

Buyoung Son, *The Subversive Chronicler: Narrative Film Theory and Canon Criticism Refocus his Intention.*

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Buyoung Son investigates a primary topic in the book of Chronicles, its theory of immediate retribution, with recourse to narrative film theory. Son notes the pervasiveness of this theme in the book of Chronicles, the often reductionist explanations of the theme by scholars, and the function of what is termed a “reversal pattern” within the book’s own narrative that subverts what appears to be the dominant view regarding such a theology of retribution. Son’s analysis endeavors to answer three primary questions: (1) What are the effects of macrorepetition, particularly the reversal pattern, on a comprehensive reading of Chronicles, in relation to the Chronicler’s intent? (2) What kinds of methodological/theoretical insights does narrative film theory offer for our understanding of the effects of the reversal pattern? and (3) How does this reading resonate with the canonical profile of Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible? Son uses the term macrorepetition to refer to the keywords or patterns that recur frequently across the narrative at a macro level to reinforce dominant themes or tropes. One such macrorepetition that has received scholarly treatment is the concept of “immediate retribution,” which refers to the reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked in a timely way and without delay to subsequent generations, and often on a personal rather than a corporate scale. Son contends that the nuanced view of retribution in Chronicles is part of a “reversal pattern” that reframes the reigns of the kings to reconsider their righteousness or wickedness, in contrast to the presentation in the book of Kings.

The brief introductory chapter outlines some basic information about Chronicles, extremely concise comments about narrative film theory, and a summary of the content of the main chapters. The concluding chapter serves as a summary of the book’s main points, often repeating paragraphs from previous chapters in nearly identical wording. Son states that this project has an approach that is synthetic, canonical, and theological (p. 20). Chronicles is largely examined in its final form (of the Hebrew text) without much attention to hypothetical redactional layers. This “synthetic” perspective is consistent with the majority view in Chronicles scholarship that the book was largely composed at one point in time, with few subsequent editorial changes. This view of the text’s unity and integrity is relevant to the use of narrative film theory, which also tends to look at a film as a “narrative whole” and the audience’s experience of viewing a film in its entirety, i.e., in the film’s “final form.” The first half of the book’s subtitle is reflected in this primary approach.

The second part of the book's subtitle connects with Son's attention to how canonical criticism provides a means to "refocus" the Chronicler's intention. The final two chapters (seven and eight) relate this research on Chronicles to other parts of the canon of the Hebrew Bible, especially the other books within the third section of the Hebrew Bible (known as the *Ketuvim*, or "Writings") and selected examples of the "counter voices" within the biblical Wisdom tradition. Finally, Son's treatment of Chronicles is thoroughly theological (with attention to literary patterns and forms), with questions of historicity or other historical concerns being almost completely ignored. Rather, Son privileges the book's theological messages to its audiences, with appreciation for its sophistication and nuance. Son emphasizes its theological importance for the audience dealing with the aftermath of Exile and the early Restoration period in addressing retribution, worship, kingship, and hope for the future.

The topic of retribution in Chronicles, especially the so-called theme of "immediate retribution," has received much scholarly attention, and Son provides a helpful overview before turning to a careful and well-defended study of the topic himself. Having established the scope of the book's dominant trope and the "reversal pattern" related to retribution, Son focuses on the problematic portrayal of Josiah's death in an extended analysis in chapter six.

The other significant topic covered in the book's first six chapters is narrative film theory, especially as illustrated by the influential approach of Gilles Deleuze. The third chapter and sections of chapters four and five provide an introduction and overview of this methodological approach before it is explicitly applied to the topic of retribution in Chronicles. Son's readable explanation of narrative film theory provides a useful resource for those desiring to engage in this type of critical analysis of a text rather than a film. The theoretical discussion is not designed to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative in providing a practical entry point to understand and to employ this particular interpretative approach. Son begins with the more general perspective of film theory before turning to Russian film theory, film semiotics, and then cognitive film semiotics. One primary concern of this approach to film is the importance of repetition, and its variations and echoes, on the audience's experience of the film in meaning-making. Son argues (as on p. 50), I believe helpfully, that similar concerns exist in how the biblical text communicates to and with its audience(s) through its own use of repetition and then the subversion of such expectations. However, as Son himself notes, the question of whether narrative film theory is "technically crucial" to this analysis of Chronicles is no (192, 219). The majority of Son's insights into Chronicles are not dependent on his use of narrative film theory but could be otherwise deduced. However, the method employed either reinforces or further clarifies interpretations of Chronicles so that the approach results in an effective and persuasive interpretation of the Chronicler's complex theology. The application of the method to Chronicles in such a direct and

productive way bodes well for its subsequent application to additional texts that would benefit from this type of “narrative” approach.

Overall, Son’s analysis will contribute to three distinct research areas: (1) the theology of Chronicles, especially in appreciating the complex and nuanced views it contains; (2) the use of narrative film theory to read a biblical text in interesting ways attentive to both the book’s impression and its details that work to create that sense of meaning for the audiences; and (3) the relationship between Chronicles and other books within the Hebrew Bible, especially those in the Writings (connections that are not as developed by scholars as with other texts, such as the Pentateuch and Samuel-Kings). While the two parts of the subtitle (narrative film theory and canon) are distinct in their explication and application, Son provides a reasonable and profitable attempt at linking the insights from each approach in how they together reinforce a deeper appreciation of the Chronicler’s distinctive work.



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