

Freshening Up Your Bible Study with Dr. Jim Coakley

Props

Introduction

The Bible does not communicate in a random haphazard fashion but is artistically structured!

Props Definition

Any physical object that functions as a part of the backdrop in visual or literary works are called “props” (short for “property”). On occasion there are props that serve a narrative function beyond their mere physical existence and ability to add detail to a composition. Some props are so intertwined with a character that one is unable to disassociate that prop from that character. Modern examples include the fedora and bull whip with Indiana Jones and the light sabre with Jedi knights in Star Wars

Examples:

Abraham: Trees

- Oaks of Moreh (Gen 12:6-7) at Shechem, Oaks of Mamre (Gen 13:14-18) at Hebron, Mt Moriah (wood brought?) (Gen 22) at Jerusalem. Other Trees in Abraham’s life: Gen 18: 1, 4, 8, Beersheba (Gen 21:31-34), Cave of Machpelah – Gen 23:17
- Trees make for a fitting prop with Abraham. A number of connections are possible. Since Abraham is the start of a new lineage it makes sense that a tree is used (family tree with seeds). In addition since Abraham is establishing a foothold in the land of Canaan he is establishing roots throughout the land.

Jacob: Rocks

- Jacob is a man who sleeps on stones, speaks in stones, moves stones, wrestles on stones. Stones/Rocks make for a perfect prop for Jacob. He is always contending with hard unyielding things/obstacles so much so that when he speaks to Pharaoh later in life, he says my days have been “long and hard” (Gen 47:9).

Joseph: Clothes

- Clothes/garments are a pivotal element throughout the Joseph narrative and they serve as an obvious prop. They appear at key transition points in the account when his status changes positively or negatively. Just as people have different clothing for different settings so readers can track plot movement whenever Joseph changes his garments.

Other examples:

- 1) Isaac- Wells
- 2) Moses- Water, staff
- 3) Goats in Genesis (deception)
- 4) Charcoal fire in John (John 18:18; 21:9)

How to Freshen up your Bible Study

- 1) Identify objects within the biblical text that are repeatedly associated with a biblical character and then reflect on how the characteristics of that prop serve a literary narrative function beyond their physical reality.
- 2) Thematically these props aid in developing a trait about the individual’s character and as a window into the overall plot that the Biblical author is advancing.