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BOOK REVIEW

The art of narrative analogy

Postell, S.D. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2025), pp. 209, ISBN: 9781493451975.

Postell introduces a crucial literary device, the narrative analogy, as an essential tool for accurately interpreting the Bible and understanding the deep, intertextual relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. Postell defines narrative analogy as the intentional structural and thematic paralleling of a later biblical story to an earlier one.

The author argues that many readers, including scholars and pastors, miss these parallels simply because they lack the necessary hermeneutical expectation or mistakenly classify them under the rubric of typology. Postell offers a critique of this prevalent typological approach, arguing that it often prioritises a Christological or spiritual meaning over the literary and verbal intent of the historical authors, which can lead to a less rigorous reading of the ancient text (Chapter 2). Narrative analogy, conversely, champions a responsible reading that focuses on discerning the *authorial intent* behind these deliberate literary connections. The book is presented as an alternative to the traditional typological approach.

Postell effectively illustrates this concept, by using the cultural example of the *Star Wars* saga, showing how the deliberate, striking parallels between films such as *The force awakens* and *A new hope* prompt thoughtful engagement and shape the audience's expectations. He then applies this framework to the Bible. For example, he points to the Markan account of Jesus calming the storm

and its deliberate analogy to the Lord's action in the book of Jonah (Jnh. 1), which is designed to reveal a deliberate contrast: the disciples' spiritual blindness compared to the pagan sailors' immediate perception of God's power. Another extended example is the systematic analogy between the life of Jesus in Matthew and the story of Moses, noted through common elements such as departing Egypt, passing through water, fasting for forty days, and ascending a mountain to receive the law.

To successfully identify and interpret narrative analogies, the book outlines three essential requirements for the reader (p. xvi): 1. Hermeneutical expectation: Being aware that these intentional parallels exist in the Bible. 2. Knowledge of the Canon: Possessing a thorough knowledge of the source narratives, particularly the foundational stories of the Torah. 3. Exegetical ability: Developing the skill to ask probing questions about the parallels (both similarities and differences) and formulate contextually sensitive conclusions.

The first half of the book provides a practical methodology for this process, outlining the criteria for identification (such as shared distinctive vocabulary and sequences of events) and detailing the principles for interpretation. Chapters 3 and 4 spell out how to identify and interpret a narrative analogy. First, to identify a narrative analogy, one must work with the original biblical languages, and both narratives must share a cluster of distinctive vocabulary. Secondly, both stories should also contain distinctive sequences with shared themes, motifs, and plot elements. Postell also identifies criteria for directionality between texts. In Chapter 4, the reader is shown how to interpret analogies that have been identified. The crucial question is whether the second story is similar to or different from the initial one.

In the second half of the book, Postell explores how to read analogies that express simple similarities (Chapter 5), highlight profound "alignable differences" (Chapter 6), involve a changeover of characters (dynamic analogies) (Chapter 7), are extended across large passages, or serve a predictive purpose. Ultimately, Postell aims to promote greater awareness of this pervasive and systematic literary strategy.

The book is worthwhile to read. Postell describes himself as a conservative scholar and a "Jewish follower of Jesus" (p. 26). This honesty and transparency add to the allure of the book and are outstanding features thereof. It is not often that a book engages with both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, particularly in a manner that fosters dialogue between Jewish and Christian scholars. Postell does this by honouring the voices of both testaments. This is especially evident in Chapter 2, where he critiques more traditional typology, by contrasting it with his understanding of narrative analogy. The author explicitly prioritises the human author's intended meaning behind the parallel

narratives. He does not read Jesus back into the Old Testament, but, for instance, shows how the author of Matthew presents Jesus as a new Moses (Chapter 5). This is an example of "simple similarity".

In the second half of the book, a variety of detailed examples are discussed where Old Testament stories imitate earlier Old Testament stories, or where New Testament stories mimic Hebrew Bible ones, or where the New Testament imitates the New Testament, while repeating elements from Hebrew Bible narratives (*e.g.* Ac. 13; Lk. 4, and Elijah and Elisha). Although the method often feels very step-by-step and rather formulaic, the author always concludes with the advice to "maintain open hands". This is an attempt to honestly acknowledge possible gaps and weaknesses in the interpretation, a rather refreshing perspective in a book on biblical interpretation. These engagements with the texts often leave the reader with numerous questions for further exploration.

As a reader, one often wonders who the intended audience of the book is: undergraduate students, pastors, or other scholars? It actually reads like all three, which can be both a strength and a weakness. It is hoped that the book will inspire a respect for biblical texts in their original languages among undergraduate students who are still learning these languages and pastors who may have forgotten them. In terms of scholars, the primary audience will be other conservative scholars; however, historical critics may also benefit from reading this book. The book provides a systematic and objective framework for identifying literary dependencies, a type of analysis that diachronically-minded scholars also employ.