

Old Testament Historical Narratives

He Gave Us Stories

- Over 40% of the Old Testament is written in narrative form.
- The following 15 Old Testament Books are largely or entirely composed of narratives: Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Jonah, and Haggai.
- Another 7 books have a substantial amount of narratives: Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Job (That's 22 of 39 books of the OT).

Narrative: a story with a plot and characters. Biblical narratives are not telling *any* story. It isn't simply a snapshot of ancient times or even a biography of heroes of the faith. All biblical narratives fit into the greater story of the Bible as a whole.

Three Levels of Narratives: Faithful interpretation should follow these three levels as steps from bottom to top.

1. Bottom Level: Analyzing the particular stories.

A. Some Good questions to ask:

Who are the characters?

What is the plot?

Where is the climax?

Who's perspective is the story given? Where does it take place?

Repeated phrases or ideas? When did it take place? Etc.

B. Scene Depiction:

1. Pay close attention to the way the author has ordered the narrative.

2. Plot: Pay attention to foreshadowing, tension, conflict, resolution, conclusion

C. Characters

1. Types of characters (functionary, flat, full fledged)

Note: some characters change throughout stories. We must be sensitive to know when to read information into characters, and when not to.

2. "Stock characters" - Ones for which we have standard expectations. (stereotypical)

3. Characterization

a. Speech: direct, report, indirect. A speech in Hebrew narrative will sometimes be repeated using all three

b. Description: in Hebrew narrative, this is very significant because there is usually so little of it provided.*

c. Inner thoughts and attitudes are also rarely expounded upon*

d. Contrast also provides basis (Lot, for example, might lead one to conclude that he wasn't so bad, but in contrast with Abraham, not so good.

D. Style: Learn to appreciate the author's literary style

1. Repetition
2. Highlighting
3. Omission
4. Irony
5. Humor/satire
6. Dialogue

E. Getting a sense of the author's point is only the first step. Interpretation left at this step is incomplete.

Implied Author/Audience: "Implied" simply means the author or audience we can deduce from the text. It isn't asking to find the personality of the real Moses or Isaiah.

The implied audience lives within their particular stage of redemptive history. To read accurately, we need to put yourself in the place of the implied reader.

Why shouldn't we hear the book of Judges as the modern church without any adjustments? What about the implied audience is similar to/different than us?

2. Middle level: Where is the story in the context of redemptive history? Pre-Fall, Patriarchal, Mosaic, Theocratic, Exilic, Apostolic, etc.

Good Questions to ask:

Under what covenant administration does the narrative take place?

What are the stipulations and promises in the immediate covenant context?

Example, if under the Mosaic covenant, would want to know the teachings of Deuteronomy to determine how the immediate narrative is related to the first level covenant context.

3. Top level: The overarching story of God's plan of redemption: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation

A. Biblical narratives are the story of God's redemption of a people at a particular stage of redemptive history.

1. Organic development of a text over the course of redemptive history
"It is sometimes contended that the assumption of progress in revelation excludes its absolute perfection at all stages. This would actually be so if the progress were non-organic. The organic progress is from seed-form to the attainment of full growth; yet we do not say that in the qualitative sense the seed is less perfect than the tree....in the seed-form the minimum of indispensable knowledge was already present." Geerhardus Vos

2. The whole gospel is present in Genesis 3:15, but only in seed form.

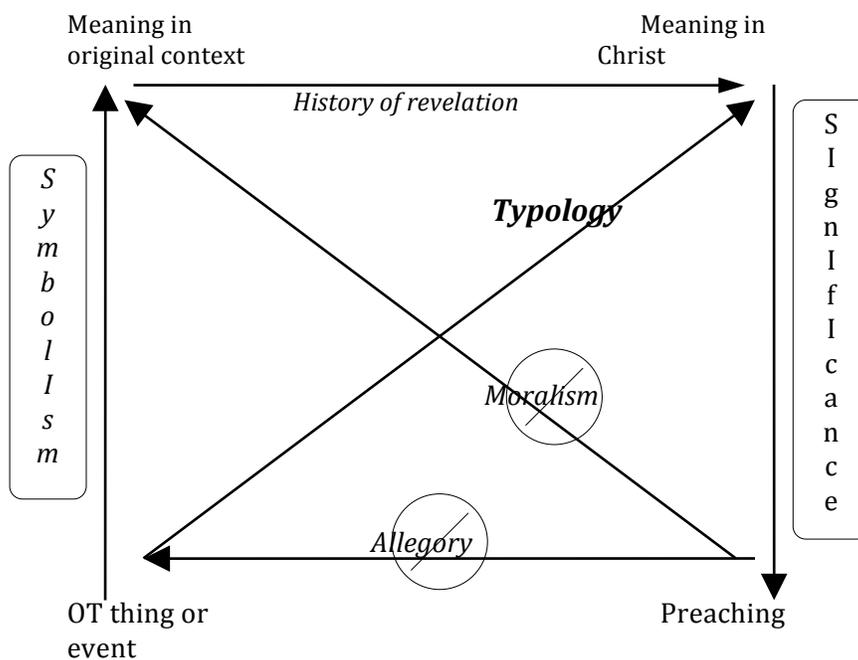
3. Yet, now that we know the complete story, we can better understand each particular stage and its relation to the end in Christ.

[27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
(Luke 24:27 ESV)

B. Making adjustments to remove obstacles in application

- Epochal Adjustments: continuities, discontinuities, and fulfillment in Christ
- Cultural Adjustments: overcome the cultural gaps that are not related to epochs. What in my world, corresponds with things in that world? (analogy)
- Personal Adjustments: old/young, male/female, rich/poor
(Taken from Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*)

Edmund Clowney’s diagram



C. Allegorizing: Why is allegorizing a narrative dangerous? Can't scripture have a deeper meaning?

It is more than just an inaccurate method of interpretation. It draws into question the clarity and intentionality of God's message. Does he want us to pick up the meaning?

D. Typology: What in my world, corresponds with things in that world? (analogy)
How do things function in the text corresponding with things in my world?

David and Goliath: If we read ourselves as David, we think the story is about having faith to overcome our Goliaths (corresponding to the obstacles in our world). What permits us to say that David is a type of me? Why is this dangerous?

What permits us to say that David is a type of Christ?

[29] "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

[30] Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, [31] he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. Acts 2:29-31

We are not David. We cannot defeat enemies of God or be faithful on our own. Christ is the true faithful king who defeats all of God's enemies.

But once in Christ, I can do what He did. I am not a sacrifice as Jesus, but am to present my body as a living sacrifice.

Back to David. We need a David. Because of our David, we now, put on the full armor of God (Christ) and see victory in spiritual warfare.

Galatians 3-4: Who is Abraham's son? His true heir is Christ. We in Christ become his true heir.

Helpful Tips

1. "God is the hero of the story if it is in the Bible...God is the supreme "protagonist" or leading decisive character in all narratives.
2. Narratives are not allegories or stories filled with hidden meaning
3. Narratives don't always teach directly: You are not told explicitly "do not commit adultery" but 2 Samuel 11 powerfully illustrates its harm.
4. Narratives are not written to answer our specific questions. Pay attention to the purpose that the author is getting at.

Most Important Rule

"Perhaps the single most useful bit of caution we can give you about reading and learning from narratives is this: Do not be a monkey-see-monkey-do reader of the Bible. No Bible narrative was written specifically about you. The Joseph narrative is about Joseph, specifically about how God did things through him—it is not a narrative directly about you...you can never assume that God expects you to do exactly the same things that Bible characters did." Fee & Stuart, 85