

## **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, *Packaging*, 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, *Macroscope*, 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*