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* (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:**


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
- hesed — 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.”

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

Resources:

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.
5.2 Identify the structure of the pericope.

Note that the Masoretes took 12:15 and 13:1 to be major section breaks. The □ indicates a paragraph division. In the MT the □ the space following the □ is blank for the remainder of the line and the next paragraph commences on the next line. □ is the abbreviation for כתחה (“open’), referring to an “open paragraph.” The MT also employs □ to identify what is termed a “closed [ס合伙] paragraph.” After □ 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, □ is the more major break that might contain within its section a number of occurrences of the □.

³הほか פַּרְשֵׁהוֹת, בֶּאֵרוֹן אֱלֻיִם בַּהֲרֵי הָעָם וְאֶת הָעָם בַּהֲרֵי הָעָם: מ
Next, note the employment of macrosyntactic יְהִי to commence the following narrative section:

13:2 יְהִי. אַשָּׁר אָשֶׁר מָשָׁרָה מַשָּׁרָה, נָתַתָה שֵׁמֶר מָאָשִׁים.

- Observe the subsequent repetitions of the various ב and מ paragraph markers and the macrosyntactic יְהִי.
  - מ: 13:18; 15:8
  - יְהִי: 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

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

1ba

1bb

2aa

2ab

2ag

2ad

2ba

2bb

3aa

3ab

3ag

3ad

3ae

3b

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:
• 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 (יהלמ רִיְשָׁן)
• 16:3 – repetition (יהלמ רִיְשָׁן)
• 16:2 – anacrusis (ירְבִּי תְאֵר דֶּבֶר)

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

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


5.13 Identify the applicational implications of the pericope.