

Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh* (Mentor, 2006)

This book is about how to preach from Old Testament narrative passages. The quirkiness in the title anticipates what is to come. Dale Ralph Davis combines a fresh and funny humour with a steady sprinkling of both down-to-earth illustrations and weighty biblical examples to create an absorbing book to read. After reading this book I immediately bought three of Davis's commentaries. I guess that says something...

After outlining his approach in chapter 1, Davis gets into it. In chapter 2, *Quirks*, he works his way through various features of narrative texts. Typically, they are expressed differently from what you read elsewhere: reticence, eavesdropping, selectivity, sarcasm, imagination, surprise, emphasis, intensity, and tension. In chapter 3, *Theology*, he wades into the patriarchal narratives of Genesis as they flow from Genesis 12, looking for God. In chapter 4, *Backstage*, he discusses the placement and layout of passages in material dealing with literary context.

Chapter 5, *Nasties*, was a highlight as Davis engages with the *simply nasty narratives* (61). Identified more fully by those stories which are *too dull, too racy, too gory, or too severe* *Avoidance* (of these texts) gets us nowhere and impoverishes the church. Naturally we can struggle with how to preach the offense and strangeness of the Bible. However, I have found that *leprous texts*... contain hidden treasure (62). Then he follows this with considering three full examples: the *Indecently Nasty* (Genesis 38), the *Shockingly Nasty* (Exodus 4) and the *Brutally Nasty* (Judges 4). When it comes to the Bible this is where so many are itching today. My grandmother used to love a good scratch (of the elbow!) and these pages provide a marvellous scratch for people today.

In chapter 6, *Macroscopic*, the author makes his case for reading the smaller story in light of the bigger story. In chapter 7, *Appropriation*, it is application that comes into focus because *the reader who does not appropriate and/or the teacher who will not apply Scripture is practicing abortion on the Bible* (94). His particular concern is that we not become *too enamoured with the human characters that we miss the big point* (100).

Chapter 8, *Center*, is about the need for theocentricity in reading these texts. After all *whenever you see God clearly in a text you can be sure there is something very applicable there for you* (9). This theocentricity needs to be our *constant perspective*

... there is no one so disturbing, so surprising, so steadying, so fascinating as the God of the Bible. So if I had one piece of hermeneutical advice to give, it is: keep your focus on God if you want your biblical interpretation to be accurate, interesting, nourishing, and relevant. (122)

Interestingly, later in this chapter he makes the passing observation that *find that most of my preaching is little else than a filling out of the doctrine of God* (127). Not a bad confession. A few pages on Christocentricity will get people excited (134-138) because he challenges the notion of preaching Christ from every Old Testament passage. The final sentence? *I am convinced that I do not honor Christ by forcing him into texts where he is not* (138).

Davis comes across as a bit of a stubborn Reformed sort of chap. But oh, he does it with such a flourish. I loved the book. If you don't warm to that persona particularly, you still absorb the book as your preaching from the Old Testament will be heaps better for it.

Paul Windsor