

Historical Narrative

Introduction (Howard, *IOTHB*, 23–58)

Historical Narrative as Prose

- Defining “Poetry”
 - Short rhythmic lines
 - High use of figurative speech
 - Heavily characterized by parallelism
 - Unbound by time and space
- Historical Narrative
 - More extended discourse.
 - Tendency toward...
 - The past
 - Earthly existence


A look ahead...




- Historical Narrative as Prose
- Historical Narrative as History
- Modern Historical Study of Biblical History
- Historical Narrative as Literature
- Reading Historical Narrative

Historical Narrative as History

The canonical record of factual history



Historical Narrative as Prose



Historical Narrative as History

- Definitions of “History”
 - The *events* of the past.
 - A *record* of the events of the past.
 - A *study* of the record of the events of the past.
- The nature of the *production* and *study* of historical material:
 - Selects events that are significant to the author and audience.
 - Interprets the significance of those events for the audience.
 - Generally writes with some *intent* beyond just recording and analyzing what happened.

History as *the facts*

- Events of the past are accessible only through memory.
 - Personal memory of the author and/or reader.
 - Documented memory
- Evidence is limited.
 - Our "memory" is thus limited, and perhaps even false.
 - Absence of recorded evidence is not proof that the event didn't happen.

Modern Historical Study of the Bible

- ANE history vis-à-vis **biblical** history.
- **Biblical historians and their approach to inerrancy:**
 - Non-evangelicals challenge the factuality of the biblical record.
 - They let external sources trump biblical assertions.
 - They bring unbiblical assumptions to both the text and the external data.
 - Evangelicals accept the factuality of the biblical record.
 - They still use external sources to shed light on the biblical record.
 - They try to shape their assumptions to those of the inspired biblical authors.
 - They assert what the inspired author asserts.
 - They follow the biblical record's judgment on the meaning and significance of what the inspired narrator records and analyzes.

History as *a record* of the facts

- This we sometimes call "historiography."
 - *Historia* = investigation, inquiry, or "research."
 - *Graphia* = writing.
- This is only a **representation** of the events of history.
 - In the case of human history, it's therefore fallible.
 - In the case of divinely inspired canonical history, it's inerrant.
- Some canonical authors showed a "historical self-consciousness" (Howard, 32).
 - OT (1 Chr 29:29; 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 32:32).
 - NT (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30f; 21:25).

Problems for Modern Historians

- **Problem of Evidence**
 - Used for reconstructing histories of varying degrees of probability.
 - This reconstruction is neither history itself nor revelation.
 - Scientific historiography:
 - Science deals with the repeatable.
 - Historians tend to deal with regularities, tendencies, and patterns.
 - Biblical history sometimes speaks of the absolutely unique and unrepeatable.
 - Some patterns, cf. typology.
 - Some things once-for-all.
- **Problem of the Historian**
 - No such things as purely objective study.
 - One's own perspective can provide unique insight.
 - One's own perspective can rule out finding what's *there*.
 - Modern reader must attempt to understand the values of the period being studied:
 - ANE and Greco-Romans studies for secular background.
 - Truly biblical world view for reading canonically.

Modern Historical Study of Biblical History

How modern "scientific" historical studies relate to the factuality of the biblical record



Importance of Historicity

- The biblical record from start to finish roots itself in **history** instead of **philosophy**.
 - The biblical record asserts its own historicity by use of historical sources and historical genre.
- The veracity of God is at stake on this issue, since he is the ultimate author of this record.
 - Either he reveals himself as a truth teller in all things,...
 - ...or he proves to be fallible or even untruthful.

Implications of Biblical Historicity

- Progressive revelation rather than timeless philosophical principles—if indeed there be such things.
- God not only makes judgments and declarations of salvation in the heavens, but he implements them on earth (i.e., in history).
- Bottom line of biblical historiography (2 Tim 3:16–17)
 - Biblical history is truthful
 - Biblical history is useful

Historical Narrative as Literature

- Historical
- Artistic
- Entertaining
- Anthological
- Selective
- Realistic
- Romantic
- Revelatory
- Response-Evoking

Canonical *Record* = Revelation

- Not enough to say God revealed himself through his mighty acts in history.
 - Even his greatest historical revelation through act (Incarnation) required canonical explanation to have full revelatory force.
- Remember two key principles of historiography:
 - The historian *selects* what to record: Even that is an interpretation, which we would lack if we just ran a 24/7 web camera on Israel's history.
 - The historian *interprets* what he records: This is essential to understanding; therefore, it's essential to revelation.
- No accident that the Jewish canon describes the OT historical books as the *former prophets*

Reading Historical Narrative

Proposing a reading strategy for the Old Testament historical books

Historical Narrative as Literature

These narrative adopt a *style* to tell a *story*

Reading Historical Narrative

- Watch for the narrator's evaluative input:
 - Implied
 - Positive or negative character development—instance by instance.
 - Not about positive or negative consequences flowing out of narrative.
 - Explicit: Explicit theological judgments, especially with reference to the standard of the Torah.
- Watch for repetition:
 - See it within a particular scene (e.g., key words)
 - See is spanning the canon (e.g., typological motifs).
- Identify with the expected response in the original audience (1 Cor 10:11).