

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 5: The Old Testament Narratives – Their Proper Use

Introduction

So far we've covered most of the New Testament with Epistles and now we will cover most of the Old Testament with Narratives. These are some of the easier books to understand if you use some of the rules we will discuss in this lesson.

All About Narratives

Biblical Narrative – the recounting of a historical event that illustrates God's intervention with man

Which Old Testament books are Narratives?

Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Jonah, and Haggai. Exodus, Numbers, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Job also have some.

The Three Levels of Narratives

Top Level (Redemptive History) – The overall scheme of man's redemption from the fall to glory

Middle Level (Israel's History) – The history of the nation of Israel from Abraham to dispersion

Bottom Level – The individual narratives that describe specific events

Each narrative is best understood when it is understood in the context of Redemptive History and Israel's History!

Principles for Interpreting Narratives

1. All narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given. However, God gives us what is necessary to know. (The name of Noah's wife)
2. Old Testament narratives usually do not teach doctrine directly but illustrate a doctrine or doctrines taught elsewhere in Scripture. (Joseph – divine providence)
3. They are not written to answer all our theological questions. They each deal with specific issues in a limited way. (Joseph – doesn't teach about management skills)
4. Narratives teach either by clearly stating the point or by clearly implying something without actually stating it. (Daniel & Lion's Den – God will protect his faithful)
5. Narratives record what happened – not necessarily what should have happened or what should happen every time.
 - a. What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Many times, they are meant to show us what shouldn't happen and the result of sin. (Abraham – lied about his wife)
 - b. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what has happened was good or bad. We should figure that out from other Scriptures. (Joseph – tell dreams)
6. God is always the hero of every story! (David and Goliath)

Just because a narrative's teaching is not clearly stated, it doesn't mean that it is a secret. Make sure you pay close attention to what a narrative tells you (not what it doesn't) and prayerfully discern the implied message.

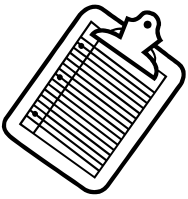
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Common Mistakes Made when Interpreting Narratives

1. Allegorizing – Instead of seeing what the passage clearly says, some see the text as reflecting another meaning that is not at all implied.
2. Decontextualizing – Taken small portions of the narrative out of its context to make up new meanings that don't fit with the whole.
3. False Combination – This approach combines elements from here and there in a passage and makes a point out of the combination.
4. Redefinition – When people don't like what the passage clearly states, they try to redefine it to mean something else.
5. Using Outside Books – Some groups (like Mormons or other cults) use books beside the Bible to interpret Old Testament narratives.
6. Moralizing – Some people try to find a moral behind every story, even when there isn't one. Some things are just historical details meant to educate us about what was happening.
7. Personalizing – This person pretends that every part of Scripture in some way applies to them right now rather than looking at the passage in context.

Assignments:



- Read the account of David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1 through 12:25)

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Individual Assignment *Studying & Presenting an Old Testament Narrative*

Read the Old Testament Narrative that you are assigned and be prepared to present the following information and answer questions:

- 1) What is the bottom level (tell us what happened in the narrative)?
 - a) Is there background information that we need to know to understand this narrative?
 - b) Who are the main characters and what do we learn about them?
 - c) What spiritual lessons are taught in the narrative?
 - i) If spiritual lessons are taught in this narrative, what other Scriptures confirm this teaching?
 - d) Who is the hero of the story?
- 2) What is the middle level (How does this narrative fit into Israel's history)? When Israelites look back at their history, what was accomplished by this event and how did it affect them?
- 3) What is the top level (How does this narrative fit into redemptive history)? The narrative could be either something that took place which prophesies about Christ and His work or allows things to happen which will bring us to Christ.
- 4) Did you enjoy this assignment? What lessons did you learn from it? Do you feel that this was a good way to learn to use the concepts taught in class?

Example: The Story Joash, King of Israel

- 1) 2 Kings 11
 - a) Athaliah, mother of previous king
 - b) Jehosheba (aunt), Athaliah (grandmother), Jehoiada (high priest)
 - c) God protects the weak and punishes the wicked
 - i) Psalms 146:9 - The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.
 - ii) Genesis 9:6 - Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.
 - d) The Lord
- 2) A period of spiritual revival and restoration in Israel
- 3) The Davidic Line was preserved
 - a) Isaiah 9:7 – “Of the increase of [his] government and peace [there shall be] no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”
 - b) 2 Samuel 7:13 – David's throne would be established forever