INTERPRETING AND APPLYING
OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:
A SURVEY OF THE EVANGELICAL LANDSCAPE[1]

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A survey of the interpretive and application approaches toward Old Testament (OT) Narrative Literature advocated by Evangelicals is presented as a foundation for a discussion on how to preach 1 Samuel 17. Interpretive theory is examined before seven recent volumes on 1 Samuel 17 are described which demonstrate Evangelical exegetical practice. Two perspectives on application precede a summary of five works which show Evangelical exposition. Finally, three papers presented in 2014 on how to preach 1 Samuel 17 are evaluated as to their similarities and differences.

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Introduction

How to interpret (exegesis) and apply (exposition) Old Testament Narrative Literature has provoked a lively and continuing discussion during the past four decades. The existence of a Program Unit on OT Narrative Literature at the Evangelical Theological Society's Annual Meeting is testimony to the current inquiry. The purpose of this article is to lay a foundation for the understanding of the three presentations which were given after this paper at the ETS Meeting in San Diego in November 2014. Each subsequent paper argued for a slightly different approach to interpreting and applying OT Historical Narrative, although all of them are solidly within the boundary of evangelicalism and each is identified with an institution that affirms biblical inerrancy. The three succeeding presenters, Dennis E. Johnson (Westminster Seminary, California), Abraham Kuruvilla (Dallas Theological Seminary), and Steve

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[1] This article is adapted from a paper presented by the author at the 66th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, CA, November 19–21, 2014.

Mathewson (CrossLife Evangelical Free Church) have all written significant volumes on the interface between hermeneutics and homiletics which form the basis from which they argued their convictions as how to specifically preach the historical narrative of 1 Samuel 17.[2] To set the stage for their presentations, I broadly surveyed the contemporary evangelical discussion on interpreting and applying OT Historical Narrative Literature.[3] This survey will of necessity be selective. In both the interpretive and application sections below, I will first present a broad overview and then, second, describe and evaluate significant evangelical resources on 1 Samuel with a particular emphasis on chapter 17.

I acknowledge that this survey will of necessity contain broad generalizations. But I think that these generalizations can be supported as basically accurate.

The Interpretation of OT Historical Narrative

The interpretation of any biblical text is based upon the "Hermeneutical Triad."[4] "Regardless of the passage of Scripture, the interpreter needs to study (1) the historical setting; (2) the literary context (including matters of canon, genre, and language); and (3) the theological message, that is, what the passage teaches regarding God, Christ, salvation, and the need to respond in faith to the Bible's teaching."[5]

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[2] The three volumes are Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007); Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2013); and Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002). Other significant evangelical works dealing with the interpretation and preaching of OT Historical Narrative include Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh: How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006); Daniel I. Block, "Tell Me the Old, Old Story: Preaching the Message of Old Testament Narrative" in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts,* eds. David M. Howard & Michael A. Grisanti (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 409–38; David C. Deuel, "Expository Preaching from Old Testament Narrative" in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, John MacArthur and The Master's Seminary Faculty (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 226–35; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Preaching from Historical Narrative Texts of the Old Testament," in *Giving the Sense*, 439–54; and Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 63–82.

[3] I am using the term "interpretation" to refer to the discovery of the original meaning of a biblical text [i.e., what the author sought to communicate to his original audience] and "application" to refer to the personal and/or corporate significance based on that original meaning of a biblical text in the present context. These definitions are consistent with Andreas J. Köstenberger & Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011) and William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, & Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Revised & Updated (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004). However, Grant R. Osborne (*The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Revised & Expanded [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006], 21–33) views "interpretation" as both original meaning (which he calls "exegesis") and contemporary significance (which he calls "contextualization"), and Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart (*How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, Third Ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2003], 17–31) view "interpretation" as both original meaning (which they also call "exegesis") and contemporary significance (which they call "hermeneutics"). The important point is that all of these authors see a distinction between original meaning and contemporary relevance with the "application" of the biblical text always based on the original meaning of the text.

[4] Köstenberger & Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 57–80.

[5] Ibid., 78–79.

The Broad Interpretive Landscape

When ETS had its first Annual Meeting in 1949, Evangelicals approached the interpretation of OT Narrative Literature with the emphasis on the historical setting and language of a biblical passage.[6] The focus was first on what was behind the text.[7] The historical veracity of Scripture needed to be defended against critical attack. Thus, the historical personages and events described in the OT historical books were placed in their chronological, geographical, and cultural contexts. This continues to be advocated by Evangelicals into the present: "In order for the interpretation of Scripture to be properly grounded, it is vital to explore the historical setting of a scriptural passage, including any cultural background features."[8] A second focus was on what was within the text. This entailed a close reading of a biblical passage after determining the original text based upon the application of the principles of textual criticism. Lexical and general syntactical analysis of a passage ensued following the general principles of interpretation. This interpretive approach was known as the "historical-grammatical" method. Blomberg has recently written, "The grammatico-historical method . . . refers to studying the biblical text, or any other text, in its original context and seeking the meaning its author(s) most likely intended for its original audience(s) or addressees based on grammar and syntax. . . . Its purpose is not one of critique but of interpretation."[9] Thus as an evangelical, his last comment seeks to differentiate his grammatico-historical hermeneutic from the historical-critical method.[10]

1981 was a landmark year in the interpretation of OT narrative. There had been a growing awareness in general OT studies of the limitations of the historical-critical method. In this environment Alter wrote, "Over the last few years there has been growing interest in literary approaches among the younger generation of biblical scholars . . . but, while useful explications of particular texts have begun to appear, there have been as yet no major works of criticism, and certainly no satisfying overview of the poetics of the Hebrew Bible."[11] It was this deficiency that Alter sought to rectify, "This book is intended to be a guide to the intelligent reading of biblical narrative. . . . The aim throughout is to illuminate the distinctive principles of the Bible's narrative art. . . . The term Bible here will refer only to the Hebrew Bible."[12]

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[6] Craig G. Bartholomew ("Hermeneutics," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books,* eds. Bill T. Arnold & H. G. M. Williamson, [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005], 392–407) gives a broad survey of how the OT Historical Books have been approached interpretively by the contemporary scholarly guild as the background to his own "canonical, kerygmatic hermeneutic." Bartholomew's article is helpful in giving insight into the recent discussion and has influenced my approach.

[7] For an introduction to the concepts of "behind the text," "within the text," and "in front of the text," see Stanley E. Porter & Beth M. Stovell, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 12–20.

[8] Köstenberger & Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 93.

[9] Craig L. Blomberg, "The Historical-Critical/Grammatical View," in Porter & Stovell, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 27–28.

[10] See the further discussion in Ibid., 29–38.

[11] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 15.

[12] Ibid., ix.

The book by Alter was the first of a number of significant works on biblical narrative by non-evangelical authors.[13]

The insights of Alter and other leaders of the "literary turn"[14] were soon appropriated by Evangelicals. The components of scene, plot, point of view, characterization, setting, dialog, and rhetorical devises such as repetition, omission, inclusion, chiasm, and irony were added to the arsenal of OT narrative interpretation.[15] This was augmented by the observation that OT narrative also exhibited grammatical patterns that enabled the interpreter to discover discourse structure. Chisholm explains,

> The main line is essentially the story line—the sequence of actions that forms the backbone of the story. Stories can begin in a variety of ways, but the story line proper is typically initiated and then carried along by clauses introduced by *wayyiqtol* (or past tense) verbal forms (often called *waw* consecutive with the imperfect). . . . Offline clauses deviate from the *wayyiqtol* pattern. . . . The following list, though not exhaustive, identifies the primary functions of offline clauses: 1. Introductory or background . . . 2. Supplemental . . . 3. Circumstantial . . . 4. Contrastive . . . 5. Dramatic . . . 6. Concluding.[16]

Thus, the "literary turn" has enhanced the literary component by augmenting traditional lexical and grammatical analysis of the biblical narrative texts (within the text) which in addition to the historical setting (behind the text) has enabled Evangelicals to sharpen their interpretation of OT historical narrative.

The third component of the "Hermeneutic Triad" has also come more fully onto the evangelical radar in recent years. The theological message of the OT, including historical narrative, has come under closer scrutiny since Kaiser's 1978 landmark volume.[17] Therefore, "If we are not only grounded in the historical setting and well versed in the various literary dimensions of Scripture but develop a firm grasp of its theological message, we will indeed be workers who need not be ashamed but who correctly handle God's Word."[18] However, although all Evangelicals agree that OT

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[13] Others include Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, England: Almond, 1983); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press); Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Almond, 1989); J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1999) and Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, trans. I. Lotan (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

[14] Bartholomew, "Hermeneutics," 395–98.

[15] Köstenberger & Patterson (*Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 237–61) include a chapter devoted to the presentation of special principles of interpretation applicable to OT Historical Narrative.

[16] Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook*, HOTE, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006), 36–39. Chisholm (Ibid., 25–88) provides a comprehensive discussion in how to interpret the OT narrative genre literarily, with summarizing interpretive principles. Also see Mathewson (*The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, 43–56) for how to interpret OT narratively and (Ibid., 227–55) grammatically.

[17] Walter C. Kaiser, J., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978). There were many OT Biblical Theologies before Kaiser, but his book sparked a renewed interest in the topic among broad Evangelicalism.

[18] Köstenberger & Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 693.

Narrative Literature has a definite theological intent, there is a division between those who relate all of that intent generally to God with only a few direct or indirect references to Christ (Theocentric) and those who would relate every passage to Christ (Christocentric). According to Christocentric exponents, there is a definite "Redemptive-Historical" view of hermeneutics built upon, but distinct from, a merely historical-grammatical-theocentric hermeneutic.[19]

My evaluation of this distinction between a Theocentric and Christocentric hermeneutic is shaped by thinking of who is before the text. There seems to be general hermeneutical agreement by Evangelicals of what is behind the text (historical background) and in the text (literary structure and meaning). However, the Theocentric hermeneutic views ancient Israel, and ancient Israel alone, as being before the text in an interpretive sense. The hermeneutical question is, "What did this text mean to the original audience?" The contemporary hearer joins with ancient Israel in receiving the message and from the application to the first audience gains insight into the significance for himself.[20] However, the Christocentric hermeneutic views the audience in front of the text to include ancient Israel and the new, true Israel, the Church. Greidanus writes, "All the foregoing presuppositions support the final principal presupposition of the New Testament writers in preaching Christ from the Old Testament, and that is to read the Old Testament from the perspective of the reality of Christ."[21] Goldsworthy states, "What went before Christ in the Old Testament . . . finds its meaning in him. So the Old Testament must be understood in its relationship to the gospel event."[22] It seems that for the Christ-centered interpreter, the exegetical process of OT narrative has not been completed until Christ is discovered in the specific OT text being studied.

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[19] Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "The Redemptive-Historical View" in Porter & Stovell, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 89–110. He describes his position as a "hermeneutical stance" (Ibid., 91). "Redemptive-Historical Interpretation" is also referred to as the "Christocentric method" in Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 227–28. Johnson (*Him We Proclaim*, 98–125) refers to his exegetical practice as "apostolic hermeneutics." In comparing and contrasting "apostolic hermeneutics" with historical-grammatical hermeneutics he writes, "The issue is whether we seek interpretive accountability in a general grammatical-historical approach that in recent centuries has seemed intuitively cogent and appropriately self-critical or in an approach that (as well as attending to original linguistic, literary, and historical contexts) also takes the New Testament *literally* when the latter affirms an Old Testament pattern is 'fulfilled' in the redemptive work of Christ. I am arguing that if the New Testament affirms a symbolic-typological interpretation of an Old Testament feature (for example, that the multiethnic church 'is' the Israel to whom God makes his new covenant), we are on safer ground to follow the New Testament's lead rather than clinging to a different, 'literal' reading that might seem, in the abstract, to be more objectively verifiable" (Ibid., 139–40). Johnson, while affirming some strengths to the grammatical-historical hermeneutic, points out what he perceives is its weaknesses that lead to the need for an accountable, Christ-centered hermeneutic (Ibid., 151–64).

[20] This is the approach which undergirds Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*. The preacher/exegete's first task to understand the ancient situation of the OT narrative text and its theological principle (31–90). Only then can he move to a consideration of application to the modern situation (93–103). Kuruvilla (*Privilege the Text!* 39–43) avers that both original hearers and future readers inhabit the text's projected world in front of the text. However, when speaking of facets of meaning, he still distinguishes the original textual sense from its transhistorical intention (Ibid., 43–48).

[21] Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 199.

[22] Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 50. Goldsworthy also writes, "To interpret an Old Testament text we establish its relationship to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ," in *Gospel and Kingdom* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster Press, 2012), 123.

The Specific Interpretation of 1 Samuel 17

This section describes the interpretive concerns and focus of seven major works on the book of Samuel.[23] These volumes have all been written in the last thirty-one years, so they give some sense of the current evangelical landscape on the interpretation of OT Narrative Literature.

Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC, vol. 10 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983).

Klein states "I have used the tools and techniques of historical criticism to interpret the final deuteronomistic form of the book of 1 Samuel" (xxxii). This passage, the pericope of 17:1–18:5, is part of the greater section of "The History of David's Rise," which encompasses 16:4–2 Sam 5:10. Klein's greatest concern in his discussion is to resolve the complication that the narrative of 16:1–23 seems to be unknown in 17:1–18:5. He resolves the complication by accepting the LXXb version, which has been expanded in the MT. His comment section retells the narrative from the MT with historical, lexical, and grammatical notes interspersed. Klein notes, "It would seem impossible for David to have brought Goliath's head to Jerusalem since the city was still in the hands of the Jebusites (cf. 2 Sam 5:6–9; 1 Sam 17:57)" (181). Perhaps Jerusalem is where the trophy finally was brought. The story's purpose is to strengthen David's credentials for the kingship. Klein's interpretive approach would be better characterized as historical-critical, even though the volume is a part of an Evangelical series.

Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1986).

Gordon writes that this commentary is principally about 1 & 2 Samuel "in its own literary, historical, cultural, and theological contexts" (9). He has followed the example of the text and not sought to censure or moralize, but he does compare and contrast David and Christ in his introduction (49–53). His conclusion is that though David is in some ways a type of Christ, "the New Testament does not indulge in wholesale typological comparisons between David and Christ" (50). Gordon actually spends more time discussing the differences between the two. As to 17:1–58, he makes abbreviated historical and lexical/grammatical notations on the text. The passage displays David's zeal for the reputation of Israel's God and his utter trust in God's ability to preserve him against all odds.

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[23] The idea for a brief evaluation of contemporary commentaries in exegetical and expositional categories came from the example of Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth*, KEG (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 101–105, 572–77.

Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel: An Introduction & Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

Baldwin declares, "My aim has been to 'set the scene' in the Introduction by indicating the present state of Samuel studies, and in the Commentary to include what seems to me most important for an understanding of the text" (9). She was aware of "the literary turn," but saw the new approach as the antithesis of historical criticism and stated that "the two methods have to be allowed to work separately for the time being, and maybe for a long time ahead" (32). As to theology, "The historical David, for all his faults, came to stand for the idealized king" (37).

Baldwin, like Klein, views the passage as 17:1–18:5. The story "provides an outstanding example of the Lord's power to give victory against dramatically overwhelming odds in response to faith and courage" (124). She conjectures the possibility that chapters 16 and 17 can be reconciled by the fact that David had returned to his father's house from serving Saul and had matured into a bearded adult when he left Bethlehem with provisions for his brothers. Her notes on the text tend to be geographical, lexical, and cultural.

Ronald F. Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, EBC, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1992).

With Youngblood, "the literary turn" begins to be seen in Evangelical Samuel commentaries. While he cautioned not to manufacture chiasms when none were present, he did affirm the author used the technique on many occasions (558–59). Youngblood sought to discover the literary structure of the text and then fill in the historical and grammatical details. The passage of 17:1–58 has a cycle of confrontation-challenge-consternation which was repeated three times (1–11, 12–39, 40–54) with a postlude (55–58). Youngblood effectively blends historical and literary aspects in his interpretation, but the insights are never summarized as to the purpose of the narrative.

Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, NAC, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996).

Bergen views Samuel as history, literary art, apology, theology, and Scripture. He writes that "the primary theological purpose was to support the teachings of the Torah and thus . . . to provide guidance and hope for Israel's exilic community" (43). As Scripture, Samuel is a major link in the Messianic tradition and so the NT rightfully sees it as pointing to Christ in addition to its providing instruction, encouragement, and hope to NT believers (Rom 15:4; Heb 11:32–34). The literary unit of 17:1–58 "is not primarily a story about human courage and effort; instead, it is about the awesome power of a life built around bold faith in the Lord" (187). Bergen also weaves historical background with lexical and grammatical comments as he retells the narrative while showing its literary artistry. He also answers those who see contradictions in vv. 55–58.

David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerd-
    mans Publishing, 2007).

Tsumura incorporates literary discourse grammatical analysis into his commen-
tary. "Thus, the discourse grammatical approach has become one of the standard
methods of studying biblical Hebrew narrative. However, no commentary has ap-
peared which applies this analysis thoroughly to the Hebrew text of 1–2 Samuel. . . .
the present volume pursues such an analysis" (50). He supplies the reader with an
introduction to the interpretive techniques he will employ (46–65). This commentator
also gives the strongest defense of the reliably of the MT as an accurate representation
of the original autograph (2–10). The theology of Samuel centers on God's kingship,
God's providential guidance, and God's sovereign will and power. The David and
Goliath passage is 17:1–54; 17:55–58 belongs with 18:1–5 as a new family relation-
ship is established between Saul and David. Chapter 17:1–54 is, "in essence, a story
of David trusting God and God delivering David" (434). Though emphasizing the
literary analysis of the passage, Tsumura does not neglect to supply the necessary
historical background. There is a robust exegesis of the passage, but to what end?
Our commentator does not tell us, because that is not his ultimate purpose.

David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, AOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

The final and most recent work we will survey is the volume by Firth. The com-
mentator avers that "attention to genre is essential for recognizing a work's purpose"
(20). Further, "a crucial hermeneutical issue for interpreting Samuel . . . is that if
artistry is crucial for communicating the message, then exegesis cannot simply ex-
amine that to which the text refers (vital as that is), but must also attend to the tech-
niques employed in that telling" (22). The major theological themes Firth identifies
are the reign of God [he retains the authority], the human kingship, and the prophetic
authority. Firth's analysis of 17:1–58 is not nearly as detailed as Tsumura's, but he
does emphasize the literary features of the text. He believes the events recounted in
chapter 17 are chronologically prior to 16:14–23. "The material's presentation has
been shaped by the need to begin with David's election by Yahweh, so this is seen
separately from his military skills. It then concludes with his killing Goliath, and
especially his speech to Goliath, so David's perception of Israel is the highlight of
his move towards the court" (195). This leads to Firth's conclusion that the ultimate
purpose of this narrative "transcends the issue of overcoming a powerful foe (though
without removing it altogether) and develops the missiological impulse that runs
through Israel's story since Abram's call (Gen 12:1–3)" (203). David's knowledge
of the purpose of Israel's election that all the world might know Yahweh (17:46)
transforms his actions. He is therefore a better king than Saul.

This survey of these major evangelical commentaries demonstrates how the ex-
egesis of the OT historical narratives has moved from a general hermeneutical ap-
proach of historical background and traditional lexical and grammatical analysis to
the adding of the special hermeneutics of genre of OT narrative which incorporates
the insights of literary analysis.

The Application of OT Historical Narrative

The Broad Application Landscape

Once the original meaning of the biblical text has been established, the interpreter is challenged to move on to personal application.[24] "Yet, if we become experts at interpreting Scripture *only*, we lose the battle of glorifying Christ with our lives. We glorify Christ when we live out what we know. What is more, if we interpret 100 percent accurately and even stun our audience with our eloquence and skill in preaching and teaching the text but do not tell our people how to apply the truths we have taught, we have failed."[25] The two main ways that Evangelicals propose to apply the biblical text is by means of the principlizing approach or by a Christotelic approach.[26]

The principlizing approach seeks to discover the basic principles in the OT Narrative Literature relevant to the first hearers, ancient Israel. Kaiser proposes the use of the "Ladder of Abstraction." "The Ladder of Abstraction may be defined as 'a continuous sequence of categorizations from a low level of specificity up to a high point of generality in a principal and down again to a specific application to the contemporary culture'"[27] Many expositors of OT historical narrative see the present application/relevance in the principles of godly behavior and leadership modeled by the key human characters in a passage. The NT also mines the OT for such examples (1 Cor 10:1–13; Heb 11:1–40; James 5:11), both positive and negative. Thus, as long as the character of God is foremost, principles undergirding the salvation and sanctification of a NT believer can be found and proclaimed from OT narrative texts.

The Christotelic approach seeks to discover how an OT historical narrative text points to Christ. Chapell writes,

> Christ-centered preaching (whether it is referred to as preaching the cross, the message of grace, the gospel, God's redemption, or a host of similar terms)

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[24] Johnson (*Him We Proclaim*, 54) writes, "Preaching must be *Christ centered*, must interpret biblical texts in their *redemptive-historical contexts*, must aim for *change*, must proclaim the *doctrinal center* of the Reformation (grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, God's glory alone) with passion and personal application, and must speak in a language that connects with the *unchurched* in our culture, shattering their stereotypes of Christianity and bringing them face to face with Christ, who meets the sinners' real needs—felt and unfelt." Kuruvilla (*Privilege the Text!* 79–82) speaks of "the rule of applicability" which asserts that every text of canonical Scriptures as it projects a world in front of the text may be utilized for applicational purposes by the church universal. Mathewson (*The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, 101–103) also declares the need for application to the modern situation.

[25] Köstenberger & Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 784. See the complete discussion in Ibid., 784–97, and Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 477–504. Both of these standard texts advocate a "principlizing" approach to application.

[26] See a complete discussion in Gary T. Meadors, ed., *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2009). Walter C. Kaiser, Jr, presents "a principlizing model," Daniel M. Doriani presents "a redemptive-historical model," Kevin J. Vanhoozer presents "a drama-of-redemption model," and William J. Webb presents "a redemptive-movement model." We will discuss the first two since they are the predominant approaches of Evangelicals in applying OT historical narrative.

[27] Kaiser, Jr., "A Principlizing Model," 24.

reflects Paul's intention to preach nothing "except Jesus Christ and him cruci-fied." Just as Paul's preaching involved more than the message of the incarna-tion and atonement—and yet kept all subjects in proper relation to God's re-demption through Christ—so also *Christ-centered preaching rightly under-stood does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every text but to disclose where every text stands in relation to Christ.* The grace of God culmi-nating in the person and work of Jesus unfolds in many dimensions throughout the pages of Scripture. The goal of the preacher is not to find novel ways of identifying Christ in every text (or naming Christ in every sermon) but to show how each text manifests God's grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ.[28]

Chapell affirms that "texts that specifically mention Jesus or reveal him typologically are few relative to the thousands of passages that contain no direct reference to Christ."[29] However, Chapell continues, "When neither text nor type discloses the Savior's work, a preacher must rely on *context* to develop the redemptive focus of a message. . . . In its context, every passage possesses one or more of four redemptive foci. The text may be:

- predictive of the work of Christ
- preparatory for the work of Christ
- reflective of the work of Christ and/or
- resultant of the work of Christ"[30]

According to Chapell, any message that highlights God's nature that provides re-demption and/or reflects human nature that requires redemption is to be considered "Christ-centered."[31] I would prefer the term "Christotelic," the OT narrative points to Christ.

The NT is clear that the OT speaks of Christ. This is evident from such passages as Luke 24:27; John 5:39; Acts 8:35; 17:2–3; Heb 1:5–13. The "Christ-centered" homiletic is a great reminder that the expositor should seek to discover where Christ is revealed in the OT and incorporate this truth into his exposition. It is possible to view David in his kingly role as a "type" of Christ. Also, such themes as exodus, law, and covenant point to the New Covenant, whose mediator is Christ.[32] The theme of God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant especially anticipates the Messiah who is the seed of Abraham (Gen 22:17b–18; 49:8–12; Luke 1:54–55, 68–75; Gal 3:6–18). Above all, as affirmed by Chapell, every message from the OT historical narrative should point to the faithful God and many will speak of the failure of man.

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[28] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 279.

[29] Ibid., 282.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 284.

[32] Note the insightful discussion in Köstenberger & Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 151–201.

The Specific Application of 1 Samuel 17

The contemporary evangelical landscape concerning the application of OT historical narrative, particularly in preaching, can be demonstrated in five volumes on Samuel that have been published in the past quarter century.

Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, FOB (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000 [original publication 1988 & 1996]).

Davis is a master expositor who preached through and wrote expositional commentaries on all of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) from 1988 to 2005. His commentary "concentrates on the literary quality of the narrative and, especially, on the theological witness of the text" (8). Davis is quite clear that the written expositions are not the sermons as he preached them, but he cast his commentary in homiletic form because he thought it helps digestion and coherence. When he comes to 17:1–58, Davis introduces the key phrase of the chapter, "to reproach, defy, mock, deride" (vv. 10, 25, 26 [twice], 36, 45), demonstrating that "Goliath's blabbering dishonors Israel's God" (179–80). Even though the exposition is developed around the theme of (David's) faith, the driving concern of the narrative is the honor due to Israel's God. Davis is a master of creatively weaving in interpretive details as he explains the meaning of the text. The primary application he makes in his conclusion is that his hearers (readers) like David must be concerned when God's reputation is at stake. He gives a number of contemporary scenarios to illustrate his application. In the last paragraph, there is a pointing to Christ. "In 1 Samuel 17 the promised king defeats the enemy of his people. He had to do it, for the enemy derided Yahweh. Yahweh's honor, his glory, must be upheld; if Yahweh is to have his glory his enemy must be silenced. It is the same in the reign of God's greater Son; some refuse to 'kiss the Son' (Ps. 2:12) and so there must be a 'rod of iron' (Ps. 2:9)" (190).

Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2003).

The NIV Application Commentary series creates a clear distinction between interpretation (original meaning), principles of application (bridging contexts) and examples of specific applications (contemporary significance). According to Arnold, as interpreters our task is to consider what a text communicates in its canonical shape. In 1 Samuel 17, the ancient narrator was concerned with the theological significance of David's rise to power. After detailing his understanding of the original meaning of the passage, Arnold turns to the general and specific significance of this passage to our own day. "Generally speaking, the narrative teaches about personal faith and the desire of God to accomplish mighty things through the simple faith and actions of his servant. But more specifically, the narrative also portrays David as the ideal shepherd leader for Israel; as such, it contributes to the larger body of texts that subsequently feed into the concept of the Messiah" (263). Thus, "David is an example of the faithful and brave servant of Yahweh, and through his faith and actions God wins a victory over his blasphemous enemies" (265). David illustrates how Christians can face God's enemies. But the text also points to David's greater son; Jesus of

Nazareth is God's own Anointed, the Speaker of God's word, and the Victor over sin and death.

John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).

Woodhouse states, "The commentary has been written out of three particular convictions about the wonderful task of expounding the Word of God" (13). First, attention is given to the details of the text. Sermons are enriched by the appropriate examination of details of the text. Second, the significance of any biblical text lies in seeing the text in its context. The context includes both the immediate book, but also all of Scripture. Therefore, these expositions not only relate to the major theme of Samuel, looking at the qualities necessary in God's leader, but also see each passage in light of the fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Third, the proper purpose of biblical exposition is not simply to find relevant lessons for life from the text but to proclaim Christ. 1 Samuel 17 is divided into four expositions, 1–11, 12–30, 31–40, 41–58.

The first two expositions are applied primarily to the hearer's experience. The first deals with facing fear. The text reminds the audience that there are real threats that intimidate us. However, because of Jesus, the Christian can look at whatever we fear in light of Romans 8:31–39. The second teaches "to trust God you must be prepared for the unexpected" (323). However, the final two expositions are related more directly to Jesus. David was committed to the gospel of deliverance from the Philistine menace. "The foolishness of thinking there was or could be some other way of deliverance from Goliath than David's fighting the enemy is comparable to suggestions that people still entertain that human beings can live without the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross over our great enemies" (333). Woodhouse picks up this same application in the introduction to the fourth exposition. "As David defeated the terrible enemy of God's people, we need to understand that God was doing (admittedly on a smaller scale and with limited ramifications) what he has now done in Jesus' victory. Appreciate the victory of David over Goliath and you should be able to say with excitement: 'But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'" (336). As David came in the name of Lord (17:45; cf. Psa 118:26), so did Jesus (Matt 21:9; 23:39). "Jesus is the one who has now 'come in the name of the Lord.' He has won a victory that outshines David's, just as his kingship does. We have more in common with those Israelites in the Valley of Elah than we may have ever realized" (344).

Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012).

The Reformed Expository Commentary series strives to be biblical, doctrinal, redemptive-historical, and practical. I included it under application because each author is to present his expositions first in the pulpit ministry of his church before putting them into print. Thus, these expositions on 1 Samuel were first preached where Phillips ministers. The expositions of 1 Samuel 17 are divided into 1–30, 31–40, 41–54, and 55–18:5. The commentator introduces David as a "type" of Christ at

the beginning of his first exposition. "We should realize that David's victory does not primarily foretell triumphs that we will achieve by faith but rather the victory of Christ for our salvation" (279). However, David had received the Holy Spirit (16:13), "thus, David's actions remind us that faith, godliness, and courage should always result from a Spirit-led life and that they will often be used by God against our spiritual foes today" (279). Although Phillips emphasizes application as it relates to what we learn about Christ and His salvation, he does not ignore lessons that can be learned by the Christians from David's example as a Spirit-empowered believer.

Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013.

This new series is designed to provide a ready reference for the exposition of the biblical text. The goal is to give clear and concise information about each biblical textual unit that can direct the pastor and teacher in their weekly preparation. Each passage is covered in six pages.

1 Samuel 17 is entitled "David's Faith Ignites a Victory." Chisholm states the big idea of the chapter as "Faith in the Lord's power to save can be the catalyst for victory" (116). The first step is "Understanding the Text" (original meaning). Included in this section is the text in context, historical and cultural background, interpretive insights, and theological insights. God is affirmed in this passage as the living God, the delivering God, and a mighty warrior king. The commentator sums up the application for the first audience: "For the exiles, David's example, in both word and deed, is an encouragement and inspiration. Though they had been defeated and are under authority of a foreign king, David's experience is a reminder that faith in God's power is rewarded, for he is the living God and is active in the life of his people. As the one who is sovereign over the battles and their outcome, he has allowed his people to experience defeat and exile, but he also has the capacity to rescue and save his people" (119–20). In teaching the text, the two principles to apply are: 1. The Lord's power is determinative in battle, and faith in that power can be a catalyst for victory, and 2. Focusing on outward appearances rather than the Lord's power can obscure reality, stifle faith, and produce paralyzing fear. Chisholm relates his application to "God" and never mentions Jesus Christ.[33]

These examples show that contemporary evangelical expositors see application in OT historical narrative as including both principles for godly living and pointers to Christ.

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[33] Dr. Chisholm was in attendance at ETS for the presentation on this paper. He commented to me that his discussion in his Samuel volume conformed to the guidelines given to him by the editors of the series. When he preaches, even from OT narrative texts, he always directs his hearers to Christ and the gospel in his conclusion.

Conclusion

After the above was read at ETS, Drs. Johnson, Kuruvilla, and Mathewson presented their papers on how they would preach 1 Samuel 17.[34] Each man showed how he would preach through the text based on what he observed to be the underlying literary structure, stating lexical, grammatical, literary, and historical data from the immediate context. Each also noted the broader context of the book in which the chapter was found. Further, each referred to the broadest context, the canon of Scripture, though not to the same degree nor to the same passages, to give insight into the meaning of what was recorded in 1 Samuel 17. Kuruvilla and Mathewson gave fewer canonical references, concentrating more on the immediate passage, than Johnson, who linked the narrative to the great battle between God and Satan first announced in Gen 3:15 to its culmination recorded in Rev 12:9, 11. According to Johnson, 1 Samuel narrates a past battle in this long war, linked through Ps 118:25–26 to a future battle when Christ came (Mark 11:9–10) to conquer Satan at the cross (Heb 2:14–15); Jesus' mission as the first-rejected-then-exalted Messiah is anticipated in the David and Goliath narrative.

From their interpretation of the text, the men stated the theological theme or principle found in the text in different ways. For Johnson the theological theme is that the king who comes in the name of the Lord has conquered our worst enemy. Kuruvilla views the theological thrust of the narrative to be that the outcome of all battles depends upon God, no matter what the stature, resources, or experience possessed by the warring entities. Mathewson concludes that the overall theological message of 1 Samuel 17 is that Yahweh wins victories through leaders who trust His power to save. Although stated in different ways, there is an underlying commonality of God, not man, as the victor over His enemies.

As expected from their previous writings, the men differed as to how Christ is reflected in their preaching proposals. Johnson's *Christocentric* homiletic is clear. To him this text clearly displays that our victorious King, Jesus (anticipated in David), leads us His people in war and triumph. In his expositional proposal, Kuruvilla mentions God extensively, but never refers to Christ either in his interpretation or application. Kuruvilla proposes a *Christiconic* hermeneutic and homiletic.[35] Although Mathewson labels his preaching approach as "Theocentric," he is also compelled to ground OT narrative texts like 1 Samuel 17 into the larger story line of Scripture which finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is the *Christotelic* homiletic.

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[34] Dennis E. Johnson, "'Blessed Is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord:' David (the seed of the woman) vs. Goliath (the seed of the serpent) (1 Samuel 17)," Abraham Kuruvilla, "David v. Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What Is the Author *Doing* with What He Is *Saying*?" and Steven D. Mathewson, "The David and Goliath Story as a Window into the Theocentric Approach to Preaching Old Testament Narrative Literature," papers presented at the 66th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Society, San Diego, CA., November 19–21, 2014.

[35] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!* 238–68. He sees all the pericopes (preaching units) of Scripture as pointing to facets of the image (*icon*) of Christ. When the pericope is accurately preached, the Holy Spirit is conforming the believing hearer to an aspect of the image of Christ, whether Christ is explicitly mentioned in the sermon or not.

Finally, all of the men point to applications for the hearers. Mathewson was the most detailed. The Christian who obediently trusts God like David because of His power to save will not be intimidated when facing crises, obstacles, of intimidating situations in his life. He then goes on to give some examples like refusing to perform a gay marriage ceremony. Kuruvilla more generally applies the text by calling God's people to exercise faith to engage the enemies of God so that they might experience the deliverance of God. Both of these applications are based on the hearer appropriating the lesson learned through David to their lives. Johnson also makes application to his hearers, but they are pointed to the example of the men of Israel in this text. Just as Israel was emboldened when they saw David's victory, so the Christian who trusts Jesus (the greater David) in his victory is called to follow Christ and put on the armor of God (Eph 6:10–17) so that he might be victorious in ongoing spiritual battle.

The interpretation and application of OT narrative is a continuing discussion among Evangelicals. As an expositor of God's inerrant Word, I am thankful for this sharing of perspectives by three good expositors as I try to hone not only my homiletic understanding, but, more importantly, my ability to accurately preach OT historical narrative.