

Lecture 4- How to Interpret the “Historical Books” (I)

The Old Testament is indispensable for understanding the nature of the world, of human beings, and of God, and it is indispensable for knowing who Jesus Christ is and who we are as his new kept covenant people, the church.

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Key Terms

Hermeneutics, history, theology, literature, God, human beings, ourselves, exegesis, first things first, submit

Lecture Objectives

- Identify and describe the three characteristics of the historical books.
- Describe how each of these characteristics affects our right interpretation of historical narrative.
- Identify ways that the Old Testament historical books teach us about ourselves and our communities.

Preliminary Questions

- Consider the quote above. In what ways is the Old Testament “indispensable” for understanding
 - * the nature of the world?
 - * the nature of human beings?
 - * the nature of God?
 - * who Jesus Christ is?
 - * who we are?
- Do you agree with the above quote? Why or why not? What difference does it make for your appreciation of and submission to Old Testament revelation?

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Devotion: Psalm 111

- * v. 4 “He has caused his wonders to be remembered...”
- * v. 9 “He provided redemption for his people.”
- * God recorded his redemptive acts in the Bible.
- * v. 10 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”
- * Prov. 1:1/ Job 28:28-If we do not fear God, our accumulation of knowledge is not to good effect.

I. How to Interpret the “Historical Books”

Hermeneutics = principles of interpretation

A. Preliminary questions:

1. What is to be found in the historical books?

a. History: “an interpretive account of the past”

1) With the Bible, we have inspired historians.

b. Theology: the principle of selection is “What is of interest theologically?”

1) The biblical text is revelatory of who God is.

2) Two people can describe the same event from different perspectives.

3) Biblical historiographers concern themselves with human events in relation to God’s faithfulness to his human creatures, and

4) In relation to his goal-directed redemptive plan.

c. Literature: even the genealogies imply more than a straightforward recounting of facts.

1) Gen. 10 moves toward Abram

- 2) Matt. 1 four foreign mothers are mentioned to point to universal significance of the Jewish Messiah.
- 3) Jesus came from sinners for sinners.

Why do you think it is important to hold all 3 of these in mind when we study OT books? What happens when one is removed or denied?

- d. The predominant historiographical mode in the OT is narrative.
- e. Our interest is not just in the bare events themselves, but in the picture of those events.
- f. We must give attention not only to the subject (history) of the text, but also the slant (theology) and the style (literature).

II. What is to Be Learned from the Historical Books?

- A. About God: the true hero of the Bible is God himself, and God alone.
 1. Even David and Moses had feet of clay.
 2. In some portions of the canon we learn about God from what he explicitly states about himself (prophets, law).
 3. In the historical narratives we mainly see God acting.
- B. About human beings: We learn of the various responses of human beings to God's sovereign rule.
- C. About ourselves: The fundamentals of various human experiences really haven't changed much over the millennia.
 1. 1 Cor. 10, as an example to us
 2. Abraham lied about his wife—2 times.
 3. Joshua failed to pray
 4. We can learn from successes and failures of others.

David was not 'the little engine that could.' "I know I can't do it, but I know God can do it."
 5. Hannah, God abases the proud and raises up the humble.
 6. We learn the nature of our dependence on God.
 - a. Solomon
 - 1) 1 Kgs 4:26, accumulate horses and chariots
 - 2) Dt. 17, not to accumulate horses
 - 3) The reader is almost unaware of the planted seeds.
 - 4) Kudzu illustration

Can you think of some OT passages that illustrate these points?

III. Summary

- A. Richard Muller
 1. "The OT is a primary source for Christian doctrines."
 2. "The OT is the primary source for doctrines not directly bound to the order of salvation established in Christ."
 - a. e.g., God, creation, providence, human nature, the fall, sin, and the covenant
 3. "Doctrines that set the stage and provide the interpretive foundation, both theological and anthropological for all that followed."
 4. "In short, the greater part of the body of Christian doctrine rests on the OT."
- B. Elizabeth Achtemeier
 1. Preaching from the OT, "The OT is indispensable for understanding the nature of the

world, and of human beings, and of God, and it is indispensable for knowing who Jesus Christ is and who we are as his new kept covenant people, the church.”

- a. The story of Israel is our story.
- b. If we are in Christ, we are in the true Israel.

IV. Basic Exegetical Steps

- Exegesis = the attempt to draw out of (“ex-”) Scripture its intended sense.
- Meaning is determinate in the mind of God.

Simply: What does the text say? What does the text mean? How does the text apply to me?

A. First things first

1. Submit the mind and heart to God.
 - a. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”
 - b. Spiritual discernment Mk. 4:11-12
 - c. Sternberg in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* makes a distinction between OT and NT.
 - 1) Points to Mk. 4, but Mk. 4 quotes Is. 6:9,10
 - d. Dt. 30:11-14 He says it is a clear accessibility of the word, but Dt. 29:2b-4
2. What can unbelievers grasp?
 - a. Large amounts of data/content of the truth claims, but remember that our background influences what we see.
 - 1) Rabbit or duck
 - b. The eyes of faith will see things the eyes of unbelief will not see.