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BOOK REVIEW

Thus Spoke the Bible: Basics of Biblical Narratives by Antony John Baptist, Bengaluru: TPI, 2024, ISBN 978-93-95623-94-0, Pp. 180

This book has been a resounding success since its initial publication in 2016, resonating with the student community and selling out its copies. The increasing demand led to a second, expanded, and updated edition, featuring thorough reviews, additional explanations, and examples from the Bible. The author has incorporated new insights and perspectives to enhance reader understanding and engagement. This updated version reflects the author's commitment to delivering high-quality content, offering a fresh exploration of the Bible's teachings. The book provides an enriching experience for readers, and this review aims to highlight its key features and significance. Having attended the author's class and studied this book thoroughly, I can attest to its profound impact on my academic pursuits. As reflected in this book, the author's expert teaching and insightful perspectives significantly enriched my doctoral dissertation, particularly in shaping my methodology and approach to analyzing New Testament passages such as Lk 2:8–20 and Acts 8:26–40.

The author provides an insightful exploration of biblical storytelling from a narratological perspective, with a deep understanding of narrative dynamics. The book offers a compelling analysis of biblical texts' literary techniques, structures, and narrative strategies, making it a valuable resource for scholars, students, and general readers interested in understanding the Bible beyond its theological dimensions.

The book is structured into seven chapters, each addressing a key aspect of biblical narration. It opens with a discussion distinguishing narratology from narrative criticism, laying a strong theoretical foundation for the study. The author critically engages with common objections to narrative criticism, including concerns about the historical reliability, textual unity, potential distortions, and

incoherencies in the Bible. Despite these critiques, he emphasizes the wholeness of the biblical text, asserting that it should be understood as a unified literary composition rather than a disjointed collection of stories. This nuanced approach allows readers to appreciate biblical storytelling's literary artistry and theological depth.

Subsequent chapters introduce essential literary concepts such as characterization, point of view, and plot structures. The book explores how biblical authors employ literary devices such as repetition and type scenes to create meaning. Type scenes, in particular, are a fascinating aspect of biblical narratives – recurring narrative patterns that create a sense of familiarity and expectation. Examples include the betrothal-at-the-well motif (e.g., Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah), divine annunciations (e.g., the birth of Isaac, Samson, John the Baptist, and Jesus), and theophanies (e.g., Moses and the burning bush). By analyzing these structures, Baptist demonstrates how biblical narratives maintain continuity while highlighting unique theological messages.

Studying the implied author's textual strategy is another strength of the book. Baptist examines how the implied author employs different techniques, such as narrator text and character text, focalization, and characterization, to guide the reader's interpretation. He also dedicates a chapter to the concept of plot, exploring its definition, structure, different moments, and elements that contribute to the coherence of biblical stories. The discussion of Emplotment-Plot-Explotment in the final chapter further deepens this exploration by considering different perspectives – author-oriented, text-oriented, and reader-oriented approaches – allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how biblical narratives are shaped.

One of the major merits of this book is its ability to bridge the gap between literary analysis and theological interpretation. While many studies on the Bible focus solely on historical or doctrinal aspects, Baptist successfully integrates literary criticism, making biblical narratives more accessible and enriching for a wide range of readers. Additionally, his clear and structured presentation and well-chosen examples from scripture enhance the book's readability and depth.

Antony John Baptist's *Thus Spoke the Bible: Basics of Biblical Narratives* is a valuable resource for anyone seeking to understand the complexity and richness of biblical storytelling, offering a well-

researched and engaging study that blends literary and theological insights. This unique blend makes the book an essential read for biblical scholars, students of literature, and curious readers alike, providing valuable tools to appreciate the profound storytelling methods within the biblical text. With Baptist's insightful analysis presented in accessible language, the book caters to a broad audience, including scholars, students, and general readers, who will find it an excellent choice for exploring the narrative intricacies of the Bible.

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