

those, such as Tina Pippin, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Robert Royalty, who focus on the dark side of Revelation's violence, have missed an important element. Taking a cue from John's comedic double stupidity near the end of the book (Rev 19:10 and 22:9), Maier sees the irony in Revelation working to undermine standard ancient models of irony. Instead of poking fun at the "other" from a distance, as irony was and is wont to do, he sees John poking fun at himself and his perceptions as well. Ultimately, this is "unstable irony," where the reader is led to question all pretensions to absolute knowledge and power. John does not replace one empire with another; he turns the concept of "empire" inside out. While Jerusalem resketches the images of Babylon, it is everything that Babylon is not; it is a reversed image.

In chapter 7 ("Remembering Apocalypse"), this reversed image focuses on a slain Lamb at the heart of the final Paradise (Rev 21:22-23; 22:1, 3). The consummation of the Apocalypse contains the images of Roman wealth and power but with a decisive difference. The Roman goal of wealth, status, and dominance is replaced by what Maier calls "cruciform irony." To remember "Apocalypse" is to view everything from the perspective of the cross of Jesus of Nazareth. Cruciform irony denies cultural urges to be greedy, idolatrous, and self-centered. It invites disciples of the Lamb to stop trying to control secular society or conquer the world for Christ. Cruciform irony considers the earthly transformations of both revivals and the social gospel as temptations to unbelief and faithlessness. It is satisfied instead with the abundance that comes from loving God and one's neighbor as oneself.

The whole book is provocative. Readers from all sides of the Christian spectrum will certainly find plenty to be offended about. Many "liberals" will be offended at Maier's seeming disinterest in projects for earthly reform, his advocacy of Christian withdrawal from attempts to transform this world (205-206). Many conservatives, on the other hand, will be offended at his apparent dismissal of any inevitable ending to history (xi) and his relative disinterest in the heavenly realities that most Christians have seen in the book. I too did not agree with everything I read in this book. But I somehow sensed that I was a better person for having read it, and for me, that was enough.

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Mathewson, Steven D. *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. 288 pp. Paper, \$16.99.

The title of this volume accurately summarizes its content. Its author is a practising preacher with a passion for expounding narrative texts, and that enthusiasm is clearly evident as he unfolds the homiletical possibilities of OT stories. The book is well organized into three main sections. In the first, "From Text to Concept," Hebrew narrative conventions are explained and guidelines given for sensitive exegesis. The second, "From Concept to Sermon," outlines strategies for moving from exegesis to exposition. This is followed by a third section composed of five sample sermons, the first by Mathewson himself, aimed at exemplifying the preceding theory. Two appendices deal with advanced plot analysis and recommended Old Testament commentaries.

Mathewson's explanation of the nature of Hebrew narrative, covering, e.g., plot analysis, characterization, and point of view, is a fair summary of current scholarship. There is nothing here that is original, however, and one would not expect a book of this type to break new ground. This section is clearly for the uninitiated evangelical preacher. Those who have read Alter, Bar-Efrat, Berlin, or Gunn and Fewell will not have their understanding of Hebrew narrative enhanced. The author's evangelical background, and an assumed evangelical readership, mean that he gives hardly any space to ways of reading narrative that counter his presuppositions. So while Mathewson is a congenial

guide to some current trends in narrative interpretation, he is less than comprehensive. Overall, however, he succeeds in alerting evangelical preachers to the imaginative dimension of biblical literature and to its use of metaphor, irony, ambiguity, aspects that have often sat uncomfortably with conservative perceptions of “inspiration.”

The homiletical theory that takes up the second section is profusely illustrated with examples taken from OT narrative. But anyone who has read Haddon Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* will be in familiar territory. One can do far worse than take Robinson as a model, but his influence on this present volume is enormous. He is cited more often than any other homiletician, on average appearing on every sixth page of the first two sections. In addition, he contributes the book’s foreword and a sample sermon. Perhaps this influence is understandable, given that Robinson was Mathewson’s mentor at seminary, but the student seems to be in awe of his master.

Published sermons rarely deliver the punch of live delivery, so almost inevitably the five sample sermons that form the third main section of the book are disappointing. None more so, unfortunately, than Mathewson’s own contribution on Gen 22. The sermon’s main point that “the greatest thing you can do for your kids is to worship God, not your kids,” is fair enough in itself. However, I am less than convinced that there is enough exegetical anchor for it in the text of Gen 22, especially when read within the context of the Abraham story as a whole.

Appendix A, “Advanced Plot Analysis,” is an up-to-date summary of current thought. However, it requires a knowledge of Hebrew, is heavy going, and even granting Mathewson’s decision to relegate it to an appendix, is unlikely to appeal to the majority of readers. Indeed, they might well ask themselves why it should, given that two of the sample sermons are by preachers who admit to having studied no Hebrew at all (Paul Borden, 201; Alice Mathews, 225). Another uses an interlinear (Donald Sunukjian, 186), and even the revered and omnipresent icon Haddon Robinson admits that he is not as skilled in Hebrew as he would like to be (213). Mathewson alone seems to have the required linguistic skills.

Despite the reservations noted above, as a class text for homiletics I would rate this volume quite highly. In fact, I intend to use it as required reading in my “Preaching from the Old Testament” master’s-level course. The author is aware of the contemporary (American) intellectual climate in general, and his biblical and homiletical scholarship is up to date. He writes in a user-friendly style, regularly providing helpful summaries in tabular form. The numerous examples from Scripture make it extremely practical. Mercifully, he is also realistic, repeatedly reminding the reader that it takes a lot of hard work and perseverance to interpret and expound OT narratives well. Some might ask what the advantage is in using this book rather than reading a standard work on the poetics and interpretation of OT narrative (e.g., Berlin), coupled with Robinson’s classic volume. For those who have already done that, the gain in using this present volume will be modest. But for the novice evangelical preacher, especially one without a knowledge of Biblical Hebrew, Mathewson provides under one cover a coherent, profusely illustrated, user-friendly guide to preaching OT narrative that is likely to become a standard text for some time to come.

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Mills, Watson E., ed. *Daniel*, Bibliographies for Biblical Research: Old Testament Series, vol. 20. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2002. xviii + 103 pp. Hardcover, \$89.95.

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