillments (e.g. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac as a type of the Father's will to sacrifice His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.) Again, by studying the OT, we realize the continuity of the redemptive story from Adam to Christ. Pictures of Christ and His people dominate the pages of the OT—from Moses, the deliverer of Israel, to Haman the Agagite, a type of all people who are committed to their destruction. In the story of Ruth, Christ is typified in the self-less Boaz who takes Ruth as his wife at the risk of his inheritance. Rescuing her and Naomi from deprivation and ruin, Boaz marries Ruth and secures hers and Naomi's future. As his greater antitype, Christ secures our inheritance by sacrificing His life upon the cross and making us His bride.

Through these pictures, God was preparing His elect remnant for the coming of Christ in whom all the OT types would find their ultimate meaning and fulfillment.

XIII. Typology of OT Narratives

A. The Grand Reversal—the Story of Esther

²³² See McNeill, *The Crisis of Moral Relativism* on the website christcommunitystudycenter.org

²³³ I use "snapshot" since the type gives us only a brief look at Christ or some other NT reality.

Question 11 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What are God’s works of providence?” The answer is: “God’s works of providence are, His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions.”

The words “God”, “Lord”, or “providence” do not appear in the book of Esther, but this does not mean that there is no evidence of God or His works in the book. In fact, we see His hand of providence in every episode almost in a comedic fashion.²³⁴ Yet, as we look more closely, we see a broader purpose for the book than illustrating God’s providence over His creatures. In this story, providence serves as the means to the end, a grand reversal of Satan’s age-old plot to destroy God’s salvific purpose. Rather than conquering God’s people, Satan and his accomplices are themselves conquered. (Yes, I know. The word “Satan” doesn’t occur in the book, either; but we all believe he is there.)

At the beginning of the book, Queen Vashti is deposed, thus providing King Ahasuerus opportunity to make another selection. We need not try glossing over²³⁵ Mordecai’s plan or what Esther did to become queen. This was not just a beauty contest. Esther, along with many other beautiful women in Persia, had a one night stand with the king and risked being one of many concubines the remainder of her life.

In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name. (Esther 2:14 NASB)

The narrator is being discreet, but every Israelite reader understood what was going on. Esther and Ahasuerus were not discussing the weather or politics from evening till morning. They were having sex and lots of it. This, of course, brings up a serious moral issue involving our “heroes” in the story, Mordecai and Esther. Are they really heroes? It also demonstrates how God uses sinful behavior to accomplish His decreed will, but this should be no surprise to those who have read the history of Israel. God uses the pagan kings of Assyria and Babylon to punish Israel and Judah, and He uses our personal sin to humble us to repentance and sanctification. God uses sin sinlessly. He is never implicated in the sin of His people who willfully sin—demonstrating the responsibility of God’s people against the backdrop of God’s sovereignty. So this is not so much the mystery in this book. But who are these Jews, Esther and Mordecai?

Waltke contends that Esther is a story of God’s marvelous deliverance of the nominally religious Jews during their domination by Persia.²³⁶ Working from this interpretation, the lack of any mention of God or the praise of God in the book is not an incidental **blank**, but a purposeful **gap**²³⁷ by the narrator. The narrator accentuates his message that “Providence is at work behind the scenes on

²³⁴ The form of a comedy

²³⁵ Polishing something to make it look good

²³⁶ Waltke, “The Gift of Providence: Chronicles and Esther”

²³⁷ Defined by Waltke as “an inconsequential omission” of material by the narrator. Isaac’s reaction to Abraham’s decision to sacrifice him on the altar is “blanked”—i.e. omitted because his reaction is unimportant for the meaning of the story or the writer’s intention. On the other hand, a “gap” is “an intentional omission” to achieve the writer’s intention. For example, the Chronicler omits David’s adultery with Bathsheba because it would not serve his interest in presenting the idealized kingdom of David and Solomon to the early post-exilic community whom he was trying to encourage to obedience (Waltke, p. 122).

behalf of these ‘secular,’ self-serving Jews”, the “nominal” people of God who are “not true Israel”.²³⁸ If Waltke is correct, then the behavior of Mordecai and Esther is no longer surprising—the end justifies the means. God’s laws can be set aside for the greater good of saving the Jewish nation. Daniel and his three friends would have never stooped this low, even refusing to eat the king’s meat in violation of Mosaic food restrictions (Daniel 1).

Esther is chosen queen, thus giving her access to the king enjoyed only by very few people in the kingdom. (“The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Proverbs 21:1); and He can use a beautiful woman to turn it. One day, while Mordecai, her uncle, is sitting in the gate, he overhears a plot to kill King Ahasuerus. He reports this plot to Esther who in turn reports this to the king, giving Mordecai the proper credit. The incident is then recorded permanently in the chronicles of the kings (2: 21-23). Meanwhile, King Ahasuerus had promoted Haman, a very rich man who suffered from a condition common to many wealthy people, megalomania.²³⁹ It was customary for the common people to bow to Haman as he passed by in the streets, but this one Jew, Mordecai, refused. His refusal may be motivated by personal pride, not religious conviction, and this single act puts the whole nation at risk.²⁴⁰

An alternative interpretation is that Mordecai refuses an act of homage to a person who associates himself with divinity.²⁴¹ The Israelites commonly bowed to their own kings, so bowing to a king would not pose a problem to Mordecai. On the other hand, bowing to someone who claimed to be divine would be a problem—as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue in Daniel 3. Originally assuming the latter interpretation, I now lean toward Waltke’s conclusion that this was simply personal pride. The narrator “gaps” any authorial comment which would lead the reader to assume Mordecai’s religious conviction. Would a man who has just prostituted his cousin to a king have moral qualms about bowing to the King’s second in command? Moreover, keep in mind that Mordecai’s willingness to have Esther violated in the king’s bedroom occurs before any threat to the Jewish nation.

Whatever his reason, Mordecai’s name was added to the top of Haman’s smut list of people to exterminate. In order to rid himself of one man who refused him the proper respect, Haman concocts a grand scheme to liquidate the whole Jewish nation scattered throughout the Persian Empire—including the exiles living in Jerusalem.²⁴² Accompanying the plot is the spoil. Since the exterminated Jews would no longer need their properties, gold, silver, slaves, and so on, their riches would fill the king’s coffers. The plot is now set to have the whole nation wiped off the face of the earth.²⁴³

Mordecai learns of the plot and publicizes his outrage by mourning in sackcloth and ashes as far as the king’s gate. When Queen Esther’s messenger approaches Mordecai, Mordecai informs him of Haman’s plot and sends word to Esther that she must plead with the king for the safety of the Jews.

²³⁸ Waltke, p. 768-769

²³⁹ Delusions of grandeur or greatness

²⁴⁰ Waltke, p. 767

²⁴¹ C. F. Keil, *Esther*, pp. 343-344. Mordecai’s reason given in the text is that he was a Jew.

²⁴² Persian provinces extended from India to Ethiopia (8: 9).

²⁴³ Regretfully, this desire for exterminating Israel has not passed with time. Hamas, the political leadership of the Palestinians, continues to call for the extermination of Israel—although many Palestinians themselves are Christians.

Hesitating from fear, Esther says that she has not been summoned to the king for 30 days, and that if she appears without being summoned, she will be risking her life. Mordecai answers with the most explicit statement of providence in the entire book.

“Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. ¹⁴ "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13-14 NASB)

For the reader with sanctified ears, “such a time as this” was the providential time that God had allowed Esther to become queen. She was not allowed this favor so she could bathe in rose petals and eat Persian delicacies from the royal kitchen. God had placed her there for a more important purpose, the salvation of His people. If she refused this purpose, the Jews would be saved some other way, but she herself would be lost. Point taken, Esther springs into action at the risk of her life; and the plan she devises shows that she was not just another pretty face. She had even more brains than beauty. To the true Israelite according to faith, salvation “from another place” would come because of God’s covenantal faithfulness to Israel even against the background of their unfaithfulness. But the narrator does not put these words in Mordecai’s mouth, nor does the narrator say that Esther goes ahead with her plan because of her faith. She simply understands that her destiny is intertwined with her people and that if they die, so will she. Her marriage to the king will not save her.

Esther proceeds with the agreement that Mordecai will organize a fast (4: 16). The author omits any mention of prayer. Daniel and his three friends fast **and pray** (Dan. 9: 1-5; 2: 17-18).

Properly dressed, perfumed, coiffed (hair done), and make-upped, she appears before the king without being summoned whereupon he extends to her the golden scepter of his approval, offering to grant anything she asks for up to half the kingdom (not really—but such overstatement flattered the generosity of ancient kings).²⁴⁴ Her only request, at this point, is that the king and Haman attend a banquet (5: 4).²⁴⁵ Very strange, the king might have thought, for Esther to do something this risky for a dinner appointment. At this first banquet, the king once again offers to grant her request (the second time he says this). In other words, “What do you really want? You would not have risked your life just to prepare dinner for me.” To add more mystery, Esther delays her real request and only asks the king come to another banquet the following day. “And don’t forget, O King, Haman is also invited” (see 5: 12, “tomorrow also”).

Haman, for his part, is exhilarated²⁴⁶ at this newly bestowed honor and must be singing “Blue skies, falling on me, nothing but blue skies do I see” on his way home.²⁴⁷ Things are surely looking up, and his delusions of grandeur are growing by the hour; but his joy soon dissolves into anger at the sight of one man, Mordecai the Jew, who steadfastly refuses to show him the public honor he craves (v. 9). Notice the next two verses.

²⁴⁴Mk. 6: 23. If anyone actually asked for half the kingdom, his head would probably roll

²⁴⁵ Notice the words, “this day”, the first banquet

²⁴⁶ To be filled with joy

²⁴⁷ But I don’t expect my African students to catch the allusion here. This song became popular in the US in the early 1920’s, especially among those getting rich quick in the stock market. Then the market crashed, causing the Great Depression and the increase of suicide by rich entrepreneurs jumping out of their sixth floor Wall Street offices.

Haman controlled himself, however, went to his house and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh.¹¹ Then Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons, and every instance where the king had magnified him and how he had promoted him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman also said, "Even Esther the queen let no one but me come with the king to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the king."¹³ "Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." (Esther 5:10-13 NASB)

The story reminds us of the whining, thumb-sucking Ahab who has everything, but still is unsatisfied because Naboth will not sell him his vineyard. Furthermore, the response of Haman's wife, Jareh, and friends is very similar to that of Jezebel—if you can't convince them against their wills, liquidate them! (1 Kings 21: 5-15) After all, might makes right.²⁴⁸ Thus, another plot is hatched—have Mordecai hanged on a gallows 75 feet tall (25 meters)—high enough to draw everyone's attention to what happens to anyone who refuses to lick Haman's boots on the public streets of Susa. The message? If you refuse to stoop low, you will be elevated—on a pole!²⁴⁹ Considering all the honors King Ahasuerus had recently lavished upon Haman, surely he would not refuse the public impaling of one lowly Jew who refused to honor the very man whom the king himself honors. Problem solved. Now, Haman, enjoy the rest of your day!

But if we know the rest of the story, Haman's plot is an episode of hilarious poetic justice.²⁵⁰ The gallows he prepares are his own; the pole rips through his own body. It reminds us of the story of Daniel's enemies who hatch a plot to have Daniel become breakfast, lunch and dinner for a den of lions, only to be served up with their families as a much bigger feast (Dan. 6).

But that night, the king couldn't sleep (more providence). Had Esther published her request earlier at the first banquet, the king would not have known what an obscure²⁵¹ Jew had done to save his life. The timing of all these events was crucial to the outcome (more providence). Since there were no over-the-counter sleeping pills in those days, a little dose of the Chronicles of the Kings (not the Biblical book) would do to lull the king into a deep sleep (6: 1). The reader could have stuck his finger anywhere in those records and read any number of stories that would have helped the king to sleep. The king would not have cared, as long as the story was about him. Instead, his finger landed in the recent record of how an obscure Jew, Mordecai by name, had uncovered a plot to assassinate the king (more providence). The king, no longer interested in sleep, remembered the incident (2: 23) and wondered whether Mordecai had been honored for saving his life. But nothing had been done! Wondering what nobleman might be inside the king's court at this time of night, the king asked, "Who is in the court?" And wouldn't you know it? Haman had just entered the court (more providence), seemingly because he just could not wait until the next morning to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on the gallows (6: 4). But before he could pop the question (more providence), the king opens the door wide for an opportunity for Haman to honor himself, "What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?" Of course, Haman couldn't think of anyone whom the king would wish to honor more than him, so he comes up with this grand procession in which one of the king's noblemen would adorn the favored individual with the king's robe, place him on the king's

²⁴⁸ The philosophy that teaches we are permitted to do anything we are capable of doing.

²⁴⁹ Rather than the hangman's noose made of rope, it is more likely that Haman wished to have Mordecai impaled on a long sharp pole, the ancient Persian form of execution.

²⁵⁰ In a story, irony occurs when the ending turns out just the opposite of what was expected. In this case, the irony is God's poetic justice.

²⁵¹ unknown

horse, and walk him through the streets crying, “Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor!”

(By now, the Israelite reading this story is laughing his head off, and if he has never read it previously, he must be wondering what will happen next. He can’t put the story down, so he continues reading.)

Haman is not in a position to object to the king’s wishes, so the next day he leads Mordecai on horseback through the streets of Susa, an honor he had wished to lavish upon himself. Having finished this trail of humiliation, he runs home mourning with head covered—presumably so none of his elite friends would see him. But his covered head was a foreshadowing of his ultimate fall (7: 8). Haman’s troubles were far from over, and even his wife and wise men recognized that things were not boding well. Through their pagan mouths, the sovereign God prophesies his doom.

Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him." (Esther 6:13 NASB)

The modern reader may recall the warning of Pilate’s wife to have nothing to do with “that righteous man”, Jesus (Matt. 27: 19). There is no rest for the wicked, and while these words were still in their mouths, Haman is fetched to Queen Esther’s banquet (6: 14). On the way, he may have been wondering, “What now?”, but as yet he does not know that Esther is a Jew—a fact she has not even disclosed to the king (2: 20)—or that she is aware of Haman’s plot to annihilate the Jews. Had he known both these facts, he would have been looking for the next camel out of Susa.

At the second banquet, King Ahasuerus is quick to remember that Queen Esther has a request, one he had promised her twice the day before. He now repeats his offer (cf. 5: 3, 6; 7:2). This is now the third time he has said this. The author makes note of this repetition as an emphasis in the story. Therefore, Esther is now more confident than ever that her request will be granted. After being put off twice by Esther, the king is ready to get on with it, so Esther now pops the question.

“If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request; ⁴ for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king.” (Esther 7:3-4 NASB)

Note the classic understatement of 7: 4 to balance the classic overstatement of 7: 2, “If we had been sold as slaves, I would not even have bothered to tell you since our slavery would not be worth your annoyance.” (It seems many ancient kings suffered from megalomania, else they would not have had such absurdities said to them with a straight face.) But notice, more importantly, that Esther asked for the very thing the king had already granted her once when she appeared before him without being summoned the day before. Had he not extended the golden scepter of his favor to her, she would not now be dining with the king. She would be dead. But the timing of this request is, well, timely. The king had been reminded only the night before of Mordecai’s involvement in saving his own life. The incident is therefore fresh on his mind. A Jew had saved his life. Now another Jew asks for her life and the lives of her people. What was the king supposed to say who had just granted her up to half the kingdom?

But the way Esther has framed her request begs another question: “Who?” Who would do such a thing? And the king feeds right into her hand by asking this question. Now comes the grand finale, “A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!”—“that’s who!” (v. 6). Haman now looks like a deer in the headlights of a truck—eyes white with fear, black pupils centered inside the sockets. It was as if someone had punched him hard in the stomach. In a very short time, he has come a long way in the wrong direction from being “the man whom the king wishes to honor.”

The king is apparently so angry he can’t speak, so he stomps to the garden to cool off—unsuccessfully. This delay gives Haman just enough time to impale himself before he is impaled. Falling on the couch—with Esther, mind you—Haman begs for mercy. Again, it is all a matter of timing. The king goes to the garden but soon returns just in time to find Haman prostrated on the couch with His queen. One simply does not wish to be found lying down on a couch with the wife of an ancient king. Not a safe place to be. Probably having already determined what to do with Haman, and interpreting his actions in the worst possible light, Ahasuerus says, “Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?” Now, although eunuchs are sexually impotent, they are not stupid; and the eunuchs attending the queen didn’t need the king to draw his finger across his throat. Haman was, for all practical purposes, dead. Corpses need to be covered, and it was customary to cover the face of someone facing execution, so as soon as the king uttered his accusation, they covered Haman’s face. One of the eunuch’s, Harbonah, apparently not fond of Haman, even offered the king a convenient solution. Why, there was no need to waste more timber to construct a new gallows. Haman could be impaled on the same pole built for Mordecai! Pleased with the suggestion, the king agrees. Public execution accomplished, the king could now finish cooling off (v. 10b).

To make a short story even shorter, Esther receives permission to have all the Jews living in every city of the Persian Empire warned of the coming invasion. Furthermore, the king issues a decree permitting them to arm and defend themselves against the very onslaught that he had originally—and carelessly—authorized through Haman, an ironic twist of providence which helps cap off the story. The author sums up this irony in 9: 1.

Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them. (Esther 9:1 NASB)

Herein is the **great reversal**. Hostile peoples will attempt to eradicate the seed of Abraham who will bring blessing to the world (Gen. 12), but their evil designs will be turned upside down to fall upon their own heads (9: 25). By the time this book was written both Assyria and Babylon had bitten the dust. Persia would be next. Nothing, not all the hostile, conquered nations of the Persian Empire—not even mighty Persia herself—are sufficient to eradicate the Jewish nation and squash the blessings of Abraham. Sanballat attempts to halt Nehemiah’s efforts in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, but fails. Herod, like his precursor Pharaoh, attempts to put the king of the Jews to death, but perishes himself without succeeding (Matt. 2). The chief priests attempt to wash their hands of Jesus once and for all, but His death and resurrection ignite a kingdom that later encompasses the entire Roman Empire. The Apostle Paul’s life is threatened time and again, but he lives and serves long enough to plant the seeds of the church that will, in time, sprout all over the globe. The salvation of God’s people will be accomplished through the destruction of their enemies. Those who curse Abraham will be cursed; and God will accomplish His unconditional promise to Abraham to make him a blessing to

all nations. In this manner the true, believing Israelites living in exile and beyond would understand and appreciate this story. To Israel according to the flesh, it was a mere secular victory.

In Esther, God is a warrior. Mordecai is from the line of Kish (2: 5) and Haman was an Agagite. Agag, you remember, was king of the Amalekites during Saul's reign (1 Sam. 15: 8), and the Amalekites were the first foreign power (unprovoked) to attack Israel as they came out of Egypt (Ex. 17). For this unprovoked attack upon His weak and weary people, God declared war against the Amalekites from generation to generation (Ex. 17: 16; Deut. 25: 16-19). As the first to attack the people of God coming out of Egypt to serve Him in the wilderness, Amalek represents all worldly powers opposed to the kingdom of God, similar to the way Babylon is depicted in Revelation. While Saul, son of Kish, was commissioned to wipe out the Amalekites, he refused to do so and spared Agag (1 Sam. 15: 3, 9). For sparing Agag, Saul lost his kingdom, but Agag fared none the better for it (1 Sam. 15: 33). Saul had also lied to Samuel about "utterly" destroying all the other Amalekites (1 Sam. 15: 20; cf. 1 Chron. 4: 42-43). The Amalekites raided Ziklag while David is on another expedition, and David must pursue and slaughter them from sunset until the evening of the next day (1 Sam. 30). Yet, even then, 400 of them escape (v. 17). God's long war against Amalek does not come to an end until Haman is executed—as well as his ten sons (Esther 9: 14). The termination of the Amalekites foreshadows the destruction of all God's enemies.²⁵² God has a long memory for those who hate His people, and none will escape His wrath.

As we consider this connection in the story, we are reminded that God will put an end to all His, and all our, enemies. The narrator puts it well.

Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them. (Esther 9:1 NASB)

Christians will be hated by all the nations on account of Christ (Matt. 10: 22), depicted symbolically in the Revelation of John as the two witnesses who prophesy in Jesus' name and are put to death by the beast. Once dead, their bodies are left unburied while the nations celebrate their death. But they do not remain dead, but are brought to life with the breath of God to join Him in heaven. This is followed by the terrifying judgment of God upon those who hated them (Rev. 11). Moreover, like the battles in this story that are fought all over the Persian Empire, Christians today are fighting spiritual battles all over the world, but with spiritual weapons. "*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NASB). Importantly, our battles are not motivated by hatred, but by the love God has given us for our enemies (Matt. 5: 44). We are ambassadors for Christ entreating the enemies of God to lay down their weapons before it is too late (2 Cor. 5: 20). Resistance against God and His Christ is futile.

"If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him." (Esther 6:13 NASB)

²⁵² I have followed Walke's analysis of this holy war against Amalek (pp. 769-770).

"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. (Daniel 2:44 NASB)

Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psalm 2:12 NASB)

Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17 NASB)

I am hesitant to agree with Waltke's assertion that the Jews "slaughter their enemies in an unbridled blood bath." This seems to imply that they were killing unarmed people in Persian provinces. The story indicates simply that they were allowed to arm and defend themselves against any and all attackers (8: 11), and that many of the people in the provinces began to fear the Jews because of the counter-decree of Mordecai who had been given Haman's place (8: 2, 5, 8-9, 13, 17).²⁵³ Their enemies had ample opportunity to cease and desist from their plans for harming the Jews, but their hatred was such that they pursued their planned extermination in spite of the counter-decree. Says Keil,

Though this edict [the counter decree] so inspired the royal officials with fear of the powerful minister [Mordecai; cf. 8: 2], that they took part with, instead of against the Jews, yet the masses of the people and especially the populations of towns, would not have paid such respect to it as to restrain their hatred against the Jews. The edict of Mordochai...allowed the Jews to stand up for their lives, and to slay such enemies as should attack them (viii.11). The heathen were not thereby restrained from undertaking that fight against the Jews, in which they were eventually the losers.²⁵⁴

In light of the counter-decree, it does seem amazing that the enemies of the Jews (not **all** the people of Persia) would persist in their plans for extermination knowing that they would be fighting armed people aided by the Persian provincial leaders. At the risk of reading too much into the text, can we see in this a type of God's enemies today who have read His "decree" (in the Bible) to destroy those who hate Him and who hate His church but still refuse to believe that their evil plans will fail? Moreover, Keil does not accuse Esther of vengefulness by extending the decree to the next day (9: 13).

Her foresight in securing the lives of her people against renewed attacks, betrays neither revenge nor cruelty. Unless the heathen population had attacked the Jews on the second day, the latter would have had no opportunity of slaying their foes. How little, too, the Jews in general were influenced by a desire of vengeance, is shown by the fact so repeatedly brought forward, that they laid not their hand on the spoil of the slain (ix. 9, 15), though this was granted them by the royal edict (viii. 11).²⁵⁵

Contrarily, Waltke blames the Jews for not taking the spoil and using it for the maintenance of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

²⁵³ The edict allowing the Jews to defend themselves

²⁵⁴ Keil, pp. 309-310

²⁵⁵ Keil, p. 310

The Jews celebrate in the feast of Purim their victory, not their God. They compassionately take no plunder from their enemies, but in so doing deprive *I AM's* temple of much-needed funds that would bring God honor. Indeed, they show no interest in Jerusalem or God's temple, the symbol of his righteous rule. Moreover, the narrator draws his book to conclusion with the Jews holding Mordecai in high esteem, not in praising God. The people never repented of their sins.²⁵⁶

Yet, considering that Saul kept the spoils of war 500 years earlier and lost his kingdom (1 Sam. 15: 19), it is possible that the people remembered this important watershed event in Israel's history and zealously shunned the spoils.²⁵⁷ Their victory also may have been likened to the victory of Joshua in which the spoils of war were devoted to God, with one disastrous exception, the treachery of Achan (Josh. 7). They were not about to make the same mistake on this occasion. Their refusal to keep the spoils of war is repeated three times for emphasis (9: 10, 15, 16), and I don't think the emphasis would be their lack of regard for a second temple already completed.

However, I believe Waltke's overall conclusion will stand. These were the nominal people of God who "never repented of their sins." The post-exilic books of Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi, and Esther prepare the reader for a Jewish people who, in spite of repeated judgments, will look upon their Messiah with disdain and will reject His offer of salvation. In this sense, Esther serves as a warning for the modern church. Deliverance may come by God's grace in the short term, but the long-term consequences of idolatry and unbelief will come due eventually.

B. The Kinsman-Redeemer—the Story of Ruth

The theology of Ruth hinges on the Israelite custom of the kinsmen redeemer.²⁵⁸ Naomi has lost her husband, Elimelech, in the land of Moab. Due to poverty, she must sell the land she inherited from him (4: 3). Either this, or she has already lost the land and cannot purchase it from her creditor; otherwise, Ruth, her daughter-in-law, would not have to glean upon Boaz' field (2: 1-10).²⁵⁹ By returning to Israel with Naomi rather than going back to her own people, the Moabites, Ruth has fully aligned herself with the God of Israel (1: 16). Furthermore, she had previously been married to Naomi's son, an Israelite, both of which gave her the same status as a full-blooded Israelite. She is, therefore, considered as a close kin (relative) to Boaz who has the right of redemption of Naomi's property.

One thing stands in the way; another Israelite is a closer relative than Boaz who must relinquish²⁶⁰ his right of redemption (3: 12). Approaching the closer relative at the city gate, Boaz inquires whether he is willing to redeem²⁶¹ Naomi's property. "Naomi" is emphasized in the previous sentence because it is Naomi's ancestral inheritance through Elimelech which is in view. Ruth has not yet been

²⁵⁶ Waltke, p. 768

²⁵⁷ Zondervan NASB Study Bible, notes on Esther. This, of course, assumes that these nominal Jews were aware of their own history.

²⁵⁸ See Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, pp. 48-62, to whom I am indebted through much of this discussion

²⁵⁹ The technical problems arising in the book of Ruth are very complex, including the question of whether Elimelech had already sold the field before leaving for Moab or whether Naomi still retained the land. For a complete discussion of the problems, see Hubbard, pp. 52-56.

²⁶⁰ Give up

²⁶¹ Purchase as the responsibility and right of the closest relative

mentioned. At this point in the conversation, the closest kin agrees to purchase Naomi's property, perhaps thinking this would be a profitable arrangement (see below), but when he finds out that he must also marry Ruth and raise up her first-born son as the legal heir to the property, he gives the right of redemption to Boaz.²⁶² Thus, the kinsman was expecting the requirement to marry someone, but not Ruth.²⁶³ The levirate requirement—as an associated requirement of the kinsman redeemer—is assumed throughout the conversation between Boaz and the closest relative at the city gate and is accepted as legal by the city elders. This poses a technical problem since in the OT there is never an explicit combination of these two obligations—namely, levirate marriage and redemption of property.²⁶⁴ Normally, the kinsman redeemer (*goel* in Hebrew) was obligated to redeem the property rights of the nearest relative who had sold his property due to poverty (cf. Lev. 25: 25). He was also obligated to redeem a family member who had sold himself into slavery to repay a debt (Lev. 25: 47-49). Moreover, he was legally the “family protector” who was also obligated to avenge the death of a murdered family member (Num. 35: 19-21), in a sense, to “redeem” the blood of his close relative which had been taken from the family by taking the blood of the murderer.²⁶⁵

The Levirate law in Deuteronomy 25: 5 specifies the condition of two brothers living together, that is, on the family farm—a situation implied in the case of Er and Onan (Gen. 38). Thus, for brothers not living together, the Levirate law would not be applicable, much less in the case of Boaz or the nearest unnamed kin in Ruth 4. Hubbard cautions against reading Ruth as a comprehensive legal code rather than a narrative. He frankly admits,

Second, one must recall the nature of biblical legal materials. Against popular impression, they do not offer a comprehensive legal code which covers every imaginable case. Rather they constitute instruction about sample or crucial topics from which inferences about all other cases are drawn.... Thus, attempts to align the customs in Ruth precisely with the details of three frequently cited texts (Gen. 38; Lev. 25: 25-34; Deut. 25: 5-10) are unnecessary and ill-advised.... rather they are mirrors of Israel's treasured values.²⁶⁶

Since the story presumes Elimelech's brothers are dead, no real levirate marriage is possible; and if one brother were still alive, marriage between him and Naomi would be futile anyway considering that she is past the age of child-bearing. Case laws—like the law of levirate marriage—in the OT do not cover every conceivable case, the very reason that the reader must assume from the reading of Ruth that the obligations of the kinsman-redeemer were far broader and more complex than the specific texts above lead us to believe. If we wonder why the nearest unnamed kinsman had not thought of Ruth, it is possible that he had never heard of Ruth before the conversation at the city gates; for when Ruth is later mentioned by Boaz, the relative does not protest that marriage to Ruth would be an illegal requirement, nor is there any protest from the elders at the gate that Boaz had made additional requirements for the kinsman redeemer.²⁶⁷ Besides, the substitution of Ruth for

²⁶² Levirate law was the responsibility of the deceased husband's brother to marry his sister-in-law and raise up a descendent from her who would be considered as the offspring of the deceased brother. The law is not mentioned in Exodus, but shows up in Deuteronomy 25 and Genesis 38 before the Mosaic Law was given. Moreover, Onan's act of spilling his sperm on the ground rather than raising up a descendent for his brother was so displeasing to God that He killed Onan.

²⁶³ Hubbard, pp. 61, 242

²⁶⁴ Hubbard, p. 49

²⁶⁵ The idea of redeeming the blood taken from the family is from an unknown source.

²⁶⁶ Hubbard, p. 50

²⁶⁷ Hubbard, pp. 50-52

Naomi would be consistent with the intent and purpose of the kinsman-redeemer law which protected a person's ancestral lands and the name of the deceased kinsman.²⁶⁸ If Naomi was too old to have children, particularly a male heir, it would do her little good to marry the nearest relative since her inheritance and the name of Elimelech would be extinguished in Israel at her death regardless of her marriage to the nearest kinsman. In such a case, the kinsman-redeemer custom would be a mere formality with no advantage for some of those whom it was designed to protect. But if Ruth becomes the substitute wife of the deceased, then the law functions as intended, to raise up the name of the deceased and to protect the inheritance from absorption into another family. Thus, we can understand why there was no objection from the elders at the gate or the relative. They fully understood the law and its intent. Thus, the relative took off his sandal and relinquished his rights of redemption according to established custom (cf. Deut. 25: 5-10).²⁶⁹

We can understand why the relative was initially eager to redeem the land. The arrangement had no risk for him other than an unwanted wife who probably wouldn't live much longer anyway, and one who wouldn't require sexual relations, much less bear a son to compete with the kinsman's existing heirs. But now the agreement was getting less lucrative²⁷⁰—a younger wife whose maintenance would be more expensive and an offspring who would own a share of his existing inheritance (Deut. 25: 6). In other words, had he married Ruth, the first-born son would have inherited Elimelech's property rights leaving the nearest relative with only his existing inheritance. But further, Ruth could have had several more sons who would have had title to the relative's ancestral property, thus "jeopardizing" the inheritance of his existing sons (4: 6). Or, if he did not have any existing sons, the arrangement would leave him vulnerable to the same predicament of the deceased Elimelech—having his name blotted out in Israel. The land would be left to Ruth's firstborn son who essentially would be raised up as Elimelech's son, not the kinsman redeemer's.

All the liabilities mentioned above were probably true of Boaz as well, but his generous spirit, demonstrated throughout the story, overcame any selfish thoughts about preserving his existing inheritance for his own offspring (if any existed).²⁷¹ Remember that the first son of Boaz and Ruth would inherit all of Naomi's ancestral property, and any other sons born to them would share in the inheritance of Boaz's existing ancestral property. If he had any other sons by another wife, their inheritance would be diminished through his union to Ruth. By his willingness to jeopardize his own inheritance, Boaz makes an inheritance for Ruth and Naomi. Reading the story on this side of the cross, we understand the real significance.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9 NASB)

²⁶⁸ "to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance" (4: 5, cited in Hubbard, p. 57)

²⁶⁹ Except, by this time, the wife of the deceased did not participate in the procedure, including spitting in the man's face. There is no evidence here that the nearest of kin suffered any disgrace for his refusal to marry Ruth. Hubbard gives him the benefit of the doubt, (pp. 245-247) while Waltke interprets the narrator's refusal to name the man ("such a one" in the KJV) as a deliberate gap which labels the man as irresponsible. "...Mr. So and So is willing to buy Naomi's field when it enhances his fame and enriches his fortune, but he exposes his self-centered motives by being unwilling to sacrifice financially...to save the name of Elimelech and Mahlon to protect their defenseless widows. As Orpah is to Ruth, Mr. So and So functions as a foil to Boaz" (p. 859). A "foil" is a person or thing that enhances another by contrast. Judah (Gen. 38) is a foil for Joseph (Gen. 39). In other words, Judah's unrighteous behaviour enhances Joseph's righteous behaviour.

²⁷⁰ Profitable

²⁷¹ Most likely, Boaz was married and had children. It would have been uncommon in Israel for a man of his age to be single and childless; and if this had been so, the author probably would have made note of the anomaly (irregularity).

Christ could have continued enjoying the fellowship of the Father in heaven without subjecting himself to poverty, human weakness, and slander associated with life on earth among sinful humans, and eventual death on the cross. While Boaz assumed great risk, Christ's suffering were guaranteed. But in order to become our kinsman-redeemer, He was willing to sacrifice both His privileges and His own life.

...who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8 NASB)

During a time when “there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges; cf. Ruth 1: 1), Boaz **does what is right** in the eyes of God. He obeys the Law of Moses by raising up a son to Elimelech, thus preserving his name and ancestral property (Deut. 25: 5-10), and he does so even in the face of potential financial loss and the loss of a name in Israel. Naomi's property will belong to his first-born son by Ruth, and if Boaz has no other son, his first-born by Ruth will take the name of Elimelech as well as his own.²⁷² If he has existing sons already, they will have to share Boaz's existing ancestral inheritance with all of Ruth's sons after the first-born. The text gives us no clues concerning whether Boaz was already married or whether he already had sons.²⁷³ It only implies that he is much older than Ruth (cf. 3: 10—“young men”; and the repetition of the address, “my daughter” (2: 8; 3: 10, 11, the same way she is addressed by Naomi, her older mother-in-law—2: 2; 3: 1, 16). At any rate, Boaz became Ruth's kinsman redeemer not because of any selfish desire to own more land, but because he loved Ruth and because he desired to do the right thing. As it turns out, far from having his inheritance absorbed by others, God gave him an inheritance of the saints in heaven; and one day he will inherit the earth (Matt. 5: 5). Moreover, far from having his name extinguished in Israel, the name of Boaz is known to believers all over the world as the father of Obed, the grandfather of Jesse, and the great grandfather of King David. As Boaz' greater antitype, Christ, who lived in obscurity until his public ministry, is given a name above all names.

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, (Philippians 2:9 NASB)

Believers must never think they are putting God in their debt by doing the right thing. God is no man's debtor and will reward us many times for anything we have done for Him and the kingdom of God. Jesus corrected this attitude in Peter who said, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” (Matthew 19:27 NASB) Christ responded, not by chiding Peter, but by reminding him of the rewards awaiting him for his belief and sacrifice.

²⁷² More technicalities emerge when we realize that Obed became a dual heir of both Elimelech and Boaz (cf. 4: 17, 21). Hubbard admits that there is “no final explanation for this phenomenon” (pp. 62-63).

²⁷³ The Levirate law also brings up the subject of polygamy since there are no qualifications in the law about whether the brother of the deceased husband is already married. The kinsman redeemer in the story of Ruth does not mention an additional wife as the reason for refusing his right if redemption, he merely says that he would jeopardize his inheritance by taking Ruth (4: 6).

And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.²⁹ "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:28-29 NASB)

But He also reminded Peter and the others who were looking at their service in terms of *quid pro quo*²⁷⁴ that all rewards for service were gifts of grace, not payment due (Matt. 19: 30—20: 16).²⁷⁵

We also see in this story a foreshadowing of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the kingdom of Israel and the church.²⁷⁶ Set during the time of the Judges early in Israel's history, it is clear from the beginning of that history that God was fulfilling his promise to Abraham to make him a blessing to **all** the nations, a fact missed by most Israelites, including Jonah. Ruth serves as a foil²⁷⁷ for the sinful Jewish nation from whom the kingdom is eventually taken away and given to Gentiles like Ruth who produce the fruit of the kingdom (Matt. 21: 43). She is presented here as a true descendent of Abraham according to the promise (Rom. 9: 8), recognized as a "woman of excellence" throughout the city who cares more about preserving the line of Naomi than her own selfish interests (3: 10-11). As such, she is more worthy of the blessings of the covenant than the natural seed of Abraham.²⁷⁸ At the same time, it should not be said that Ruth's righteousness is the source of her blessings. The story of Ruth is a story of God's grace. Before her marriage to Naomi's son, she was an average Moabite woman worshipping false gods—much like Abram whom God graciously rescued from his pagan life in Mesopotamia (Joshua 24: 2). By her providential connection with Naomi, she came to know the true God who changed her heart and made her into the "woman of excellence" Boaz mentions. Before God saved us, we were poor and destitute sinners like Ruth and Naomi. We had no means of redeeming our lost standing (inheritance) with God brought about by sin, and our names and memories would have been blotted out from the earth (Ps. 34: 16; 109: 15; Deut. 25: 6). But God has been gracious to us. Sending His Son as our kinsman-redeemer, God in Christ has purchased us from sin and poverty and given us an inheritance in the land of promise, the renewed heavens and earth. He has also "married" us (Eph. 5: 25-33), giving us a new name, "Christians", a name that will never be extinguished upon the earth but will be preserved for eternity. All of our blessedness is bound up in our identification and union with Christ.

Moreover, the story is about the importance of women in the kingdom of God. Ruth is an ordinary woman chosen to be the ancestress of Christ. In Christ Jesus, there is neither male nor female in terms of worth or importance. All are one in Christ Jesus and heirs of salvation on equal footing with men (Gal. 3: 28; 1 Pet. 3: 7, the word used means "co-inheritor"). This does not imply, however, that

²⁷⁴ "this for that"—or, "due wages for work performed"

²⁷⁵ See McNeill, *Synoptic Gospels*, on this parable

²⁷⁶ So also Waltke, p. 867, who says, "...Naomi and Ruth foreshadow the union of ethnic Israel and of Gentiles in the church (p. 867).

²⁷⁷ See footnote 267

²⁷⁸ In 3: 9, Ruth is not offering herself for sex with Boaz, but proposing marriage.²⁷⁸ Although the language of the 3: 3 is loaded with sexual innuendo²⁷⁸, the narrator makes it clear that Ruth is a virtuous woman and Boaz a virtuous man. It would be contrary to his whole purpose to imply that the marriage was consummated that very night. In fact, having them meet at night at the threshing floor—where prostitutes often gathered for customers—and without having sexual contact, demonstrates the narrator's purpose in developing their ideal characters as the ancestors of King David.

women have the same function as men in the family and the church as the modern feminist movement claims (1 Tim. 2: 11-15).²⁷⁹

C. The Inheritance of the Levites

From the beginning of the priesthood, God had instructed Moses that the Levites would not receive a portion of land among the other tribes. Look at any map outlining the boundaries of the twelve tribes of Israel and you will not find any portion of land for Levi. Instead, the Levites were given 42 cities plus six cities of refuge to dwell in—along with their pasture lands—as well as a portion of the sacrifices. Their allotment of the sacrifices symbolized the fact that the Lord Himself was their portion and inheritance. Note the following verses.

Then the LORD said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel.²¹ "To the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting.²² "The sons of Israel shall not come near the tent of meeting again, or they will bear sin and die.²³ "Only the Levites shall perform the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the sons of Israel they shall have no inheritance.²⁴ "For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer as an offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said concerning them, "They shall have no inheritance among the sons of Israel." (Numbers 18:20-24 NASB; emphasis mine)

This statute is repeated when Israel takes possession of the land of Canaan. All the tribes receive a landed inheritance except Levi.

Now Joshua was old and advanced in years when the LORD said to him, "You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land remains to be possessed. . . .

"Now therefore, apportion this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh." (Joshua 13:1, 7 NASB; emphasis mine) [Note: the other two and a half tribes had received land before the conquest on the east side of the Jordan.]

Only to the tribe of Levi he did not give an inheritance; the offerings by fire to the LORD, the God of Israel, are their inheritance, as He spoke to him. So Moses gave an inheritance to the tribe of the sons of Reuben according to their families. (Joshua 13: 14-15 NASB; emphasis mine)

Moses also gave an inheritance to the tribe of Gad, to the sons of Gad, according to their families. (Joshua 13:24 NASB; emphasis mine)

Moses also gave an inheritance to the half-tribe of Manasseh; and it was for the half-tribe of the sons of Manasseh according to their families. (Joshua 13:29 NASB; emphasis mine)

But to the tribe of Levi, Moses did not give an inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as He had promised to them. (Joshua 13:33 NASB; emphasis mine)

So what was the Lord teaching Israel through the example of the Levites? The Lord was not being stingy²⁸⁰ with the Levites, as the 48 cities and pasture lands indicate (Num. 35: 6-7; Joshua 20—21).

²⁷⁹ See McNeill, *Pastoral Epistles—1 Timothy* (discussion on 1 Timothy 2: 11-15).

²⁸⁰ ungenerous

He also gave them the tithe from the other tribes—a tithe from which they also tithed (Num. 18: 26). Yet, by giving them the tithe and by withholding a large territory of land, the Lord symbolized for them that He was their true portion and inheritance. They needed nothing else. Furthermore, these cities were strategically located throughout the other 12 tribes, thus indicating that in one sense, the Levites could enjoy the entire territory of Israel, not just one portion of it. This may be typical of the fact that the whole earth will belong to God’s people, not just the land of Palestine. (Personally, I would prefer a place in the Olympic Mountains in the state of Washington—without the liberal politicians—but we’ll see.) What was symbolic for Israel is a type for us. As believers we are a kingdom of priests (1 Pet. 2: 9). As priests, God is our inheritance through our union with Christ Jesus. While it is true that we shall inherit the earth (the new Canaan; Matt. 5: 6), we should never forget that the core or foundation of our inheritance is not a material piece of real estate, but a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1: 11, 14, 18; passim [in other places]). Without this relationship, nothing else really matters, and nothing will bring us any joy or satisfaction.

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36 NASB)

...but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,... (2 Corinthians 6:4 NASB)

...as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things. (2 Corinthians 6:10 NASB)

D. The Division of the Land of Canaan—Joshua

As we have seen in Joshua, Chapters 13—21 (nine chapters) are devoted to the division of the land and the allocation of the cities of refuge and pasture lands to the Levites. Why would the author devote so much space to this subject? To the present reader living in the 21st century, such reading may be tedious and boring, but to the original reader, this was tangible evidence of the fulfillment of Yahweh’s covenant promise of land to Abraham. Crossing the gulf roughly 3400 years from Joshua to the present day, the division of the land typifies the future promise of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5 NASB).

Contrary to some opinion, believers will not exist eternally in heaven as bodiless souls. The bodies of believers will one day be glorified, and these glorified bodies will need a place to stay (1 Cor. 15). Jesus himself promised the eleven remaining disciples that He was returning to the Father to prepare a place for them (and for us). Had it not been so, He would have informed them otherwise (Jn. 14: 2-3). Deep down, everyone yearns for a permanent dwelling, one which they can call their own and cannot be taken away by war, destitution, personal failure, or any necessity requiring us to move from place to place. In our 38 years of marriage, Fran and I have lived in 22 different houses—six different houses in Uganda alone. But our impermanence is trivial²⁸¹ compared to the suffering of all the displaced persons and refugees in this world who have been driven from their homes through violence, war, and poverty. Truly, the new heavens and earth will be a welcome change to believers now living under such circumstances. We don’t know anything certain from Scripture about how Jesus will carve up the earth’s surface for His people. For example, I am not sure what significance

²⁸¹ insignificant

to place on Jesus' promise of cities to the two faithful slaves in the parable of the minas (Lk. 19: 11-27). Apparently, there will be rewards of leadership for faithful believers in the age to come. All I know is that all of us who know Christ will be pleasantly surprised at the abundance of God's fulfilled promises.

Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass. (Joshua 21:45 NASB)

In the same way His promises were kept for Israel, they will be kept for us. There is one important exception. Because the New Covenant is based on "better" promises vouchsafed by God's own oath (Hebrews), and because its fulfillment ultimately depends on God, the new heavens and earth will never spew out its covenant inhabitants as did the land of Canaan. The Holy Spirit will ensure our continued faith and obedience.

E. The Craving for a King—1 Samuel 8

I really don't know where this more properly belongs: in typology, theology, or application. However, I believe I can defend it as typology. When Israel demands a king, they effectively reject the rule of Yahweh over them (v. 7). In this act of unbelief, they were simply doing what they had always done throughout their apostate history (v. 8), so this should not have come as any surprise to Samuel. Israel's desire for a king, by itself, was not the rejection of Yahweh. The Lord had already codified in writing the regulations for kings in Deut. 17: 14-20. Had the Lord absolutely forbidden the institution of kings, He would not have regulated it. The Lord does not regulate what He absolutely forbids. The problem with Israel's desire for a king was in the **kind** of king they wanted—a king like the kings of the other nations, the very kind the Lord did not want (cf. Deut. 17: 15, a king whom **He** would choose).

To be frank, the people did not know what they were asking for, though they thought they did. They thought they wanted a man who would judge them fairly and fight their battles (8: 20), the very thing Yahweh had done with perfect precision and effectiveness throughout their history. They did not reckon with the consequences of this decision, as Samuel tried to explain to them (8: 11-18). The king they wanted would draft their sons and husbands into his army, appointing some of them as warriors and some as farmers and blacksmiths. Even the women would be drafted to cook and make perfume for the royal family, who could number in the hundreds. Some of their choice fields would be confiscated through eminent domain (v. 14).²⁸² Along with all this, they would pay taxes to support the uncontrolled spending of their king and public officials whose appetite for buildings and personal fortune would be endless (v. 15). The list goes on (vv. 16-17). In the end, the people will cry out in distress over the oppression of their own king, but by then it will be too late (v. 18). Does any of this sound familiar?

Well now, after such a morbid description of their future king, surely the people would change their minds—right? Wrong! This dispels the "education fallacy" which argues that if people are simply

²⁸² The practice of governments to take property by force if the use of such property is in the best public interest. Governments generally do not pay fair market price. My own grandfather lost much of his land in Mississippi in this way, leaving my father and his siblings with very little inheritance.

given enough information about what is harmful to them, they will avoid it. Not so. Mere intellectual information may clarify the issue, but it will not transform the individual heart.²⁸³ As one African friend of mine has often said, “We need a theological education which not only informs, but transforms.” And for that, of course, we need the Holy Spirit. Nothing Samuel said about the negative consequences of a king “like the other nations” would change their minds or their hearts.

When Jesus came on the scene, the Jews were still looking for an earthly king like David to fight their battles and deliver them from the tyrant of Rome. They also longed for the days of Solomon when times were more prosperous and silver was so common that it had limited value (1 Ki. 10: 21).²⁸⁴ Had they forgotten Solomon’s other side (1 Kings 12: 10-11)? They were not looking for a man after God’s own heart who would set an example of repentance and faith.

Now let’s cross the gulf of roughly 3,000 years since Samuel to the present day. Has anything essentially changed in Samuel’s description of an earthly king like other nations? And has anything changed about people’s expectations from an earthly king or president? Well, maybe. Answering the second question first, “fighting our battles” has now taken on a far more comprehensive meaning for modern citizens who not only demand the government to protect them from foreign attack but also demand protection from economic hardship—as if the government has a bag of tricks for every conceivable problem plaguing mankind. Whenever times are hard, the public demands the government to “fix it”; and more often than not, its “fix” is more harmful than the problem itself. The very recent history of US government bailouts of large banks and corporations—even AIG, Morgan Stanley, and General Motors—and its “stimulus plan” or electric shock therapy to reboot the US economy, has been one of the most colossal failures of modern economic history.²⁸⁵ But the general public just doesn’t get it, and they continue to demand the government to “do something”. The point is: the president and his government most often don’t know what to do; and if they did, they would be too afraid to do it. (Too many lost votes.)

Although **worshipped as the modern Messiah to right all wrongs**, this mere human messiah (the government) with its president, cabinet, senate, representatives, parliament members, et al, cannot fight all of our battles—not even most of them. They can’t because they are not all-powerful or all-knowing. They are mere men like us. I’m reminded of a statement by Dick Cheney, former vice-president under George W. Bush. During a campaign speech for the first term, Cheney was confronted by a young man in the crowd who demanded, “We are your children; what are you going to do for us?”—to which Cheney responded, “Get a hold of yourself, man; I’m not your father!”²⁸⁶

Typologically, can we not see in any modern country **the same essential fallacy** that we observe in ancient Israel when their true Messiah arrives preaching the kingdom of God and the need for repentance? Israel according to the flesh despised Jesus’ message of repentance, faith, and obedience to the Law of God. They wished for material and political deliverance, something they did not deserve and could not achieve in their state of sin and rebellion. At times, they sought Jesus only

²⁸³ Davis, *1 Samuel*, p. 90

²⁸⁴ The author is obviously using “hyperbole”, exaggeration for effect.

²⁸⁵ I am now reading a book about this, *The Great Deformation*, by David A. Stockman. I don’t understand 90% of the book—written for economists and politicians—but I understand the gist of it. We don’t have true capitalism in the US. We have “crony capitalism” that favors some businesses (the bigger ones like Morgan Stanley) over others.

²⁸⁶ Source unknown

because He gave them bread, not because they wanted relief from sin's oppression (Jn. 6: 26). They also wanted political freedom from Rome, but they despised the only Savior who could grant them the inward freedom that would, in time, produce political freedom as well.²⁸⁷ In the same manner, the citizens of modern countries are hopelessly looking for new "messiahs" who will bring them salvation.

Although Africa certainly comes to mind, the US is not an exception. In one of his campaign speeches, Barach Obama, using biblical allusions, said that he saw the ocean waves calming at the desires of the American people for change.²⁸⁸ But after almost six difficult years in office, this new American messiah has discovered that he can barely create an operational web site for Obamacare, much less calm the ocean waves. The next US president (white or black) will be no messiah, either, but hopefully more informed and less pretentious. Yet, despite the failure of modern government, and the emptiness of materialism, the majority of US citizens continue despising the only Messiah who can give them true liberty and freedom. Modern Africans are following in our train. Jesus is viewed as a Messiah who offers escape from this world, but not transformation within it. He is the great ancestor in the sky. Western ways and western philosophies are being adopted unthinkingly. The West itself is hailed subconsciously by many Africans as the New Messiah, the bringer of prosperity. The soul of Africa is being sold for a bowl of soup.

Answering the first question, nothing has essentially changed in terms of the description of oppressive powers granted by the people to earthly kings or governments. Although the military draft is not instituted in many countries, young men in the military still fight wars they often do not understand or wars which unlawfully attempt to seize the land and commodities of other nations.²⁸⁹ Billions of dollars in material and human resources are siphoned away from the private economy through taxation to support the ever-growing appetites of government bureaucrats and their bloated staffs who falsely believe they have solutions—or who simply want the perpetuation of the fraud with extraordinary personal empires.

The oppressive government powers throughout the continent of Africa have proven without any reasonable doubt that the promises of prosperity and liberty by political candidates were idle (or "idol") promises. Beginning their terms with the promise and hope of modern messiahs, they have become tyrants and oppressors of their own people on a massive scale (Idi Amin, Robert Mugabe, Charles Taylor, Daniel arap Moi, Mobutu, et al.²⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the people—too ignorant to understand Samuel's warning, or too sinful to obey it (v. 19)—keep crying for more government, thus, progressively selling their freedoms for government handouts. As Franklin D. Roosevelt's right hand man once said, "Tax and tax, spend and spend, because the people are too...dumb to understand"²⁹¹—a modern allusion to the cry of the Israelites, "No, but there shall be a king over us." People still prefer government solutions to Biblical wisdom and divine law. In the **reverse** of King

²⁸⁷ The Christian faith, properly understood and practiced by a critical mass of a population, will produce political freedom. This can be historically documented and has been noted in Alvin Schmidt's *How Christianity Changed the World* and David Noebel's *Understanding the Times*.

²⁸⁸ Or some such nonsense. I don't remember his exact words on public TV.

²⁸⁹ Resources of oil, gold, minerals. This is not a reference to the US which has not used one drop of Iraqi oil which it did not pay for with American money and blood—to the tune of almost 5000 lost lives and over one trillion dollars.

²⁹⁰ See George Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos and Africa Unchained*

²⁹¹ Source unknown

David, men instead proclaim, “Let us now fall into the hand of men, for their mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of God” (cf. 2 Samuel 24:14 NASB).

Happily, true believers presently enjoy the King who rules over our hearts and gives us real freedom. One day, this King will come again to consummate His kingdom over the whole cosmos, ruling righteously and justly with all wisdom and knowledge. He will employ our participation and labor, facilitating the fullest expression of human potential lived in obedience to His law (Gen. 1: 28).

F. The Exodus

In Waltke’s opinion, out of all the OT types, none surpasses that of the exodus from Egypt. The exodus had formative influence in the self-identity of Israel (symbolized in the Passover), and it continues to form the self-identity of believers (the Lord’s Supper). The correspondences between Moses and Joshua—including his assurance of presence (Josh. 3: 7), the drying up of the Jordan River (Josh. 4: 23), the instructions to remove his sandals (Josh. 5: 13-15), crossing the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month (Josh. 4: 19), the same day as the beginning of Passover (Ex. 12: 3)—all point to the conquest of Canaan as another exodus. The exodus also became a type of Israel’s deliverance from Assyrian and Babylonian exile. As we have seen earlier, Abraham’s exodus from Egypt prefigured Israel’s exodus from Egypt much later.²⁹²

Likewise, when Jesus was speaking with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, they were discussing the “departure” (*exodus*, Greek) that Jesus was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk. 9: 31). As the new Moses, Christ conquers sin (spiritual Egypt) in His death and resurrection and makes His exodus **out of** this world to reign at the right hand of God **over** this world. Moreover, in His victory procession, Christ carries with Him to heaven a host of captives (Eph. 4: 8)—Christians from every tribe, tongue, and nation—conquered by Christ but victorious over the world (1 Jn. 5: 4). As the exodus from Egypt represented the departure of the Israelites from the idolatry and sin of Egypt to serve the true God in the land of promise, Christians by faith make their exodus from this world—the dominion of sin and death—to the next world, the dominion of righteousness and life—the new heavens and earth. This is symbolized in our baptism in which we are baptized into Christ as the Israelites were baptized into Moses in the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10: 2). Moreover, our final exodus will take place at the second coming, the consummation of the exodus, when we are caught up in the air to meet the Lord (1 Thes. 4: 17) and all our enemies will be defeated (1 Thes. 5: 2-3).

Summary and Conclusion

Through these few snapshots, I hope the student concludes that much of the NT theology he believes finds its source in the Old Testament. The Bible is one book with a central message retold over and over again from different angles and perspectives. From any human standpoint, it is a work of art; and for this reason the Bible is admired by literary critics who do not believe its message but appreciate its literature. From the believer’s standpoint, the intricate connectedness of all its parts—with so many authors writing over a period of 1500 years—proves that this is not simply a human book, but a divine one. The typology of the OT allows the reader to see Christ and His people through a prism of multiple colors and shades, each one shedding light on different aspects of Christ’s work and His relationship with His church.

²⁹² Waltke, pp. 138-139

Lesson Questions for OT Narratives

I would like to incorporate some of the best answers to these questions in a future edition of *Interpreting OT Narratives*. If I use your examples, I will credit you in the footnotes. I admit that this is a difficult and time-consuming exercise, but upon completion, you will have gained a lot of practical experience in interpreting and preaching the OT.

The questions are designed to challenge all students up through the masters level. The instructor may wish to take some of the questions from the exams provided (attached in emails) for students at the certificate, diploma, and bachelor's levels. However, all students should strive toward a working knowledge of this textbook.

Lesson One—Getting Started

1. Discuss the need for both intellectual effort and the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture.
2. What is the difference between illumination and inspiration?
3. Name three checks and balances to our interpretation of Scripture. That is, what three things should be considered to keep us from making mistakes in our interpretation? Explain what they mean?
4. Why is the literary analysis of the OT necessary for interpretation? Illustrate your answer from Genesis 12: 10-20.
5. What are the dangers of polyvalence?
6. What three things make up the full value of a text? Explain what they are.
7. What are four important questions to ask when interpreting OT scripture?

8. What is the suggested meaning (connotation) of the stories of Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah the Hittite?
9. Give three examples (not used in your textbook) of what the author says (denotation) which helps us interpret the OT story.
10. Give three examples (not used in your textbook) of what the author does not say but implies.

Lesson Two—Asking the Right Questions

- 1-2. Define: Denotation. Give two examples from the Bible not found in your textbook. Explain your answer.
- 3-4. Define: Connotation. Give two examples from the Bible not found in your textbook. Explain your answer.
- 5-6. Give two examples (not found in the textbook) of what the author leaves out of the story that is important to determining his purpose. Explain your answer.
- 7-8. Give two examples (not found in the textbook) of how we may determine the author's purpose by how he structures his story. Explain your answer.
- 9-10. Give two examples (not found in the textbook) of the writer's purpose in writing the story. Support your conclusion with appropriate analysis. Explain your answer.

Lesson Three—Structure Implies Meaning (Part I)

- 1-3. Give 3 examples of a circular pattern or inclusion (not in textbook). Explain your answer.
- 4-5. Give 2 examples of contrasting patterns (not in textbook). Explain your answer.
- 6-8. Give 3 examples of reverse symmetry (not in textbook). Explain how each symmetry helps interpret the narrative.
- 9-10. Give 2 examples of forward symmetry (not in textbook). Explain how each symmetry helps interpret the narrative.

Lesson Four—Structure Implies Meaning (Part II)

- 1-4. Give 4 examples of dramatic resolution (not in textbook). In this exercise...
 - demonstrate how “the dramatic problem sets the narrative in motion”;
 - how “rising action raises tension”;
 - how “the turning point shifts toward reversing the problem”;
 - how “falling action continues the unwinding of tension initiated by the turning point”;
 - and how “resolution wraps up the loose ends of the narrative”.
- 5-8. Develop the structure of two larger narratives in the OT (not in textbook) similar to the ones developed from 1 Samuel 4—7, 2 Samuel 21—24, Daniel 2—7, and 1 Kings 21—22.
9. Give one example of clusters of stories (not in textbook).
10. Give one example of a confirming parallel and one example of a contrasting parallel (not in textbook).

Lesson Five—On Stage with Biblical Characters

- 1-10. Develop scene divisions in three OT stories (not in your textbook).

- Demonstrate how you determined the scene divisions by using the scene markers in the textbook: changes in time (subsequent, antecedent, simultaneous), changes in setting, differences in characters, changes in mode of narration, environment, etc.
- Summarize each scene as accurately as possible. Indicate whether the scene is straight narrative or dramatic mode, panoramic or close-up.
- Include comments about visual, tactile, auditory, et al imagery if present. How did the process of dividing the narrative into scenes help you interpret the narrative?

Lesson Six—Getting Technical

1-3. Give the “Earliest Likely Date of Composition” of three OT books (other than books dated in the textbook). You do not have to give a numerical date (e.g. 587 BC). Give the date in terms of events—e.g. before, during, after the exile, before the return to Judah, the time of a king, etc. Justify your conclusion. **Note: Do not consult your study Bibles for this exercise.**

4-6. Give the “Latest Reasonable Date of Composition” of three OT books. (See instructions above).

7-8. How would your approximate date for **two** of the books above affect the way you preach these books to a modern audience? Choose a text from each of the six books and explain in a few sentences how the dating would affect your preaching.

9-10. Distinguish the difference between systematic theology and biblical theology. How does each one reorganize the contents of the Bible. Are both needed? Justify your answer.

Lesson Seven—Samples of OT Theology

1-3. Demonstrate the “Quad Promise” in three OT narratives (not in your textbook). Justify your answer.

4-6. Give three stories (not in your textbook) demonstrating three different theological themes in the OT—e.g. providence, sovereignty, moral character, etc. They do not have to be any of the themes mentioned in the textbook.

7-10. Give four examples of NT redefinitions of OT realities (not found in my text, etc). Explain each one, providing OT and NT references.

Lesson Eight—Snapshots

1-5. Choose five OT narratives (not in the textbook) and develop their type-antitype relationship.

6-10. Take the same five narratives in 1-5 and summarize how you would preach or teach each of these stories to your congregation or Bible study group.

Lesson Answers for OT Narratives

Lesson One—Getting Started

1. Discuss the need for both intellectual effort and the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture.

The Bible has both a divine author and a human author. The human authors were affected and influenced by their ancient culture, political and economic circumstances, their education, personality, audiences, background, and so forth—all the influences which make up what is called the organic inspiration of Scripture as opposed to the erroneous mechanical view of inspiration in which the Holy Spirit dictates the text to the human author who is passive in the process. All of these factors must be considered in order for us to understand what they wrote and why they wrote it. Therefore, interpretation has a scientific element—an intellectual element—which cannot be bypassed. To be effective interpreters, we must think clearly and logically about how the Bible came to us progressively through history, doing the proper research to determine the meaning.

On the other hand, the Bible also has a divine author, the Holy Spirit, without whose help correct Biblical interpretation is impossible regardless of our interpretive skills. Often the Holy Spirit brings us beyond our personal skills by revealing truth to us which is not derived from diligent study. A burst of insight into the text comes to us suddenly like a ray of sunshine through the trees far more profound than anything we have learned from personal examination of the text or from our

examination of commentaries. This is the work of the Spirit who will not limit Himself or His ministry to scholars or trained preachers.

But further, the Spirit often works against our study of the text which is clouded by preconceptions (unproven assumptions) that we have brought to the text because of our upbringing and culture. God loves us so much that often He will bless us with the truth in spite of all our effort. This does not imply that we must avoid study in our quest for truth, but that we must not arrogantly believe that our study is infallible or that God is obligated to bless our labors under all circumstances.

Too often one or the other of these elements—tools or power—is ignored or marginalized (set aside as unimportant). When the intellectual tools of interpretation are over-emphasized, the interpreter falls into the error of arrogance, thinking that he does not need to depend upon the illumination of the Holy Spirit to help him understand the text.

2. What is the difference between illumination and inspiration?

Throughout the history of God's people, the Spirit has illumined our understanding of His written word. Illumination is the ongoing help of the Spirit for every believer for understanding the Bible. Inspiration is the non-continuing work of the Spirit in inspiring human authors to write the Scriptures.

3. Name three checks and balances to our interpretation of Scripture. That is, what three things should be considered to keep us from making mistakes in our interpretation? Explain what they mean?

(1) Theological heritage—the past illumination of the church throughout its history. The accumulation of biblical knowledge throughout the history of the church.

All the great ecumenical councils of the church, the works of the church's most gifted theologians, its creeds and confessions, etc. fit into this category. To ignore these confessions and theological works is the same thing as ignoring the progressive work of the Holy Spirit in teaching His church. Just as God did not produce the Scriptures in one day, but directed their writing over a period of about 1500 years, so He did not grant full understanding of the Scriptures in one day, but gradually through history. For this reason, no one can ever say, "I have the exhaustive meaning of this text of Scripture", although he may be interpreting it correctly.

(2) Present community—the continuing illumination of the church in the present day.

The "present community" includes the interpretive work within the church today as the Holy Spirit continues to illumine the meaning of Scripture. Just as we cannot ignore His illuminative work in the past, we also cannot ignore the teaching ministry of the Spirit presently going on in the church today. The hermeneutical activity of the present community includes the "constitutional documents, position papers, advisory letters, and disciplinary cases" of various denominations which are continually responding to the present problems and needs of the church. It also includes the theological writings and research of theological societies, Bible colleges, and seminaries. Present community also includes the week to week teaching ministry of pastors/elders and other non-ordained teachers who labor in the word for the benefit of the local church.

(3) Private judgment—what we learn from the text through personal study.

This consists of what we learn from the Bible through private, independent study. With all the theological helps and commentaries, private judgment in the West is sorely neglected as a means of attaining knowledge from the Bible, but God expects every individual believer to do his best at interpreting the Bible for himself. Although it would be a rare occurrence for anyone to “discover” something from the Bible that no one else has ever seen before, it should not be a rare occurrence for non-scholars to discern the true meaning—though not exhaustive meaning—of a text from their own private study apart from any reliance on scholarly works.

4. Why is the literary analysis of the OT necessary for interpretation? Illustrate your answer from Genesis 12: 10-20.

In comparison to narratives and poetry, direct ethical teaching, in the form of commandments, comprises very little of the OT. The OT is primarily poetry and narrative (stories). Therefore, we must learn to interpret the OT with an emphasis on literary analysis, not with an emphasis on theological or moral categories. Theological and moral principles will become evident as we carefully examine the literary units of the OT, but if we approach the text primarily with systematic theology or ethics as our first goals, we will miss much of the purpose for which the text was written.

Genesis 12: 10-20 illustrates how the deliverance from Egypt is foreshadowed in Abraham’s and Sarah’s deliverance from Pharaoh. God did for Israel what He did for Abraham. Thus, the slaves coming out of Egypt should interpret their deliverance as the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham.

5. What are the dangers of polyvalence?

The Roman Catholic Church held people in bondage to the tyranny of allegorical interpretation for hundreds of years, claiming that the interpretation of the Bible was too complicated for the average believer. Present-day pastors do the same with their far-fetched, fanciful interpretations of the Bible, particularly OT passages, which they interpret any way they wish to promote their own agendas. On the other hand, if a passage means what the original author intended it to mean, then the only responsible interpreter is one who attempts through diligent study and prayer to discover the meaning for the original reader. On the other hand, if a passage means many things, it means nothing.

6. What three things make up the full value of a text? Explain what they are.

- (1) Original meaning—the meaning intended by the author for the original audience
- (2) Biblical elaborations—what other scriptures say about the text which go beyond the original meaning of the text. Such elaborations illustrate established biblical doctrine from other texts.
- (3) Legitimate applications of a text based on the original meaning. Such applications are similar to those intended by the author.

7. What are four important questions to ask when interpreting OT scripture?

- (1) What did the author choose to say, and what did he choose not to say?
- (2) How did the author arrange his story (or stories)?
- (3) Why did the author write the story?

(4) So What?—How does the story apply to my life and/or the life of the corporate church?

8. What is the suggested meaning (connotation) of the stories of Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah the Hittite?

God will bring Gentiles into His kingdom in answer to His promise to Abraham that he will be a blessing to all nations.

9. Give three examples (not used in your textbook) of what the author says (denotation) which helps us interpret the OT story.

[No answers provided.]

10. Give three examples (not used in your textbook) of what the author does not say but implies.

[No answers provided.]

Lesson Two—Asking the Right Questions

[No answers provided.]

Lesson Three—Structure Implies Meaning (Part I)

[No answers provided]

Lesson Four—Structure Implies Meaning (Part II)

[No answers provided]

Lesson Five—On Stage with Biblical Characters

[No answers provided]

Lesson Six—Getting Technical

[No answers provided for questions 7-8]

9-10. Distinguish the difference between systematic theology and biblical theology. How does each one reorganize the contents of the Bible. Are both needed? Justify your answer.

Systematic theologians attempt to discover the doctrinal themes of the Bible (the doctrines of God, man, sin, Christ, salvation, etc.) and formulate them into a coherent (logical), consistent whole. This is possible because God is self-consistent, never contradicting Himself either in the revelation of His nature in OT narratives or His commandments in the OT or NT. **Biblical theologians** attempt to discover the progress of redemption from the beginning of revelation to its culmination in Jesus Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, followed by the continuing elaboration of Christ's salvific event in the epistles through to Revelation. Thus, the study of Biblical theology is the

exploration of how God progressively revealed Himself through history from Adam until Christ, who is the fullness of God. Systematic theology views the whole panorama of revelation at a glance and explores how OT revelation sheds light on NT revelation and vice versa (the other way around) without too much consideration of when or how in redemptive history a certain truth is revealed. Biblical theology views revelation in stages, e.g. how God revealed Himself first to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, etc., noting the differences in these epochs of revelation.

Pratt says that Biblical theologians wished to...

...discard the scholastic concept of the Bible as a **resource for doctrine** and to treat Scripture primarily as a **resource for reconstructing God's progressive redemption of humanity**... Many leading twentieth-century critical interpreters focused their efforts on understanding the mighty acts of God recorded in the Bible.

...Biblical Theology assumed that this redemptive-historical orientation was central to the Bible itself.... "The Hebrew language was one of action, and the God of the Hebrews was understood as One who acted."

Biblical theology took an abrupt turn in the 1960's when the majority of liberal scholars began accepting "scientific" or natural explanations for all the mighty acts of God in scripture. Others in the movement rightly pointed out that they could not have their cake and eat it too. If none of these events recorded in the narratives were miraculous, then there were no mighty redemptive acts of God in history. God was essentially out of the picture, like the cosmic clock maker who has already wound the clock and left it to tick on its own. So why was Biblical theology so important? Modern evangelical scholars have since followed in the footsteps of men like Gerhardus Vos who organized the Bible according to epochs of revelation history, claiming that this is the Bible's own method of organization. Pratt disagrees, arguing first that many books like Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes have little to do with redemptive history; and second, that the Bible's own organization exists in the form of books: Genesis, Chronicles, Ezra, and so on, not epochs of redemptive events. It is therefore, just as ambiguous and arbitrary for biblical theologians to claim to have the Bible's own organizational paradigm as for systematic theologians to claim that the Bible is organized along doctrinal themes—something no systematic theologian has ever claimed.

With disclaimers for both systematic and biblical theology, Pratt argues for using both in our study of the Bible, remembering that neither one is infallible. Both systematic and biblical theologians must be accountable to one another for their findings.

The great value of a redemptive-historical approach is its ability to help us reassess the meaning of Old Testament narratives. **It is easy to be so preoccupied with systematic theological questions that we miss much of what these stories teach.** We force them into our theological system, never noticing how they challenge our preconceptions. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to go to the extreme of ignoring traditional theological concerns. **The writers of Old Testament narratives gave their readers a system of beliefs through their texts.** They were concerned with **logical patterning** of beliefs as well as with the history of revelation. To understand their stories properly, we must set them within the framework of logical parameters as well as historical development.

As a result, we must not set either Biblical Theology or systematic theology above the other; we must put them on equal footing. Both can misrepresent Scripture and both can reflect the teaching of Scripture. Both outlooks are ways of synthesizing material into useful formats, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. As we learn to employ both methods, we will grow in our understanding of Old Testament narratives.

Lesson Seven—Samples of OT Theology

[No answers provided]

Lesson Eight—Snapshots

[No answers provided]

Author's Biography

Born in 1952, I grew up in a rural town in Mississippi not much bigger than some of the larger villages in Africa. I received the Bachelor of Science degree (BS) from Mississippi State University which included courses in biology, biochemistry, and animal physiology in pursuit of a career in medicine. However, the Lord redirected my steps to theology (Prov. 16: 9).

Shortly after graduating from MSU, I married Fran Wiggins, a girl I met in German class in my first year of college. We were married in May, 1976, and two weeks later I entered Greek class at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS—a reformed and evangelical seminary in the US. I have two master's degrees from RTS—the MDiv. and the MCE (or MA in Christian education). I am presently pursuing the DMin. with Miami International Seminary. Fran and I have been married almost 37 years; we have four grown children and seven grand children, two of whom were adopted from orphanages in Ukraine. Second only to my relationship with Jesus Christ, Fran is the best part of my biography and a very important part of my ministry in Africa.

Before coming to Uganda as a teacher in 2003, I had been a headmaster in a Christian school and a pastor of two small churches. However, twenty-five years or so of my work experience has been in manual labor—renovating old homes for resale, cabinet-making, and house painting.

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