

Preaching God's Stories without Missing God's Point Conference on the Church for God's Glory – 2024

Introductory Considerations

Introduction: Yes, God gave us stories,¹ but what in the world are we supposed to do with them? The subject of this workshop is preaching from biblical narrative passages.² If the task sounds easy, you need this workshop so that you do not underestimate the complexities involved. If, on the other hand, you think the difficulty of the task places it beyond your abilities, you, too, need this workshop. The goal is two-fold:

- Shed light on the difficulty of preaching from narrative passages and expose common interpretive and homiletic errors.
- Encourage the preacher to take up the task by explaining a rubric for preparation and formulation of sermons that are true to the narrative text.

1. A word about presuppositions and commitments

- 1.1. I presuppose an “originalist hermeneutic”³ and thus, employ a dispensational interpretation of Scripture.
- 1.2. I am committed to expository preaching and thus, advocate the *lectio continua* method as the primary approach to preaching.

2. A rubric for the hermeneutic/homiletic task

Proper preaching requires proper answers to three questions.

- 2.1. What is the Bible's metanarrative?
- 2.2. What contribution does this book of the Bible make to the metanarrative?
- 2.3. How does the sermon text advance the message of the book?

¹ Richard L. Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives*, Illustrated edition (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 1993).

² This should not be confused with narrative styled preaching. We preach the text and not our own stories. The Fred Craddock “revolution” in preaching is popular but misdirected.

³ Mark A. Snoeberger, “Refining Dispensational Discourse: Reconsidering Four Common Expressions,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 27 (2022): 15-30.

3. Assessing the important task of preaching narrative passages.

3.1. Properly preaching narrative passages is essential to our calling.

3.1.1. We must preach narrative passages rather than ignore them.

3.1.1.1. God chose to give us his truth in stories.

This is significant. Consider the fact that over 40 % of the Old Testament is narrative.⁴ To ignore the stories is to ignore what God has said.

2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

3.1.1.2. The stories God gave are profitable for the spiritual vitality of our flocks.

Romans 15:4 (ESV)

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

3.1.2. When we preach narrative passages, we must preach them properly.

The foundational principles of solid hermeneutics still apply.

Specifically, the proper meaning of the text is the (human) author's intended meaning—never a *sensus plenior*. We are not at liberty to indulge in eisegesis.

3.2. Properly preaching narrative passages is a difficult task—and here are some of the reasons why.

3.2.1. Difficulties of Language: Many preachers have rusty or nonexistent skills in Hebrew language.

This problem is compounded by an understandable imbalance in the typical preaching plan. New Testament books receive priority, so Hebrew skills suffer from sparse usage.

Suggestions:

3.2.1.1. Designate a specific time in your schedule to brush up on language skills.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Fourth edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014), p. 89.

- 3.2.1.2. Purchase a collection of good books: commentaries and specialized works on hermeneutics.
- 3.2.2. Difficulties of Literature: Many preachers have learned reading skills designed to discover *what* an author says but not *how* he says it.

T. David Gordon makes an astute assessment that helps explain why many preachers struggle with exposition. His observation is especially applicable to exposition of narrative passages.

“Culturally, then, we are no longer careful, close readers of texts, sacred or secular. We scan for information, but we do not appreciate literary craftsmanship. Exposition is therefore virtually a lost art. We don’t really read texts to enter the world of the author and perceive reality through his vantage point; we read texts to see how they confirm what we already believe about reality.”⁵

Suggestions:

- 3.2.2.1. Incorporate classic literature in an annual reading plan.
- 3.2.2.2. Cultivate a taste (or at least a tolerance) for select works of fiction and poetry.
- 3.2.3. Difficulties of Context: Many preachers examine the sermon text but fail to investigate its expansive connections.

Literary and thematic connections extend far beyond the actual pericope of a story. Details usually have a long reach that stretches throughout the book. In many cases, the connections extend into the developing biblical metanarrative, drawing from stories that precede it and providing literary currency for stories that will follow.

Suggestions:

- 3.2.3.1. Read through the panorama of Scripture regularly, preferably following a chronological Bible reading plan.
- 3.2.3.2. Read through the book that contains the pericope multiple times in a single sitting.

3.3. Common mistakes made when preaching narrative passages

- 3.3.1. Some preachers moralize the story, confusing description with prescription.

⁵ T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 2009), 49. This means that preachers must work hard to overcome the prevalent literary malaise.

Moral strength and weakness appear in the narrative passages, but commonly without repudiation or approbation. When preachers craft their sermon to proclaim, “be like this and don’t be like that,” they may be right, but those kinds of messages are seldom the point of the passage.

3.3.2. Some preachers allegorize the story, finding Christ in odd places.

Most evangelical preachers today align themselves with a movement that insists that Christ is the subject of every verse in the Bible. The better preachers in that movement are able to make connections between passages and Christ by tracing themes through the biblical metanarrative. But far too many resort to allegory.

- Did Moses intend to teach that the tree cast into the bitter waters of Marah was a type of the cross (Exodus 15:23-25)?
- Did Samuel intend to teach that David’s victory over Goliath was a picture of the imputation of Christ’s work to believers (1 Samuel 17)?

3.3.3. Some preachers psychologize the story, exchanging principles of exegesis for theories of pop-psychology.

It is probably true that Abraham’s household was filled with tension that occasionally erupted into angry conflict. But to preach about how the characters felt and how their feelings affected family relations misses the point of the story.

3.3.4. Some preachers theologize the story, imposing principles that allow them to preach it like an epistle.

Unlike the biblical epistles, narrative passages communicate a message *indirectly* rather than *directly*. Some approach the story determined to see the building blocks of the message in each scene of the story. This way they force the story into their preferred sermonic structure. But in stories, the details are usually just that—details. The message comes from the whole rather than the parts.

3.3.5. Some preachers truncate the story, focusing on one part while missing the point.

The story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife vividly depicts a young man who “flees youthful lust.” But is that the point of the story? Doesn’t that pericope serve a larger purpose?

3.3.6. Some preachers highjack the story, misapplying it to our current age.

- Does Judges 6:36-40 establish the practice of testing God with a “fleece?” (That is wrong on more than one level!)

- Does 2 Chronicles 7:14-15 contain a promise that God will save America if Christians pray?

3.3.7. Some preachers merely *use* the story, validating a personal agenda.

Tragically, some preachers do not even think about the meaning of the text. They have a message of their own creation and find a text to justify it.

- Did the locks of Samson’s hair really represent his loss of separation, sanctification—and five other things that start with the letter “s?”
- Does the story of David’s bride price for Michal really teach us to go over and above what God requires of us in his service?

3.4. Unaccounted costs of failure in preaching narrative passages.

Every time a preacher steps into the pulpit, he teaches his congregation at two levels. He teaches them *what* the Bible says, and he teaches them *how* to arrive at an understanding of what the Bible says. This two-level teaching takes place whether the preacher thinks about it or not. This workshop is a call to think about the interwoven and inseparable relationship between the disciplines of hermeneutics and homiletics. The preacher who willfully ignores the application of sound hermeneutics risks doing great harm when he preaches to the flock entrusted to his care.

3.4.1. Failure to train our people to understand and apply biblical hermeneutics . . .

We hold a high view of Scripture because what God has said matters. It is hypocrisy for us to fight for a high view of Scripture, on the one hand, but then misuse Scripture by “placing” words in God’s mouth that God never said. Hypocrisy in the study produces ministry malfeasance in the pulpit by publicly teaching others to do the same.

3.4.2. encourages them to use spurious methods of interpretation . . .

Subjectivity—even mysticism—is the default approach to interpretation among the immature and untrained. A preacher’s misuse of narrative passages confirms people in this dangerous approach.

3.4.3. or discourages them from even trying.

Unfortunately, many who try to interpret Scripture the way their pastor does eventually give up because they can’t understand how it works. They go through life without ever becoming a self-feeder. They don’t realize that they can’t see what he sees in the text because it isn’t really there.

4. An overview of the process—from interpretation to proclamation

What follows describes a recommended process for the development of sermons from narrative passages. A strong recommendation does not imply that no other approach exists, nor that preachers should never vary these elements. However, as with preaching from any literary genre, the preacher will benefit from first establishing and practicing a specific, proven form. That way, he will exercise greater caution when choosing variations.

4.1. Preliminary considerations

4.1.1. The Bible tells a story.

To say that the Bible tells a story neither casts the Bible in the category of fiction nor calls into question its historical accuracy. Rather, it expresses the unity of the Bible and describes the form of its communication. The Spirit of God guided the 40+ human authors of the collection of sacred books to make essential contributions to the story of God’s relationship with His creation—especially with his people. Therefore, we must not treat individual books in isolation, still less, the individual pericopes. Atomizing the Scriptures this way leads to many of the common mistakes listed above.

As an illustration of the fact that the Bible tells a unified story, compare the opening chapters of Genesis (1-3) with Revelation 22:1-5.

4.1.2. As a story, the Bible has literary features.

Abner Chou correctly argues that the prophets (biblical authors) were better exegetes and theologians than we tend to give them credit for.⁶ Failure to recognize the authors’ skills in these areas have led interpreters to assign the label *sensus plenior* to difficult passages, quickly and wrongly.

When preparing to preach biblical narratives, the preacher must realize that, not only were the biblical authors better exegetes and theologians than we give them credit for, but they were also better writers. Their works often show masterful literary expertise.

It is beyond the scope of this workshop to give a detailed explanation of all the various literary features employed by the authors of Old Testament narratives. Consider these few:

- Alliteration
- Allusion

⁶ Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018), pp. 93ff.

- Assonance
- Chiasmus
- Foreshadowing
- *Inclusio*
- Repetition
- Word-play
- Etc.

The authors also follow the classic, universal structure of a story:

- A clear beginning and ending
- A plot presented in identifiable scenes
- A point of tension or complication
- A resolution to the tension—either positive or negative

Resources in the bibliography will provide help identifying and understanding these literary features.⁷

4.2. Functional levels of a narrative passage

Fee and Stuart rightly describe narrative passages as functioning at three levels.⁸ These levels establish a guide for the preacher as he shapes the interpretive process and also establish the priorities that direct the movement of his sermon. See the summary chart on page 16.

4.2.1. Level One: The details of the pericope

4.2.1.1. Determine the parameters of the pericope.

The beginning and ending of a story seem easy to identify. However sometimes the pericope extends much farther than expected and encompasses large sections of a book. For example, consider the *inclusio* that marks off the Joseph cycles as a single unit (Genesis 37:5-11—50:18). The preacher may decide to preach this sizable unit in several sermons, but he must relate the smaller units to the message communicated by the complete pericope.

4.2.1.2. Decide which details of the pericope are important to the larger story.

⁷ Two works that are particularly helpful in this regard are: Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021) and Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2nd edition (New York: Basic Books, 2011). Please note that the latter work is not written from a Christian perspective and contains serious error. However, the author's knowledge of Hebrew and skills in literary criticism make it a valuable resource.

⁸ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, pp. 91-92.

A book's author wrote the book to serve a larger purpose in the unfolding story of the Bible. He then selectively chose the stories to include in the book because each specific pericope contributes to the development of the book's message. In other words, there are no unimportant stories.

However, not all details of a story are equally important. Some details are necessary framing for the important ideas, other details present the important ideas. The interpreter must learn to distinguish between the two. The fact that the stew Esau gobbled down was made with lentils is not an essential detail, but the fact that the immediate gratification of his appetite was more important than his birthright is essential to the message of the story (Genesis 25:29-34).

4.2.1.3. Determine the scenes.

The plot of a story develops as action takes the reader from one scene to the next. That movement not only provides the substance of good storytelling, it layers additional elements significant for understanding the main idea of the pericope. The scenes organize the preacher's retelling of the story.

4.2.1.4. Identify the main characters and their roles.

Characters are central to Hebrew stories. Identify the main characters and follow their development (positive or negative) by analyzing their words and actions.

- Who is the protagonist in the story?
- Who is the antagonist?
- Are there agonists?
- Is there a foil?
- Who are tertiary characters?

Most importantly,

- *God is always the story's main character.*

Always ask, where is God in the story (explicitly or implicitly)?

Note: a narrative passage seldom offers a moral assessment of the characters' words or actions. Instead, the narrator assumes that the readers have sufficient understanding of biblical standards of righteousness to assess the situation on their own. The reader must never assume that silence is consent.

4.2.2. Level Two: The unfolding story of the people of God

Following the story of God’s relationship with his people extends beyond the pericope and, often, beyond the book in which we find it. The book makes connections with the central motif of Scripture and/or supporting motifs.⁹

The determination of how a book fits into the biblical story is essential to sound exegesis. It is also essential to accurate and interesting preaching. Simple, carefully packaged, easily dispensed summaries of the biblical message have become the stock-in-trade of many expository preachers. But some books do not fit easily and neatly into our preferred “Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation” soundbite-styled breviaries. The biblical story is not simply linear, but more like a richly textured tapestry. The preacher needs to struggle through details to arrive at firm answers to difficult questions about unity within the canon.

Tracing the story of God and his people requires the proper use of biblical theology. Biblical theology is distinguished from systematic theology and yet the two are inseparably related as a foundation (biblical theology) is related to a superstructure (systematic theology). The goal of biblical theology is to “map unity in diversity” within the biblical texts.¹⁰ Andreas Köstenberger identifies four distinct approaches:¹¹

- Classic biblical theology: Synthesize the messages of individual books across the body of works within the canon.
- Central themes: Identify a complex of themes that unite the body of works within the canon.
- Single center: Identify one theme that unites the entire body of works within the canon.
- Metanarrative: Identify the movements of a story that unites the entire body of works within the canon.

⁹ Does the Bible have a central, unifying theme? Many agree that it does but defining that theme has proved difficult. Is it Christ? Is it the gospel? Is it kingdom? Is it glory? Or is it something else? Most opinions fall into one of these suggestions. Some prefer a combination.

Those who embrace covenant theology tie the story of the Bible to the history of redemption. They believe in the dubious idea that there exists in the eternal Godhead a covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*). It ties the glory of God to the salvation of man. Therefore, covenant theologians easily truncate and minimize the Bible’s robust teaching on the subject of kingdom.

Many dispensationalists connect the Bible’s central theme with kingdom. God is achieving his own (ascriptive) glory through his rule over creation. In the beginning, he assigned his image bearer the authority and responsibility to rule as coregent. Adam rejected God’s plan and failed in his responsibility. The coregent became a rebel. Yet, God still rules his creation to display his glory. His display of glory through his rule is tied to progressive revelation. The apex of his glorious rule will be the future kingdom when he mediates his rule through the perfect coregent, Jesus Christ (the Second Adam). So, history is moving from *creation* to *recreation*. In the future Kingdom, God will receive ultimate, undimmed glory.

¹⁰ Scott J. Hafemann and Paul House, eds., *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

¹¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Present and Future of Biblical Theology,” *Themelios* 37/3 (2012), 446-47.

Though these four approaches have distinct emphases, we would do well to focus on their overlapping and complementary elements. A metanarrative does not exclude the existence of a central theme; a central theme does not eliminate the existence of a complex of supporting themes, etc.

To determine how the Bible fits together, biblical theology requires the interpreter *first* to move chronologically through the canon up to and through the book that contains the pericope under analysis. This helps prevent reading the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament or imposing conclusions on a text determined by studies in systematic theology.

Every interpreter will bring previous theological conclusions to his work on a scriptural text—this is unavoidable. But he must remember his proclivity toward this weakness and consciously try to minimize his own biases.

4.2.3. Level Three: The overarching story of the Bible

Having reached conclusions about the pericope and the book that contains it, the interpreter traces those conclusions through the canonical works that follow it chronologically. This takes his work into the third functional level.

4.2.3.1. A proposal:

God's rule, or "Kingdom," serves as a robust theological center for the story of the Bible; it is the unifying theme of Scripture.

It 1) encompasses all humanity (saved and lost), 2) extends to all sentient beings (human and angelic), 3) and unites all eras of history.

4.2.3.2. God's rule as theological center establishes a clear *telos* for the story of the Bible.

The Bible moves from creation to recreation. In that movement, God progressively glorifies himself through his rule over the creation. This progression will climax in the restoration of the heavens and earth under the rule of Israel's King, God's perfect coregent.

4.2.3.3. God's rule as theological center upholds his covenant promises.

Several important facts emerge from the biblical data on the covenants.

First, the covenants were made for Israel.

This is true for all the major covenants with the exception of the Noahic covenant: Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New. The Abrahamic laid the

foundation for God's relationship with Israel; the subsequent three covenants fleshed out the details of the three promises contained in the Abrahamic covenant (land, nation, blessing).

Second, there is no biblical evidence that there exists within the Godhead an eternal covenant of grace.¹²

The idea of the covenant of grace is imposed by a theological system and is based on a faulty understanding of the nature of covenants. The covenants are binding legal agreements that include unilateral and eternal promises made to the nation.

Third, there is no biblical evidence that the promises made to Israel were nullified or reassigned to the church.

Therefore, 1) there is a future for national Israel and 2) salvation is not the unifying theme of Scripture.

4.2.3.4. God's rule as theological center appropriately exalts Christ as the promised mediatorial King of Israel.

Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament promises that move in a specific trajectory from Eden to New Jerusalem. The Scriptures introduce him in the rather cryptic *protoevangelium* (Genesis 3:15). His identity (broadly speaking) becomes clearer as revelation progresses: Son of Abraham, Judah, and David. His roles take on clearer definition, as well. Israel's messianic expectation anticipates:

- The perfect Prophet who speaks for God (Deuteronomy 18:15; cf. John 1:21)
- The perfect Priest who brings men to God (Psalm 110:4; Zechariah 6:13; Isaiah 53)
- The perfect King who rules for God (Genesis 49:10-11; Acts 2:30-31)

¹² See R. C. Sproul, "What is the Covenant of Redemption?" <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-covenant-redemption>. In this post, Sproul asserts authoritatively that, "the covenant of redemption is intimately concerned with God's eternal plan. It is called a 'covenant' inasmuch as the plan involves two or more parties. This is not a covenant between God and humans. It is a covenant among the persons of the Godhead, specifically between the Father and the Son." However, Sproul does not offer one shred of scriptural evidence that such a covenant exists. Instead, he offers passages that describe the interaction between Father and Son in the provision of salvation, but a plan or promise or an activity do not constitute a covenant.

- 4.2.3.5. God's rule as theological center properly explains salvation history as an essential component of what God is doing to populate a kingdom for his glory.

Christ's work as Redeemer is essential to God's plan, but not the ultimate goal (1 Peter 1:10-11). God's rule through his perfect mediator has always been the ultimate goal. For this reason, the Apostles expected Christ to fulfill the kingdom promises immediately following his resurrection. History is still moving toward that end (Acts 1:3, 6; 28:30-31). In this age, the church takes the message of Christ's coming kingdom to the nations.

4.3. Interpretive progression

It may seem counter-intuitive, but the interpretation of a narrational text begins with a broad view and then narrows, eventually arriving at the exegesis of the text itself:

- 4.3.1. Ask the first programmatic¹³ question: What contribution does the book make to the biblical metanarrative?

As an example, if a preacher decided to preach Genesis 38, he would begin by contemplating what he knows about the role Genesis plays in the overall story. He would know that the book sets the trajectory for the rest of the Bible:

- Reveals Creation and Fall
- Records promises of God to Eve and Abraham regarding a "seed"
- Records God's provision of a "seed" through Abraham
- Records God's protection of the "seed" through sovereign acts.

- 4.3.2. Ask the second programmatic question: How does the story advance the message of the book?

Or, put another way, are there any elements of this story that connect with or support the book's big picture ideas listed above? If not, perhaps it introduces new elements previously overlooked.

In the case of Genesis 38 the pericope:

- Continues the theme of the "seed," or descendant of Abraham
- Contrasts the character of Joseph (chapter 39) and Judah

- 4.3.3. Perform an exegetical analysis of the text.

For example, in text of Genesis 38,

¹³ "Programmatic" in this context means a predetermined plan to be followed.

- God demonstrates control over the fulfillment of his promises (38:1-11).
- The twins conceived in incestuous immorality continue the theme of the older serving the younger (38:27-30).
- There seems to be a crucial moment that might be the cause of repentance in Judah (38:26).
- The name of one of the younger twin appears again in 46:12 as the descendent of note (his heirs followed in the genealogy) and again in the larger story of Scripture: Ruth 4:18 as ancestor of Boaz and David and again in Matthew 1:3 as the ancestor of Jesus.

4.4. Proclamational priorities

When crafting the sermon from the pericope, the preacher can move from the details of the story itself, make important connections in the book, and finally use it to connect the listener with the big picture of what God is doing. See point 5 for a description of the sermon structure.

5. A recommended sermon structure for preaching narrative passages

Most expository preachers today typically frame sermons in the deductive structure popularized by Haddon Robinson.¹⁴ However, a deductive structure ignores how stories function as literary units. A better structure—at least as a baseline for preaching narrative passages—comes from the 16th century father of the Puritans, William Perkins.¹⁵ Perkins advocated “simple” preaching and taught a simple homiletic form subsequently used by the Puritans and their heirs for centuries to follow. He did not craft the form to use specifically with narrative passages but advocated it as a structure useful for all biblical genres. For our purposes, it avoids pitfalls in narrative texts that often accompany the deductive approach. His sermons contained three elements, commonly summarized as: 1) explanation (of the text), 2) doctrine, and 3) use (implications/application).¹⁶

5.1. Explanation: Retell the story

Speak as a storyteller, following the movement of the story from scene to scene. Do not simply list the details of the text. Step into the scene and use your language to invite the listeners to join you. Employ sacred imagination to describe what you find there.

¹⁴ For a visualized summary of various sermon structures recommended by Robinson, see his *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 79.

¹⁵ William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying: And the Calling of the Ministry*, 2nd ed. edition (Banner of Truth Trust, 2021).

¹⁶ This formula is similar to Robinson’s “Inductive-Deductive Development, explained in *Biblical Preaching*, p. 88. The main difference is that the initial inductive section of Robinson’s sermon structure does not seem to be exclusively focused on a Scripture text.

Note: Avoid the temptation to speak in the first person. That is theatrics, not preaching.

5.2. Doctrine: State the truth the story presents

Once sermonic retelling of the story is finished, present the doctrine the human author intended to convey through its telling. Give brief exegetical reasons for your conclusion.

Note: this is the equivalent of the “proposition” or the “big idea” of the sermon.

5.3. Use: Explain the implications of the story

Every point of doctrine has applicational implications. The preacher should use the details of the story to define those implications and bring them home to the affections of the audience.

An example from Genesis 38:

Doctrine: God sovereignly works his good plan in all the details of life.

Argument:

- 1) Judah thought he was in control, but God was.
- 2) God used the wickedness of man to bring to pass his plan.
- 3) The role of Perez in the plan of God displays grace.

Use: God accomplished his good purposes with:

- 1) Unassailable sovereignty
- 2) Inscrutable wisdom
- 3) Unfathomable grace

Further application:

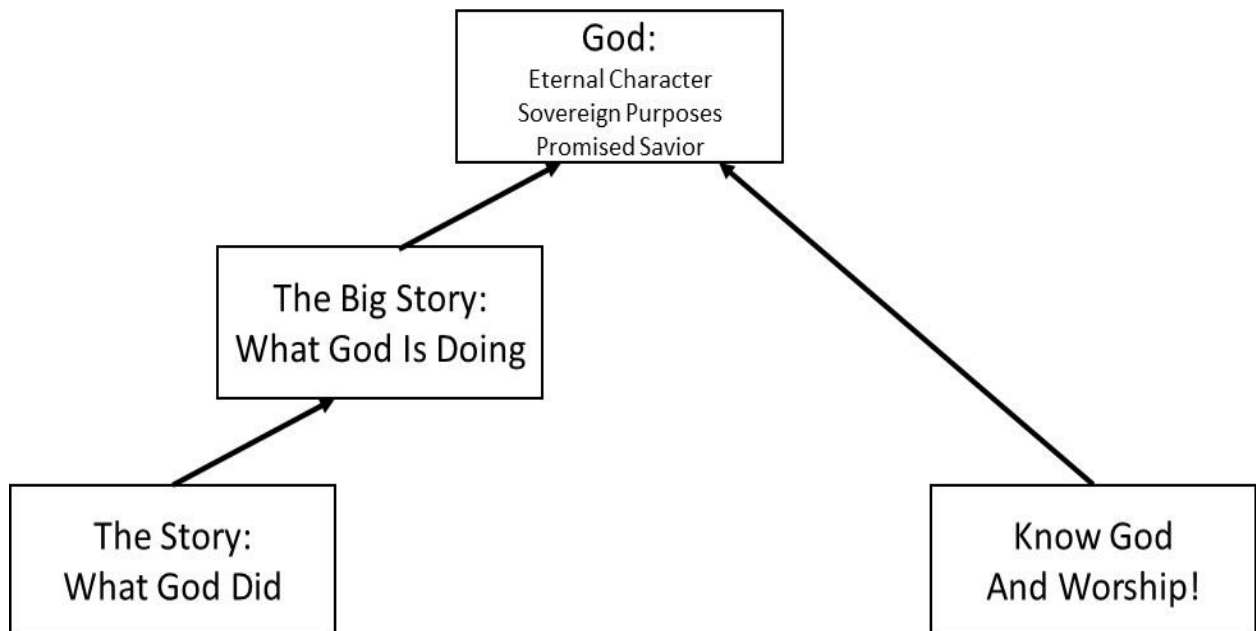
In ugly, dark, painful days, the Bible challenges us with the truth that God is at work in all details. But in quiet moments, doubt answers the challenge: But I can't see his hand in this. I can't understand his wisdom in this. What good can come of this?

Sometimes pain and confusion and sorrow wash over us, robbing us of the ability to correlate the details of our lives with the truths we recite. In those moments think of Jesus; Jesus, who became one of us; Jesus, who, by his choice, owns our heritage with all of its ugliness. And then we remember that God has demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He is the foundation of our faith. He is all the proof that we need that God's promises are true: that he accomplishes his purposes in the details of history with unassailable sovereignty, inscrutable wisdom, and unfathomable grace.

6. A word about the goal

The work of the preacher is pastoral, not merely academic.
The concern of the preacher is the salvation and sanctification of his people.
His preaching is soul-care.

One popular book on preaching describes the “ultimate goal” of the preacher’s work as “to teach [people] how what the Bible says fits their life.”¹⁷ To clarify, the author adds, “Our primary intent is not that our listeners learn something but that they use the Scriptures for all the practical ways intended in everyday life.”¹⁸ With this approach, preachers can frame the message in utilitarian terms; the Bible becomes “God’s answer book.” A better approach has a different goal in view. The message moves from the “story” (passage) to the “big story” (the metanarrative) in order to better understand the character and purposes of God. Once the preacher presents a new look at God, his job is NOT to bring God to the people so they can use lessons about him for their benefit. His task is to bring his audience into God’s “presence” and there worship together. Knowing God (theology) provides the solution to every genuine need. To put the idea another way, practical solutions to human problems need to be grounded in corporate worship.

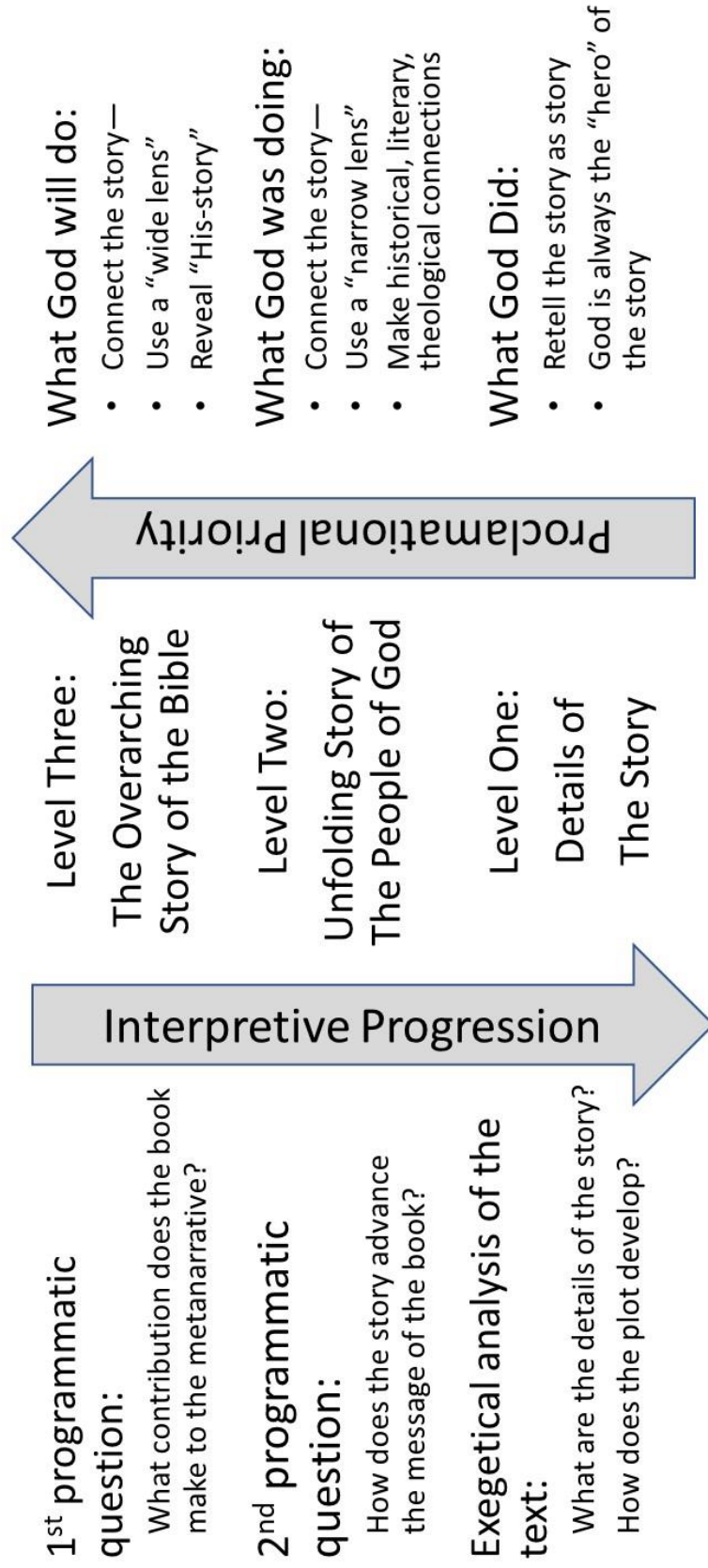


¹⁷ Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), p. 108.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 110.

Narrative Interpretation

Functional Levels (Echoes of Fee and Stuart)



7. Some useful resources

Here is a list of a few books the author has found useful in understanding and preparing for the task of preaching narrative texts. Their inclusion in this list does not imply full endorsement. Some of them suffer significant flaws. Even so, their content contains useful information.

Adler, Mortimer J., and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*. Revised edition. New York: Touchstone, 1972.

Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. 2nd edition. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Chou, Abner. *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018.

Gibson, Scott M., and Matthew D. Kim eds. *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.

Greidanus, Sidney. *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001.

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