

Genesis: Preaching Historical Narratives – Gen. 24

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Session: Lecture 25

Source: Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Abraham, Genesis 24, Redemptive-Historical, Exemplaristic, Allegorical, Homiletics, Preaching, Isaac, Rebekah, Biblical History

Abstract

This lecture explores the interpretation and preaching of Old Testament historical narratives, focusing on the life of Abraham and specifically the narrative of Genesis 24. Dr. Vannoy compares three homiletical methodologies: the allegorical approach, which spiritualizes historical details; the exemplaristic approach, which uses biblical characters as positive or negative moral models; and the redemptive-historical approach, which centers on God's sovereign work in the progress of revelation. He argues that while illustrative lessons have their place, they must be integrated into the foundational redemptive-historical context, as biblical doctrine rests fundamentally upon actual historical events.

Outline

I. Abraham's Lapses, Failures, and Shortcomings (Genesis 16)

- A. The Abraham and Hagar narrative
 - 1. Sarah's barrenness leads to Hagar conceiving Ishmael
 - 2. Household conflicts (Sarah and Hagar, Sarah and Abraham)
 - 3. Ishmael is not the son of promise
- B. The Line of Promise
 - 1. Established through Isaac (Genesis 17:21)
 - 2. Continued line in Genesis (Genesis 25:17)
- C. Other lines and interconnections
 - 1. Ishmael's genealogy (Genesis 25:12-16) and marriage to Esau's line (Genesis 28:9)
 - 2. Midianites through Keturah (Genesis 25:4)
 - 3. Ammonites and Moabites through Lot

II. Abraham's Significance for Believers

- A. Redemptive-Historical Significance
 - 1. Abraham chosen to receive promises and prepare the way for Christ
 - 2. Manifestation of a sovereign God working out redemption (Genesis 3:15)
- B. Exemplary or Illustrative Significance
 - 1. Abraham as a model of faith and faithfulness
 - 2. Referenced as an example in the New Testament (Romans 4, Hebrews 11, James 2)

III. Homiletical Approaches to Preaching Old Testament Historical Narratives

- A. The Challenge of Preaching Narrative Texts
 - 1. Moving beyond simple retelling of the story
 - 2. Translating ancient historical/cultural contexts into modern relevance
- B. The Allegorical Approach (Genesis 24 Example)
 - 1. Method: Spiritualizing historical facts as symbols of deeper truths
 - 2. Symbols in Genesis 24: Isaac as Christ, Rebekah as the Church, Eliezer as the preacher, Rebekah's well-drawing as daily word, camels as those needing instruction or image of sin, ten camels as ten commandments
 - 3. Critique: Eisegesis, arbitrary interpretations, ignores historical integrity of the text
- C. The Exemplaristic (Illustrative) Approach
 - 1. Method: Using characters as moral examples of behavior (do's and don'ts)
 - 2. Application to Genesis 24: marrying believers, seeking guidance in prayer, Rebekah's service as a model of womanhood
 - 3. Critiques and Objections:
 - a. Arbitrary Objection: Difficult to determine which actions are exemplary (e.g., asking for a sign)
 - b. Anthropocentric Objection: Risks moralism, legalism, and centering on human action rather than God's mighty acts
- D. The Redemptive-Historical Approach
 - 1. Method: Contextualizing events within the ongoing history of redemption and revelation
 - 2. Application to Genesis 24: Focusing on God's faithfulness in fulfilling His covenant promises, pointing forward to Christ
 - 3. Significance: Provides a source of comfort, encouragement, and foundational faith
- E. Synthesis of Exemplaristic and Redemptive-Historical Preaching
 - 1. No inherent conflict; exemplary lessons are valid
 - 2. Exemplary applications must be grounded within a redemptive-historical framework to avoid arbitrariness

IV. The Foundation of Biblical History

- A. Relation of Doctrinal Sections to Historical Sections
 - 1. History is foundational to doctrine (the doctrinal rests on the historical)
 - 2. History is not merely illustrative of truths
- B. Critique of Critical Views (S.R. Driver / Wellhausen School)
 - 1. Critical scholars minimize historical reality, focusing only on character examples
 - 2. Danger of treating biblical narratives as unhistorical parables or fables (e.g., Aesop's fables)
- C. Apostolic Preaching as a Model
 - 1. Peter and Paul's sermons recount physical, historical acts of God in redemptive history
 - 2. Need to interpret historical texts in their full context and integrity