

Session 3 Handout

I. Introduction to Narrative Features:

A. Setting and Initial Conflict:

1. The setting provides the necessary background for understanding the events and details that occur within the story.¹
2. The initial conflict is where a problem is introduced that upsets the status of the setting.

B. Discovering Plot: The plot is discovered by asking, “What is the conflict in this story and how is it resolved?”²

C. Rising Action to Resolution:

1. The rising action is the section of a narrative that traces the activity of the protagonist to solve the problem created by the inciting incident.
2. The climax is the major turning point in the narrative because the conflict and rising action reach a tipping point.
3. The resolution is where the tension in the narrative breaks and the plan of both parties is either vindicated or disproven.

D. Epilogue: This is where the reader finds the results of the victory that re-establish the purpose of the protagonist.³

E. The Bible as Dramatic Plot:

¹Leland Ryken. *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 35.

²Sidney Greidanus, “Detecting Plotlines: The Key to Preaching the Genesis Narratives,” CTJ 43 (2008), 65.

³Charles P. Baylis, “*The Story of the Bible: Introduction.*” Unpublished class notes for DM 205 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Winter Session, 2014), 14.

II. A Case for a Metanarrative of Scripture:

A. Literary Structure at a Macro Level:

B. Interdependence:

1. Almost every book that follows the Torah references Torah in some way, thereby implying literary and theological dependence.
2. Sometimes interlocking devices are used to link books.
3. Allusion: “A literary allusion is a literary device utilized by an author whereby allusive textual markers are placed into the alluding text so that the rhetorical relationship between the two contexts can be determined and the meaning created by the allusion can then be imported into the author’s developing textual meaning.”⁴

C. Literary Features:

1. Themes:
2. Progressive revelation:
3. Closure and Unresolved Conflict:
 - a. Unresolved conflict leaves the reader waiting for a resolution.
 - b. As the Old Testament narrative of Scripture unfolds, one begins to realize that closure and resolution are presented as a future hope.
 - c. The Old Testament ends without any real sense of closure.

⁴ David R. Klingler. *Validity in the Identification and Interpretation of Literary Allusions in the Hebrew Bible* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 75.

D. The claims of Christ: Jesus recognized the literary unity of Scripture as being centered upon Himself (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47).

III. The Parts and the Whole:

A. Ways that metanarrative should impact interpretation:

1. The story as a whole casts light on the particulars.
2. Words have meaning in context; context is not limited to a passage or even an individual book of the Bible.
3. The books of the Bible must first be seen as individual literary units that were intended to be understood as such. Books carried a specific message to a specific audience.
4. As God progressively revealed Himself and His plan, certain themes and motifs are developed to greater clarity and specificity.
5. The metanarrative of Scripture can bring greater clarity, depth and richness to something that was previously revealed.
6. The metanarrative allows us to see the significance of a truth that may not have been fully appreciated when first given.
7. Until the completion of the biblical story, some tensions will remain unresolved and themes undeveloped.

B. Cautions and other considerations:

1. Though we are privileged to have the entire word of God, we must be careful not to read into earlier texts and understanding that was not there originally.
2. The Bible contains many types of literature (not just narrative). In our study of Scripture, we must read each genre according to its own style and characteristics.

3. Nevertheless, even the books that are non-narrative occur within a narrative context.
4. With the completed canon, we are in a unique position to understand God's word. We know how the Grand Story will end!