

Benjamin H. Walton. *Preaching Old Testament Narratives*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2016. 255 pages. \$18.99.

As a pastor and an Old Testament professor I have often heard the comments, “The Old Testament is hard to understand,” or “I do not enjoy the Old Testament because it seems foreign to the New Testament and Christian practice.” Such comments are frustrating because I enjoy studying the Old Testament and see it as dynamic and applicable for today. Benjamin H. Walton offers an introduction to preaching from the Old Testament stories in his book, *Preaching Old Testament Narratives*. His stated goal is to offer a resource that will be useful for preaching from Old Testament narratives and seeks to offer both interpretation and practical skills to enhance preaching from those narratives (19). He divides his book into two sections: 1.) Discover the Message; 2.) Deliver the Message.

In the first part of his book, Walton lays out a hermeneutic for developing Old Testament narratives for preaching. He notes that one of the most neglected areas of preparation is the understanding of genre (31). He advocates for distinguishing complete units of thought (CUT) that have a natural beginning and ending when studying narratives. He continues by comparing Old Testament narratives with New Testament epistles. In narratives, the CUT tends to be one or two chapters, while the epistles are normally one or two paragraphs. Old Testament narratives also are more descriptive, while epistles are prescriptive. Walton notes that Old Testament narratives’ emphasis on retelling an event often leads to few explicit theological principles, thus affecting the application of the narrative (35-36).

In studying Old Testament narratives, Walton recommends to first develop an understanding of the Original Theological Message (OTM) by seeking to recognize the original author’s intent. Once the OTM is identified one can formulate a Take Home Truth (THT), an appropriate application of the OTM to the current life situation. Walton holds that the OTM and the THT help to better understand the original intent of the passage and help to aid in the coherence of the sermon.

Common mistakes in preaching Old Testament narratives tend to manipulate the text instead of developing the narrative. Walton provides a step by step process for analyzing the narrative. First is to identify the CUT, and should include the complete plot of the narrative and have a natural beginning and ending. The next step is to identify the theological and historical context of the narrative as it may have pertained to the original audience. Third is the study of the literary qualities of the text including narration, word usage, and plot development. Fourth is the naming of the OTM, followed by the constructing the THT. Walton illustrates this method in Chapter 3 by taking the reader through the process of studying 2 Samuel 11-12.

In part 2 of the book, Walton addresses the development of a sermon using an Old Testament narrative. The unit primarily follows classic steps in the development and delivery of the sermon. However, he does make specific reference to how this applies to the preaching of Old Testament narrative. He also offers four appendices at the end of the book giving additional suggestions, including developing sermon ideas for 2 Samuel 11-12 and Genesis 11:1-9. The final appendix provides a storyline for the Old Testament.

Walton addresses preaching Old Testament narratives in his book, covering both how to study Old Testament narratives and how to develop sermons based on Old Testament narratives. His text provides a good introduction to the subject. However, further research into the subject is recommended since he only gives a cursory review of narrative and narrative structure. Still, the author provides a systematic way to identify and study narrative to gain both an understanding of

its original intent and its application to society today. The second unit, Delivering the Message, while applied specifically to Old Testament narratives, provides a good primer for the overall development and delivery of a sermon.

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