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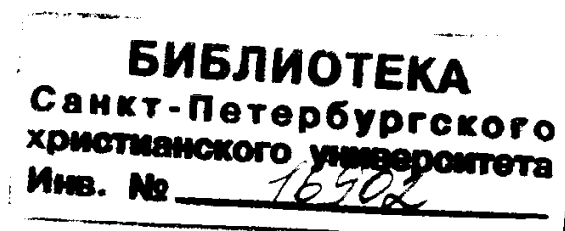
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6. NARRATIVE CRITICISM: THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

The literary qualities of OT narrative have long been recognized by scholars and general readers alike. In the 1980s four books were published that marked a significant advance on previous scholarly studies of OT narrative: R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative;* A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative;* M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative;* S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible.* Taken together, they provide a sophisticated and wide-ranging treatment of the workings of OT narrative. I term this approach "narrative criticism." Alter and Sternberg have since written further on this subject, and many others have followed their general approach, but I will use the four books listed above as the basis for this essay, since they provide a convenient reference point as well as being readable treatments of the topic (Sternberg's book is, however, longer and more complex than the other three).

Narrative criticism represents only one out of many literary approaches currently being applied to OT narrative. For a sampling of some others, among them reader-response criticism, deconstruction, materialist criticism, feminist criticism, intertextual approaches, see D. N. Fewell (ed.), *Reading Between Texts;* J. C. Exum and D. J. A. Clines (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible;* D. M. Gunn and D. N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible.* Significant aspects of the work of Alter and Sternberg in particular have been criticized by scholars writing out of some of these other approaches: D. M. Gunn, "Reading Right"; B. O. Long, "The 'New' Biblical Poetics." Some of these criticisms will be picked up in what follows. Narrative criticism, however, remains full of suggestive insights, particularly in the way it links narrative techniques to a worldview or theology underlying the narrative.

The main thesis of narrative criticism is that OT narrative is in general written using certain recurrent literary techniques, which become apparent when one examines the following main features of OT narrative: its use of patterns of repetition and variation, its presentation of narrative events out of chronological sequence, and its selectivity in what the reader is told. Most narratives, ancient and modern, fictional and nonfictional, display these features to some extent: In order to create a coherent narrative, one generally has to select and reorder events, and also bring out similarities and differences between them. The claim of narrative criticism is that the writers of OT narrative exploit what were in effect the requirements of their chosen literary form resourcefully and in many ways: in order to provide interpretations and evaluations of the events narrated, to characterize the human participants in these events, to create ambiguity and suspense, and to influence the reader's response to what is described.

In what follows I will introduce these techniques more fully and then discuss their implications for OT theology. As well as working through some OT examples, I give further OT references that readers can follow up for themselves.

1. *Repetition and variation; cross-textual allusion.* An immediate impression for any reader is that OT narrative is at points repetitive. If we are at first tempted to dismiss this feature as a literary defect (arising, perhaps, from the vicissitudes of oral transmission, or accidentally created by the editorial combination of sources), closer examination suggests the reverse. For one thing, though there are many cases of exact repetition, there are as many where one of the repeated elements is given in a varied

form. And in general, in most cases of exact or varied repetition, it is possible to argue that we are dealing, not with a more or less accidental literary epiphenomenon, but with a deliberate authorial technique. Some of the uses of repetition in OT narrative are set out in what follows. See also the discussions of Alter (1980, 88-113) and Sternberg (1985, 365-440).

Repetition can take several forms. Individual words may be repeated so as to stress a key idea (e.g., the use of "sight," "vision," and "blindness" in 1 Sam 3: the use of "listen," "obey," "voice," "word" in 1 Sam 15); a series of actions or words may recur (e.g., the patterning of the days of creation in Gen 1). On a larger scale there are cases where entire incidents have a similar pattern (e.g., the account of the crossing of the Jordan in Josh 3-4 seems to be modeled on the account of the Exodus in Exod 14).

Exact or near-exact repetition can suggest such things as stability and order. inevitability, unanimity, and obedience. The patterning of the days in Gen 1 suggests God's firm control over the stages of creation. In 2 Kgs 1 the message Elijah receives to take to Ahaziah is quoted three times: as given by God to Elijah (vv. 3-4); as given by Ahaziah's messengers to Ahaziah (v. 6); as given by Elijah himself to Ahaziah (v. 16). The message is each time given in unchanged form, suggesting that for all Ahaziah's attempts to threaten Elijah, he cannot escape the death prophesied (cf. v. 17). Finally, Num 7 is perhaps the extreme case of unvaried repetition: Only the names of the tribes and their representatives change as each tribe duly brings its offering for the tabernacle.

Repetition with variation can suggest a different range of ideas: contrast or conflict, a significant development in the narrative, a climactic moment in the narrative, or an incident that in some way overturns or parodies an earlier incident. Thus, when Elisha at 2 Kgs 2:14 parts the Jordan with his cloak, as Elijah has just done before (v. 8), this suggests both continuity (God will be with him as with Elijah) and change (Elijah has gone, and Elisha is to carry on his work). In Judg 20 the different preparations for the third day's fighting against Benjamin suggest that it will end in victory, not defeat (compare vv. 18, 22-23, and 26-29; note also how the tone in which the Israelites address God becomes increasingly anguished as the fighting drags on without success, vv. 18, 23, 28). Readers may also like to study the repetitions and variations in the treatment of the successive plagues in Exod 7-11. As regards overturning and parody, large sections of Judg 17-21 (which have as their theme anarchy in premonarchic Israel) can be seen as travesties of earlier narratives: The Danite destruction of Laish is a travesty of the conquest narratives in Josh (God has not commanded the destruction, the killing of the inhabitants is portrayed as an atrocity, and the Danites institute idolatrous worship in the territory they have conquered): Judg 19:15-30 reminds the reader of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19:4-13, with the difference that in Judg 19 it is the Israelites who are engaging in blatant wickedness; the ambush of Gibeah in Judg 20:29-48 reminds one of the ambush against Ai in Josh 8, except that now Israelites are fighting against Israelites. In each case, comparison between Judges and the earlier narrative underscores the theme of wickedness in Israel.

OT narrative seems at points explicitly to encourage this kind of cross-textual allusion. We may cite, for example, God's self-description in Exod as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exod 3:6; cf. Deut 1:8). In a similar way, the recurrent "cyclical formulae" of Judg (3:7-11; 4:1-2; etc.) and "regnal formulae" of Kgs (1 Kgs

11:41-43; 14:19-20; etc.) can be seen, not as evidence of a stereotyping mentality, but as an invitation to the reader to compare and contrast the activities of earlier and later judges/kings, noting recurring themes and new developments.

Repetition with variation can take subtle forms, particularly when it involves whole episodes. Gen 37 (the selling of Joseph into Egypt) and Gen 38 (the episode of Judah and Tamar) appear to be separate narratives; but both culminate in a scene where someone is asked to identify objects linked to goats (37:22-32, 31; 38:17-18, 25-26), This similarity of plot suggests a pattern running through seemingly unconnected events: Gen 38 is clearly concerned with the survival of the line of one of Jacob's sons; but Gen 37 turns out to have been no less concerned with this theme, for it is Joseph's presence in Egypt that will make it possible for them to survive famine. God, the narrator hints, is at work in the events of Gen 37 and 38, though in a way that will only be clearly discernible later on (a point explicitly made at 45:5; 50:20). Compare also Gen 27 compared with 29:15-30, from which it emerges that Jacob suffers a deception just like that he perpetrated against his father; 1 Sam 24-6 (discussed by R. P. Gordon), in which the Nabal episode of ch. 25 turns out to develop the same themes that run through chs. 24 and 26, in particular the theme of David's vindication against a hostile kingly or king-like (see 25:36) figure.

All these uses of repetition may be termed forms of *implicit commentary:* The narrator uses repetition, variation, and patterning to emphasize points, suggests connections between events, and hints at interpretations and evaluations; but in none of the cases discussed does he explicitly state what he thinks is going on. Instead, the reader has to compare, contrast, and interpret what the narrator has no more than suggestively juxtaposed. At many points OT narrative also provides explicit interpretations and evaluations of people, actions, and events; but it may be said that one of the most fundamental features of OT narrative is an apparent reticence which, when probed, resolves itself into a sharply focused, though unstated, commentary on the events narrated. See further Bar-Efrat (23-45) for a discussion of the difference between "overt" and "covert" narrators.

The frequent reticence of OT narrative does, of course, often leave more than one interpretative option open in repetition and variation, as in other aspects of OT narrative we shall examine. While we may sometimes be confident in identifying and interpreting small- or large-scale patterns of repetition/variation (because of the number or character of similar elements, or because of other, contextual factors), on other occasions we may be more hesitant: Is there a connection between (for example) two incidents, and, if so, what does it mean? And why these two incidents in particular? Are other connections not possible? P. D. Miscall, for example, investigates Gen-2 Kgs using a deliberately loose model of "narrative analogy." According to him, all sorts of links may be made between all kinds of texts. The effect is to create so many intertextual interconnections that ultimately the procedure breaks down; all texts come to say much the same as other texts, and in this general indeterminacy of meaning, any attempt to trace focused implicit commentary is undermined (see also Fewell, for other versions of this approach). These are somewhat extreme forms of the principle of repetition and variation, partly deriving from a view according to which readers (not writers) generate any meanings a text may have and hence are at liberty to compare any

text with any other; on this view it is scarcely relevant whether or not the writer may have had more limited cross-textual connections in mind.

To many readers this approach will seem arbitrary. It must be acknowledged, however, that it has rightly identified a certain "open-endedness" in the surface of OT narrative; this can sometimes be resolved, but not always so. See, for example, the reference to the milk cows lowing as they bring the Lord's ark to Beth Shemesh (1 Sam 6:12). Is this simply a realistic detail? Alter (1992, 101-6) wonders whether the narrator means to produce a strange resonance with the narrative of the birth of Samuel: As the cows are unable to give their calves milk (hence their lowing), so Hannah, having weaned Samuel, has given him to the Lord's service (1:24-28), a sacrifice as costly in its own way as that which the cows endure (6:14). Does the narrator intend to suggest this train of thought? It is hard to say. The suggestive, allusive style of OT narrative does not leave every end neatly tied up.

2. *Narration and dialogue.* Dialogue is an important part of OT narrative (Alter, 1980, 63-87). A significant event in OT narrative is most usually presented in the form of a scene that contains spoken words. Judg 1:11-15 and 1 Kgs 9:10-14 are good examples of scenes that contain dialogue, though they could have been differently composed. Probably 75 percent of this dialogue is spoken by men or women (the remainder by God). It is in itself significant that so much space is given to human words (and thus feelings, motives, and views).

Dialogue in OT narrative has much in common with the patterns of repetition and variation discussed above. Implicit commentary is again involved, but here the issues raised are those of viewpoint, knowledge, and motive. The narrator juxtaposes spoken words of two or more characters, or spoken words and his own third-person discourse. As in most narratives, the narrator generally presents himself as reliable, able to tell the reader what is going on in various locations, and able to say what people, and even God, are thinking (Bar-Efrat, 17-23; Sternberg, 1985, 58-83). The spoken words of the human characters, in contrast, are not necessarily to be taken at face value: Characters may be telling the truth or lying; they may say what they think, or they may hide their feelings; they may twist facts so as to influence people; their words may be colored by a particular attitude or may reveal a misunderstanding; subsequent events may put their words in a new light. Some further evaluation of spoken words is almost always necessary (Sternberg, 1985, 129-31).

It is usually the reader who must make this evaluation, for the narrator is generally sparing in evaluative comment. Typically dialogue is introduced with nondirective formulae, such as "he said," "she answered," rather than more explicit phrases such as "he lied," "they disagreed," "she replied evasively," and "they retorted contemptuously." Falsehood, disagreement, evasion, or contempt may be present, but the reader has to deduce this by comparing spoken word with spoken word, or with the narrator's discourse. Hence dialogue can work on two or more levels, a bland-seeming surface parting to reveal more complex motives and attitudes in the characters and sharp comment on the part of the narrator (readers who wish to see how far this procedure can be taken may consult Sternberg's study of Gen 23, "Double Cave, Double Talk").

OT narrative in general appears to delight in the play between viewpoints, as if to stress the bias and limitation of human perceptions. Even third-person narration, which it might be supposed gives solely the narrator's perspective, sometimes presents

events, not as they appear to the narrator, but as they are perceived by one of the characters. Such shifts of viewpoint are particularly common in descriptions of personal encounters (Exod 3:2-4; Judg 19:16-17; Ruth 3:8-9). For a discussion of this point and of the ways in which shifts of viewpoint may be marked, see **Bar-Efrat**, 36-39; Berlin, 59-64, 72-76. The following are examples of play between narration and dialogue. In Gen 16:4-5, Sarah's complaint to Abraham about **Hagar** in v. 5 is shown to be justly founded by the narrator's words in v. 4; the narrator supports Sarah's claim that Hagar has despised her (though the vehemence with which she attacks Abraham is hers alone). In 50:16-17, Joseph's brothers, fearing revenge from him, attribute to Jacob words that he is never recorded as having said, but which are at points similar to the words in which they themselves express their fear in v. 15 (v. 15, "all the wrongs we did to him"; v. 17, "the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly"). The narrator thereby suggests that they have invented the words they put into the dead Jacob's mouth. In 1 Kgs 21:2-6 Naboth's response to Ahab ("The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers," v. 3, repeated by the narrator in v. 4) is polemically truncated by Ahab when he reports it to Jezebel, and it becomes "I will not give you my vineyard" (v. 6), as though Naboth had refused out of unmotivated spite (Gideon similarly twists the words of the officials of Succoth in Judg 8: cf. vv. 5-6 and v. 15). In Judg 18:7-10 the narrator stresses how remote and defenseless Laish is (v. 7), but the Danite spies give an unsympathetic description that dwells on the prosperity of Laish and the ease with which it can be conquered (vv. 9-10). The spies' viewpoint diverges yet further from the **narrator's** at the end of v. 10, where they confidently state that God has given them this land, a claim that the narrator nowhere validates (cf. in this regard 17:13). See also **Sternberg**, 1985, 390-400, and G. W. Savran.

Sternberg and Alter view the contrast noted above between reliable narrator and unreliable characters as fundamental (e.g., Sternberg, 1985, 84-99); for them the narrator's reliability suggests God's role as omniscient judge of human words and deeds (not least in the way in which, like God, the narrator often appears to withhold judgment). This view has been questioned. Gunn has drawn attention to seeming contradictions, that appear to undermine **narratorial** reliability (1990, 56-57). Further, is God always portrayed as omniscient in OT narrative? Some texts might suggest not (Gen 18:20-21; 22:12; cf. Long, 81-82). However, as Gunn and Fewell note (1993, 54), a scale in which information given by the narrator is usually more reliable than that given by the characters is a useful rule of thumb in reading OT narrative. In general, the suggestion that OT narrative style portrays human history as unfolding before the gaze of God seems a fruitful one.

Dialogue is also one of the chief means of characterization in OT narrative. Typically, two characters will be contrasted in what they say, how they say it, whether they speak at length or briefly, and the extent to which one of them dominates a dialogue. See, for example, the differing dynamics of the following dialogues: between Jacob and Esau in Gen 25:29-34; Jacob and Laban in 31:25-44; **Micah** and the Danites in Judg 18:21-26; Saul and David in 1 Sam 24:8-16; Paltiel and Abner in 2 Sam 3:13-16; Michal and David in 6:20-23; Nathan, Bathsheba, and David in 1 Kgs 1; Elijah and Obadiah in 18:8-15.

3. *Selectivity, dischronologous presentation.* As in all narrative, so in the OT the presentation of events is controlled by a narrator. Sometimes his presence is obvi-

ous: He gives information in asides (Judg 20:27b-28a; 1 Sam 9:9), gives clear explanations for events (Judg 14:4; 1 Kgs 12:15), and passes unambiguous judgments on them (Judg 17:6; 2 Sam 11:27). On other occasions he is less explicit, linking events but leaving the reader to deduce the connections between them (Gen 15:1; 2 Sam 15:1), proceeding by means of hints rather than plain statements, as in many of the examples given in the preceding sections. OT narrators are selective in what they choose to reveal: Circumstantial details are rare; topography is not described, unless important for the plot (Gen 29:2-3; 1 Sam 17:1-3); similarly with physical appearance and clothing (Gen 27:11; Judg 3:15-17; 2 Sam 13:18-19).

It is always worth asking what the narrator describes at length and what he passes over briefly: "Narrative time" (the time the narrator takes to describe each event) and "narrated time" (the length of time events are said to have taken) usually differ greatly in OT (see 2 Sam 13:23 and 38; **Bar-Efrat,** 141-54). An event on which the narrator dwells for a long time is generally significant. Thus in Gen 24, the meeting between Abraham's servant and Rebekah is told twice, and in full, to emphasize that God's hand can be seen in this event (see vv. 27 and 48; cf. **Sternberg's** treatment of the chapter, 1985, 131-52). A variation of this technique is when the narrator builds up to a significant or climactic event simply by delaying it: Judg 20:29-41 delays the moment when the Benjaminites realize they are doomed; 1 Sam 9:1-17 delays the meeting between Saul and Samuel (cf. 2 Sam 18:19-32).

Further, events are not always presented in chronological order. A piece of information relating to the past may be withheld until the point at which it is most relevant (1 Kgs 11:14-25), or when it suggests a connection between two events: In 1 Sam 23:6-14 it emerges that **Abiathar** brought an ephod to David after the massacre at Nob (1 Sam 22); but we only learn this when David uses it to escape from Saul, suggesting the thought that Saul's mad violence is rebounding upon him (M. Weiss, 187-88).

4. *Ambiguity; persuasion.* In connection with **narratorial** selectivity, **Sternberg** speaks of the **Bible's** "maneuvering between the truth and the whole truth," noting that OT narrative can vary greatly in how much the reader is told, and what questions are left unresolved (1985, 56; cf. 163-66). There is always the possibility that a later event will throw new light on earlier events.

Men and women are sometimes portrayed in a way that leaves it unclear what is going through their minds. 2 Sam 11 is thoroughly ambiguous as to how much Uriah knows or suspects about what has been going on between David and Bathsheba and how much David suspects about what Uriah knows (Sternberg, 1985, 190-213). David's motives in 1 Sam 18 are left opaque in contrast to Saul's (Alter, 1980, 115-19, part of a longer treatment of the presentation of David in 1 and 2 Sam, [115-30]). And what does Bathsheba think when she enters King David's chamber and sees Abishag ministering to him (1 Kgs 1:15)? The narrator records the detail, but does not describe Bathsheba's feelings. More generally, the behavior of human characters is not entirely predictable: After fasting for his son's life, David can accept his death with a resignation that startles his slaves (2 Sam 12:15-23); the "wise" Solomon can turn to folly (1 Kgs 11:1-8); the "righteous" Noah can get drunk (Gen 9:20-28); after a life full of strife and turmoil Jacob can reach a resigned and almost saintly old age (chs. 48-49); Moses dies with all his faculties intact (Deut 34:7); David dies a weak and indecisive

old man (1 Kgs 1). Alter is correct to speak of an "abiding mystery" in the OT's depiction of human character (1980, 126).

By presenting events selectively the narrator influences the reader's responses. The same is true of the order in which he relates material facts. A fact revealed at a point when it does not seem relevant to the ongoing narrative (i.e., "too early" from the standpoint of strict chronology) can create suspense, because the reader views it as a loose end that must be tied up later on (Judg 4:11; cf. vv. 17-22). Because Amnon's motives are revealed at the beginning of 2 Sam 13 the reader fears for what will happen to Tamar and feels greater sympathy for her. On the other hand, a fact revealed "too late" may startlingly alter one's evaluation of the narrative up to this point. In Judg 20:18-28 the narrator seems deliberately to raise the question why the Israelites are defeated by the Benjaminites on the first two days of fighting. They have enquired of the Lord beforehand and have been told to join battle; yet they are defeated. Only when they enquire for the third time are they told they will win, but no explanation is given for the previous defeats. In Judg 21, however, we see that the Israelites, previously so zealous in meting out justice to the Benjaminites, resort to all manner of compromises (compare v. 5 and vv. 11-12), casuistry (v. 16 and v. 22b), and downright illegality (vv. 21 and 23) in their efforts to ensure Benjamin's survival. The reader now understands why the Israelites in Judg 20 suffered losses like the Benjaminites: They are equally corrupt; and the delayed revelation of this fact brings it home to the reader with particular force, strongly underscoring the theme of Israelite wickedness (cf. 21:25). See also Judg 8, where Gideon's hot pursuit of the defeated Midianites and his ferocity towards the inhabitants of Succoth is suddenly explained when we learn that all along he has been conducting a private vendetta on behalf of his brothers (8:18-21; Sternberg, 1985, 311-12); and Gen 34, where we learn only right at the end that the Hamorites have been holding Dinah hostage (ibid., 467-68).

There are other means by which the narrator can shape the reader's response, ranging from the direct to the highly subtle: the use of epithets (1 Sam 25:3), the use of loaded language (2 Sam 13:14), and pseudo-objective narration (Judg 17:1-5—the writer does not express his disapproval of Micah's household until v. 6). The uses of repetition and variation discussed above could also be included here (see further Sternberg, 1985, 445-75, and the list of such devices on pp. 475-81).

5. *Theological implications.*

(a) *God's purposes and human understanding.* Though OT narrative greatly condenses real life in its selectivity, it is in one respect completely true to life: People's motives and the significance of events are usually not clear at the time and only become so in the light of the subsequent narrative. The characters, and more often than not the reader, have limited knowledge in comparison to that of the narrator, who controls the presentation of events. One of the effects of reading OT narrative is a feeling of growing understanding as patterns become apparent and as new facts, words, and deeds emerge that throw light on what has happened so far. Explicit comment seems to be withheld so that the reader may experience this sensation of groping after comprehension, and thus, the limits of human understanding: "To make sense of the discourse is to gain a sense of being human" (Sternberg, 1985, 47). The other side of this is that OT narrative style leads the reader to sense behind the events narrated a God who evaluates human deeds and words and who is working out purposes that unfold only gradu-

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ally; the narrator's knowledge and his control of the presentation of events seems to mirror God's omniscience and his sovereignty over history.

Some puzzles, though, are never resolved. We never learn whether Ziba or Mephibosheth is telling the truth (2 Sam 16:2-3 and 19:26-27; David's response in 19:29 is understandable). And larger enigmas remain, even on repeated reading. Why are Isaac and Jacob chosen, and Ishmael and Esau not? How is it in Judg 21 that Israel as a whole, fully as guilty as Benjamin, escapes the severe judgment that has been carried out against Benjamin? What is God's attitude to the things done in his name in 2 Sam 21? The narrative, like the God it portrays, is at points inscrutable, and sometimes the only knowledge yielded to readers is of the limits of their understanding.

(b) *Human dignity.* OT narrative, however, is not solely concerned with suggesting the power of an omniscient God. Though they are always limited in knowledge and power, the men and women of OT narrative are never reduced to pawns. Much of OT narrative is taken up with depicting human words, emotions, relationships, and actions, and these, too, play their part in, and affect the course of, the unfolding story of the OT: "God's purposes are always entrammeled in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for their continuing realization" (Alter, 1980, 14). Further, men and women are characterized realistically, with great subtlety and sometimes at some length. No character who features for more than a few verses in OT is simply a cardboard cutout; there is always something more to him or her than that; and brevity can be as suggestive as prolixity in this regard (Gen 4:23-24; Judg 17:2-3; 2 Sam 6:20-23). OT narrative shows a deep interest in human personality and the interactions of men and women; more than once it suggests the unpredictable, volatile, and mysterious side of human beings. Certainly there is no oversimplification here or any attempt to present humans as mere cogs in a divine plan; rather, there is a respect for human personality that it seems natural to link with statements such as those found at Gen 1:26-27 and Ps 8:4-5.

(c) *Reader involvement.* Finally, OT narrative seeks to involve the reader in three main senses. First and most obvious, it is generally told in a gripping and lively way; words are not wasted, and there is plenty in the way of interesting dialogue, characterization, and suspense. Second, the devices of implicit commentary draw the reader into the (often demanding) interpretative process; it is the reader who has to note and make sense of patterns, allusions, divergences, discontinuities, and gaps that the narrator simply allows to stand in the text, and in this sense it is the reader who interprets events. Third, and balancing the second point, the narrator often seems to lead the reader towards a particular evaluation of the events narrated by means of a variety of persuasive devices, both implicit and explicit. OT narrative style thus seeks to engage the reader's interest, requires the reader's commitment to the task of understanding the events narrated, and urges the reader towards a response, generally of faith or of ethical commitment. Though OT narrative may give the appearance of a largely neutral succession of words and events, it is, on closer examination, anything but neutral; and its neutral-seeming surface turns out to be a way of involving readers more fully and persuading them more effectively.

Conclusion

OT narrative style suggests a distinctive view of God's dealings with human beings and seeks from its readers a response to the claims of this God. It depicts the

grandeur of God's purposes, underlines the worth of men and women made in God's image, and respects its readers by seeking their active engagement in the process of interpretation.

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