

# Expository Preaching in Hebrew Narrative

by  
William D. Barrick, Th.D.  
Professor of Old Testament  
The Master's Seminary  
Sun Valley, CA

- 1. Definition:** Narrative in the Hebrew Bible consists of the relating of a series of events in sequential (whether logical or chronological) order. Verbs employed in Hebrew narrative are primarily *wayyiqtol*s (*waw*-consecutive imperfects). Interruptions in the narrative occur by means of the usage of non-standard constructions (e.g., disjunctive clauses). Hebrew narrative writers also utilize embedded quotations and dialogue (reported speech) to develop characters and contribute to development of the plot or story line.

## Resources:

- Chisholm, Robert B., Jr. *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998. [Especially, pp. 119-42, 149-69, and 187-200.]
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook*. Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2006.
- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. "Narrative." In *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament*. Ed. by D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, Jr., 69-88. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003. (63-82)
- Mathews, Kenneth A. "Preaching Historical Narrative." In *Reclaiming the Prophetic Mantle: Preaching the Old Testament Faithfully*. Ed. by George L. Klein, 19-50. Reprint; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998.
- Overstreet, R. Larry. *Biographical Preaching: Bringing Bible Characters to Life*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001.
- van Wolde, Ellen, ed. *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible*. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2002. [A collection of technical essays dealing with Hebrew syntax and Hebrew narrative.]

## 2. Elements of Hebrew Narrative

- **Scene:** A segment of the story with a specific time and place with two or more characters.
- **Plot:** Sequential movement toward a climax and resolution.
- **Point of View:** The storyteller's perspective.
- **Characterization:** Development of characters, their actions and their words.
- **Setting:** Space and time location of the story.
- **Dialogue:** Conversations between characters or groups.
- **Leitwort/Key Words:** Repetition and pattern of leading word(s) throughout the story.
- **Structure:** A deliberate arrangement of the story.
- **Rhetorical Devices:** Literary devices employed in narrative may include inclusion, repetition, chiasmus, ellipsis, metaphor, irony, and paronomasia.

## 3. Guidelines for Exegeting Hebrew Narrative

- 3.1 Identify the limits of the pericope.
- 3.2 Identify the structure of the pericope.
- 3.3 Identify the scenes with regard to place, time, and characters.
- 3.4 Determine the point of view.
- 3.5 List the characters and their relationships.
- 3.6 Analyze the plot.
- 3.7 Mark the details of each scene.
- 3.8 Examine the dialogue and identify its contribution to the advancement of the plot.
- 3.9 Examine the details for each unit within each scene to identify their relationships and the manner of advancing the plot.
- 3.10 Identify the exegetical significance of each literary/rhetorical device employed by the author in the pericope.

“We cover a number of [stylistic characteristics] by saying [the author] seems to have had an utter fascination with words. He clearly enjoyed assonance, for example. The cardinal instance occurs at 2:10. ...

“Assonance yields the potential of punning, and punning, along with other kinds of word-play, was a favorite device of the Ruth story-teller. One of his

techniques is to establish a particular Hebrew vocable as a key word in a particular scene and to repeat it frequently throughout the scene, often picking it up once more in another scene to serve as a linking device. Another related technique is to plumb the assorted nuances of a particular vocable; this is done with particular effect in the scene at the threshing floor. Furthermore, sometimes it is a whole sentence (see 2:5, 11) or a phrase (see 2:2, 10, 13) which provides the link.

“Even more important is a series of words which occur only twice, or at least very infrequently; these serve to round out the themes of the story. This is such a striking characteristic of Ruth that it is worth our while to list the instances:

‘Lad(s)’	—	1:5; 4:16
<i>hesed</i>	—	1:8; 2:20; 3:10
‘Security’	—	1:9; 3:1
‘Cling/attach/stay close’	—	1:14; 2:8, 21, 23
‘Lodge’	—	1:16; 3:13
‘Brought back/restorer’	—	1:21; 4:15
‘Empty’	—	1:21; 3:17
‘Covenant brother/covenant circle’	—	2:1; 3:2
‘Substance/worthy’	—	2:1; 3:11 (cf. 4:11)
‘Take special note/regard’	—	2:10; 2:19
‘Wing(s)’	—	2:12; 3:9

“... Double occurrences of the same word are not simply a matter of repetition; they constituted brackets, as plot problems are transferred from one set of circumstances to another, from difficulty to be overcome to resolution of that difficulty. The first use of the word constitutes a foreshadowing of what is to come, perhaps not recognized as such until the term reappears. It takes an attentive audience to keep them in mind. ... One can well imagine that the ancient audience would have experienced repeated delight, no matter how many times they heard the tale retold, at the discovery of these devices....

“These long-range word-plays are the most persistent examples of the story-teller’s use of *inclusio*, the bracketing device in which a composer returns to a note he has already sounded in order to wrap it in an envelope. Another kind of *inclusio*, usually bracketing short units, is signaled by the phenomenon of *chiasm*, a technique in which the order of a pair of words is reversed on the second occurrence. As examples, consider

husband/boys in 1:3 with boys (lads) husband in 1:5,  
go/return in 1:8 with return/go in 1:12,  
kiss/lament in 1:9 with lament/kiss in 1:14  
Shadday/Yahweh in 1:20-21a with Yahweh/Shadday in 1:21b,  
elders/people in 4:9 with people/elders in 4:11, and  
Mahlon/Kilyon in 1:2, 5 with Kilyon/Mahlon in 4:9.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 7 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 13, 14.

3.11 Research the geographical, historical, and cultural aspects of the setting.

3.12 Examine the canonical and theological implications of the pericope and the narrative structure within which it is embedded.

3.13 Identify the applicational implications of the pericope.

#### 4. ANE Background

##### Ancient Near Eastern Backgrounds



To which group of people are the Sea Peoples (whose migration routes are depicted in the map above) related?

Of what significance might this information be to the exegete?

How might this information be employed by the expositor?

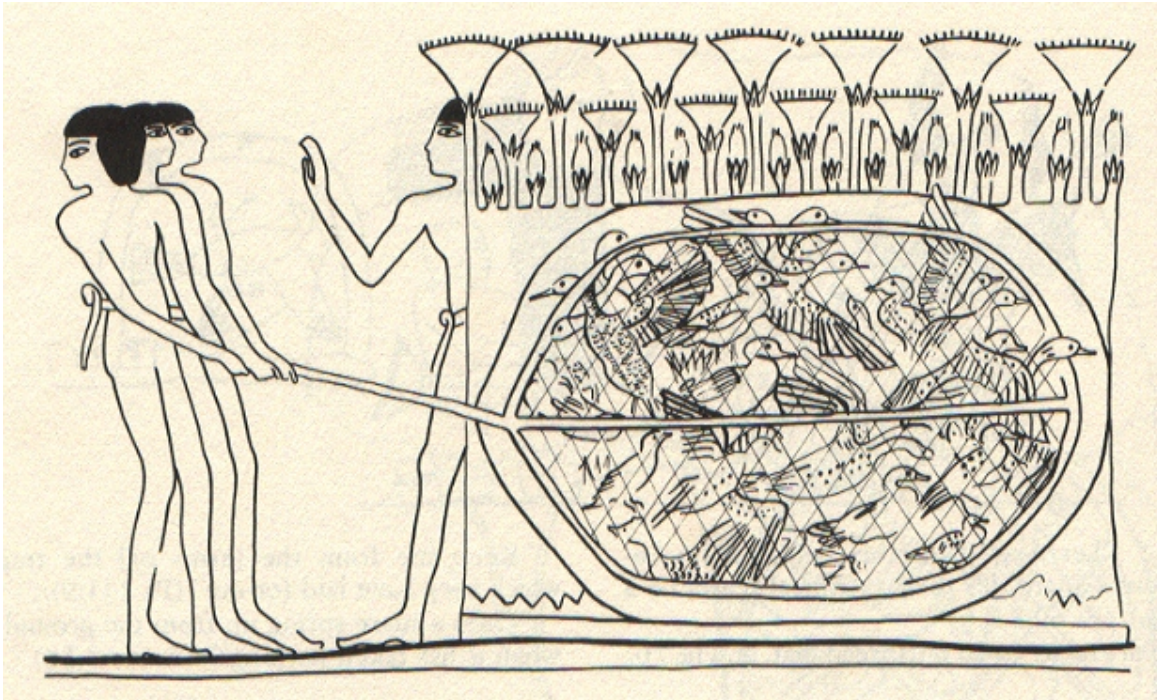
What other examples of similar material and information could be of use in preaching the OT?



The photo above is Shechem (modern Nablus). The view is from the east. Which mountain is Ebal and which is Gerizim?

Identify the photo below. What OT events does it represent?





Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of The Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. by Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 92 (Fig. 115).

## 5. One-on-One with a Text: Judges 16:1-3

### Resources:

- Block, Daniel I. *Judges, Ruth*. New American Commentary 6. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.
- Cundall, Arthur E. "Judges: An Introduction and Commentary." In *Judges, Ruth*. Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, 7-215. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968.
- Wolf, Herbert. "Judges." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. 12 vols. Ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin, 3:373-506. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.
- Wood, Leon. *Distressing Days of the Judges*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975.

### 5.1 Identify the limits of the pericope.

- The cycles in the Book of Judges:
  - Rebellion: 3:7 – "The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD"; cp. 2:11.
  - Retribution: 3:8 – "Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of"; cp. 2:14.

- Request: 3:9 – “When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD”; cp. 2:18.
- Rescue: 3:9 – “the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them”; 3:10 – “The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel”; cp. 2:16.
- Rest: 3:11 – “Then the land had rest forty years”
- Samson story: Judges 13–16
  - Resource:** Waltke, Bruce K. *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007. See pp. 607-13.
  - Rebellion: 13:1a – “Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD.”
  - Retribution: 13:1b – “so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.”
  - Request: cp. 13:8.
  - Rescue: 13:5 – “For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”
  - Rest: 16:31 – “Thus he had judged Israel twenty years.”
  - Rebellion: 17:1 – “Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah” and 17:7 – “Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who as a Levite” (cp. 19:1, “there was a certain Levite”); 17:6 – “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (cp. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

## 5.2 Identify the structure of the pericope.

Note that the Masoretes took 12:15 and 13:1 to be major section breaks. The **פ** indicates a paragraph division. In the MT the **פ** the space following the **פ** is blank for the remainder of the line and the next paragraph commences on the next line. **פ** is the abbreviation for פְּתוּחַ (“open”), referring to an “open paragraph.” The MT also employs **ס** to identify what is termed a “closed [סְתוּמָה] paragraph.” After **ס** the line contains a small amount of blank space (more than normally found between verses or words) and then the line continues with the next paragraph. Therefore, **פ** is the more major break that might contain within its section a number of occurrences of the **ס**.

12:15 וַיִּמָּט עֲבֹדוֹן בֶּן־הַלֵּל הַפְּרָעִתוֹנִי  
וַיִּקְבֵּר בַּפְּרָעִתוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲפְרַיִם בְּהַר הָעֵמֶלְקִי: פ

13:1 וַיִּסְפוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה  
וַיִּתְּנֵם יְהוָה בְּיַד־פְּלִשְׁתִּים אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה: פ

Next, note the employment of macrosyntactic וַיְהִי to commence the following narrative section:

13:2 וַיְהִי אִישׁ אֶחָד מִצְרַעָה מִמּוֹשְׁפַחַת הַדְּנִי וְשֵׁמוֹ מְנוּחַ  
וְאִשְׁתּוֹ עַקְרָה וְלֹא יָלְדָה:

- Observe the subsequent repetitions of the various פ and ס paragraph markers and the macrosyntactic וַיְהִי.
  - פ: 13:7, 25; 14:4, 19; 15:20; 16:23, 31
  - ס: 13:18; 15:8
  - וַיְהִי: 13:20 (concluding and followed in 13:21 by a disjunctive clause); 14:11 (concluding; but followed by *wayyiqtol* in v. 12); 14:15 (initial); 14:17 (internal); 15:1 (initial); 15:17 (internal); 16:4 (initial); 16:16 (initial); 16:21 (internal); 16:25 (initial); 17:1
- Develop an outline that takes these markers into account.
- Note the use of disjunctive clauses as markers: esp. 16:31b

16:31 וַיִּרְדּוּ אָחִיו וְכָל־בֵּית אָבִיהוּ וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֹתוֹ  
וַיַּעֲלוּ וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אוֹתוֹ בֵּין צְרַעָה וּבֵין אֲשֶׁתָּאֵל בְּקִבְר מְנוּחַ אָבִיו  
וְהוּא שָׁפֵט אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה: פ

### 5.3 Identify the scenes with regard to place, time, and characters.

- 13:2-24 – the messenger of YHWH, Manoah and his wife.
- 13:25-15:20 – Samson's Timnite affairs
- 16:1-31 – Samson's Gazite affairs

### 5.4 Determine the point of view.

### 5.5 List the characters and their relationships.

- 16:1 – Samson and a Gazite prostitute
- 16:2 – the Gazites



5.6 Analyze the plot.

For a short passage like 16:1-3, a logical diagram can be of great help in carrying out further examination of the text:

1a		1 וַיִּלְךָ שִׁמְשׁוֹן עִזָּתָהּ
1ba		וַיֵּרֶא-שָׁם אִשָּׁה ↔ זִוְנָה
1bb		וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ:
2aa		2 לְעִזָּתִים   לֵאמֹר
2ab	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">בָּא שִׁמְשׁוֹן הִנֵּה</div>	
2ag		וַיִּסְבּוּ
2ad		וַיֵּאָרְבוּ- לוֹ
		כָּל-הַלַּיְלָה
		בְּשַׁעַר הָעִיר
2ba		וַיִּתְחַרְשׁוּ כָּל-הַלַּיְלָה
		לֵאמֹר
2bb	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">עַד-אֹר הַבֶּקֶר וַהֲרַגְנָהּ:</div>	
3aa		3 וַיִּשְׁכַּב שִׁמְשׁוֹן
		עַד-חֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה
3ab		וַיִּקָּם
		בְּחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה
3ag		וַיֵּאָחֵז בְּדִלְתוֹת שַׁעַר-הָעִיר
		וּבִשְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת
3ad		וַיִּסָּעַם
		עִם-הַבְּרִיחַ
3ae		וַיֵּשֶׁם
		עַל-כַּתְּפָיו
3b		וַיַּעֲלֶם
		אֶל-רֵאשׁ הַהָר
		אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי חֶבְרוֹן: פ

- Samson's attraction to a prostitute and fulfilling his desire/lust (16:1).
- Parenthetical information (incomplete, non-verbal clause)—Samson's presence in the city exposed (16:2a).
- A plot against Samson's life is conceived and steps implemented to see it through to completion (16:2b).
- Tension: Will he escape? If so, how?
- Resolution: Samson's escape (16:3).

**5.7** Mark the details of each scene.

**5.8** Examine the dialogue and identify its contribution to the advancement of the plot.

**5.9** Examine the details for each unit within each scene to identify their relationships and the manner of advancing the plot.

**5.10** Identify the exegetical significance of each literary/rhetorical device employed by the author in the pericope.

- 16:2 – repetition (כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה)
- 16:3 – repetition (חֲצִי הַלַּיְלָה)
- 16:2 – anacrusis (עַד־אֹרֶר הַבֶּקֶר)

**5.11** Research the geographical, historical, and cultural aspects of the setting.

- John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
- Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).
- Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Handbook*, ed. by Gary N. Larson (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984).
- Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985).
- Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1977).
- George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895).
- Edward E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament*, Baker Studies in Biblical Archaeology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971).
- Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible: A Study in Historical Geography*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
- Trude Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press/Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982).

**5.12** Examine the canonical and theological implications of the pericope and the narrative structure within which it is embedded.

- Cf. Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).

**5.13** Identify the applicational implications of the pericope.