

Preface

THIS ANALYSIS of a biblical narrative is intended for readers of English translations of Old Testament scripture¹ (knowledge of Hebrew or Greek not required). It gears toward raising an awareness of what is present and absent in a select text. Using the book of Esther, a prospective shape for a reading method is advanced to introduce examination of biblical story.² Tracing Esther's character, actions, and speeches is one entry into a story world; her role proposes a reading with sensitivity to the general components of Old Testament narrative and an appreciation for the text's literary art.

A brief overview on the power and construction of narrative begins the discussion. General comments review: a need for reading biblical narrative, a function of biblical stories, a research focus, and a sketch of developing the case for this reading model. The overview elaborates on the selection of the Esther story as representative of this proposed reading method, identifying four movements for engaging this literary genre in scripture. Stemming from the story of Esther (and informing the structure of this entire work), this approach involves: an awareness of self (backgrounds),

1. *Old Testament* is used out of respect for the time-honored status of this formative literary collection. The regard this esteemed body of literature is held in by the Judeo-Christian faith traditions bespeaks its contribution to life, faith, and ethic.

2. Readers unfamiliar with definitional aspects of biblical narrative are referred to works by Amit, Bar-Efrat, Alter, Fewell, Ryken, and the Mickelsens, to name only a few helpful resources. Full bibliographic citations appear at the end of this work.

searching the text (making observations), seeking meaning (interpretations, options, and implications), and living learned values.

A reading of Esther is supplied in chapter 2 with sensitivity to the narrative features of the text: narrator, characters, plot, space (setting), time, and style. The text is outlined in four major movements of character development that correlate with the above cited major components: Introduction, Crisis, Action, and Solidarity. To maintain the integration of narrative features, subsections of discussion relate titles and themes via comparison and contrast.

While historical-critical readings are needful and play an important part in the apologetic quest for truth, the potential to value the beauty and power of the story itself can be overlooked. Astute literary-critical analysis is a helpful companion in the reading journey, and based on Esther's example, may critique, but not (purposely) dethrone, other reading practices. Intentional inclusion of literary analysis in reading commitments is like Esther—the contribution is made when brought from periphery to center, beauty is recognized, and when the objective to lead readers in a positive direction (toward life) is acknowledged.

A brief summation prepares for discussion of select findings (implications). A case for reading biblical story asserts narrative features are present before readers; however, if ignored or if readers fail to discern these elements of biblical story, the delightful impact of biblical narrative remains hidden in plain sight, awaiting future discovery. The challenge is to learn an effective reading method of this genre—a method that does not neglect Esther (or narrative readings) in one's commitment to the study of scripture. Sources used in this work appear in footnotes and bibliographic citations. A separate section of supplemental resources is also included.

Three appendices offer practical illustrations for students to compare their own work with: *Appendix 1—Study*

Questions on the Text of Esther provokes thought and discussion relative to the reading in chapter 2. *Appendix 2—Framing Observations* identifies key features/facts of a text. Findings from Esther chapter 1 are framed as: declaration of finding, supporting discussion, and appropriate documentation. Emphasis is on *observation* rather than on *interpretation*. *Appendix 3—Compiling Narrative Observations* categorizes findings, illustrated by isolation of a particular narrative component. The element of “setting” from Esther chapter 1 demonstrates development of one aspect of this study (included in chapter 2, a reading of Esther).

SAMPLE