Expositional Preaching from OT Narratives

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Introduction:
1. Narratives make up a large portion of Scriptures, so we should give attention to this subject.

2. Since the narratives have too often been handled in ways that dishonor the text and Author, we need to be careful to treat them properly.

I. The Elements of OT Narrative

A. Scene

“Each scene represents something that took place at some particular time or place. In this regard, then, the scene acts much like the paragraph does in regular prose writing, usually supplying one main idea for each scene” (Kaiser, Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament, p. 64).

B. Plot

“Basically, plot refers to action. It consists of a sequence of events that usually hinge on a conflict or crisis. The events in the story move through this conflict or crisis towards some kind of resolution” (Steven D. Matthewson, The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative, p. 44).

1. Exposition

“The exposition provides the information that sets up the story. It introduces the characters, informing us of their names, traits, physical appearance, state in life, and relationships. It may also describe the geographical or historical setting…. Whatever the story writer includes, it will help the reader understand the action that follows” (Matthewson, p. 45).

2. Crisis

“From exposition, the plot moves into the crisis, variously described as the complication, the conflict, or the tension. Once the conflict appears, the tension rises as the story moves toward its resolution. For this reason, some scholars point to an inciting moment or occasioning incident when the problem appears for the first time. Subsequent development is described as complication or rising tension. Scholars describe the highest level of intensity in the conflict as the climax or peak moment” (Matthewson, p. 45).
3. Resolution

“Eventually, the story moves from crisis to resolution and the plot descends rapidly from its climax to a solution of the original conflict” (Matthewson, p. 46).

“What matters most in the analysis of a narrative, we think, is to pinpoint the resolution of the plot. This moment, more than any other, is the one the reader is waiting for. It is also easier to uncover the resolution than the other moments. After this resolution, the dramatic tension drops and can even disappear completely” (Ska cited in Matthewson, p. 46).

4. Conclusion

“Finally, stories end in a conclusion or denouement. The latter term refers to the tying up of loose ends. The conclusion or denouement generally sums up the outcome of the story or the fate of the main characters in the wake of the resolution. Or the conclusion can offer a special message to the reader. Some narratives do not have a conclusion distinguishable from the resolution” (Matthewson, p. 47).

C. Point of View

“Point of view refers to the perspective from which the story is told. Usually it is the prerogative of the narrator to express the stance of viewpoint from which the story is being told…the point of view supplies the lens through which the reader, interpreter, and expositor may relate to the acts or events of each scene” (Kaiser, p. 67).

“A storyteller’s perspective determines how listeners experience and understand a story” (Matthewson, p. 71).

D. Characterization

“Interpreting Old Testament stories requires us to pay attention to the characters and how they develop. Because plot is primary, our analysis should attempt to specify the function of characters in relationship to the plot” (Matthewson, p. 57).

1. Identifying Characters

a. Major or minor—based on the size of the character’s role in the story.

b. Type

1) Protagonist—central characters who are indispensable to the plot
2) Antagonist—main adversaries or forces lined up against the central characters
3) Foil—characters that expand the story by serving as a contrast or parallel to the central character.
2. Gathering Information on Characters

“Once an analysis of the way a narrative is structured has been secured, it is important to begin discovering what a narrative expresses. The substance of what a narrative portrays can be found especially in its use of character. The real movement of a narrative comes from the characters and their actions and speeches. Therefore, it is just as impossible to portray a character apart from the events as it is to depict the events as separate from the character” (Kaiser, p. 68).

a. A character’s own actions and his/her interaction with other characters.
b. A character’s speeches.
c. The speeches of other characters about a specific character.
d. The narrator’s specific comments about a character (including names given).

E. Setting

“After scrutinizing the plot and characters of a story, an interpreter needs to consider two issues related to a story’s setting or environment. One issue concerns the specific place and time in which the story occurs. This is the story’s historical, cultural, and geographical setting. The other issue concerns the position of the story within the flow of stories that make up a book. Scholars often refer to this as the literary setting” (Matthewson, p. 67).
III. The Homiletics of OT Narrative

A. Identifying the Textual Theme

1. Components


2. Process

   “Obviously, determining the big idea of Old Testament narrative poses a steeper challenge than other literary genres. Stories work through indirection, conveying ideas in a more subtle way than poetry or prophecy” (Matthewson, pp. 84-85).

   a. Repeated words or concepts

   b. Pivotal statements in the dialogue

   c. Conflict-Resolution

   d. Find the underlying question

   e. Vision of God

   f. Depravity Factor

B. Formulating the Sermon’s Focus

C. Designing the Sermon

   1. Inductive vs. “Deductive”

   2. Flashback Approach

   3. First Person Narratives