

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Unit 2
Week 8 - Old Testament Narrative

Old Testament Genres

- Narrative: Genesis–Esther.
- Law: Exodus–Deuteronomy
- Poetry & Wisdom: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
- Prophecy: Isaiah–Malachi.
- Apocalyptic: Ezekiel, Daniel, parts of Zechariah.

Introduction to Old Testament narratives¹

A historical narrative is _____.

Biblical narratives are _____:

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(1 Corinthians 10:11) Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction...

Interpreting Old Testament narrative

A. Look for three basic parts: plot, characters, and plot resolution.

Narratives have a **PLOT** that usually involves some kind of conflict or tension surrounding one or more **CHARACTERS** that works toward a **RESOLUTION**.

For example, the overall story of the Bible.

Plot:

¹ This section borrows many insights from Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993) pp. 78-93.

Characters:

“Who are the main characters?”

“What are they like?”

“How do they interact with each other?”

“protagonist”

“antagonist(s)”

“agonist(s)”

Resolution:

Let’s identify these three components in the Joseph narrative...

Plot:

Characters:

Resolution:

B. Investigate Historical Features

C. Understand the passage in context of the “big picture” rooted in the Covenants

A Covenant is:

1. Abrahamic Covenant:

Genesis 12:1-3.

In this covenant, God promised that:

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2. Mosaic Covenant (the Law)

Exodus 19:5,6 “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”
(See also Joshua 24:15,16)

Unlike God’s covenant with Abraham, which was unconditional, God’s covenant with Moses spelled out responsibilities for God and for his people.

God’s responsibility:

Israel’s responsibility:

The connection between Israel’s failure to keep the Mosaic Covenant and God’s judgment on them is a prominent theme in the prophets.

Example: Jeremiah 22:8,9 “Many nations will pass by this city; and they will say to one another, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this great city?’⁹ “Then they will answer, ‘Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord their God and bowed down to other gods and served them.’ ”

3. Davidic Covenant:

2 Samuel 7:12-16**

God promised David that he would establish one of his descendants on the throne of Israel to rule as an eternal king forever over the entire world. This future ruler is called the “Messiah” in the Old and New Testaments.

Discussion:

How do the events in the Joseph narrative pose a threat to the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham?

How do the events in this story advance the fulfillment of this promise?

D. How to find the main point of a Biblical narrative ?

Look for these three clues:

1. God speaking:

Genesis 50:19,20,24.

2. Repetition:

Ideas – Restatements of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 15:6; 17:6-8, 22:17,18; 26:3,4; 28:13,14; etc.)

Phrases – “In those days Israel had no king” & “everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25).

Words – “It was good” in the creation narrative. Contrast with “it was not good” in Genesis 2:18.

3. The plot:

(Genesis 45:4) “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!”

(Genesis 45:5,7, 8) “And now don’t be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you... (7) God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. (8) So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.”

REMEMBER:

E. Don’t read hidden meanings into the text unless an inspired New Testament author indicates they are there

Saint Ambrose (339-397 AD, Bishop of Milan) saw many parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ. The table below is just a sample of some of the connections Ambrose drew between Joseph and Jesus:²

² *Saint Ambrose: Seven Exegetical Works* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1972), pp. 187-240.

Comparisons between Joseph & Jesus	
Joseph	Jesus
Sent by Jacob to find his brothers and inquire after the welfare of the flock.	Sent by God to inquire after the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
Sold for a number of pieces of silver.	Betrayed for by Judas for a number of pieces of silver.
Stripped of his garment and cast into a dark, dry pit as if dead.	Stripped of his clothing, crucified and subjected to the wrath of God and death.
Foresaw famine in Egypt and provided food for the people.	Takes pity on the spiritual hunger of the world by opening the granaries of divine mysteries that nourish mankind.

Looking for deeper meaning when we're reading Old Testament narrative can shift our attention away from what the author is trying to communicate.

OT events or symbols interpreted in the New Testament:

- John 3:14,15 “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵ so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.”
- Hebrews 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; ¹⁸ *it was he* to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendants shall be called.” ¹⁹ He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

Isaac is a type of Jesus.

Application of Old Testament Narrative

What did it mean to the original audience and what action did it call forth from them?
(Gen.50:20-21)

How does the main point relate to us? What does God call us to do?

Be aware of the following issues when you apply Old Testament Narrative:

1. Don't blindly imitate practices recorded in a narrative.

Examples:

- Polygamy in many OT instances
- Abraham lied to the Egyptians to avoid a confrontation
- Gideon tested the Lord to gain reassurance of His will (Judges 6)

Simply because the bible describes a practice does not mean God prescribes that practice.

2. Don't apply something to yourself or your situation that has specific application to Israel.

Example: In 2 Chronicles 7:14, the Lord appears to Solomon and says:

(2 Chronicles 7:14) "...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

(Stephen Green) "In Britain, (2 Chron 7:14) means that recompense must be made for the shedding of innocent blood; ... that sodomy will be banned; that marriage will again be for life; that the courts will dispense justice; that the Sabbath will be kept; that government will be honest and limited to what God commands. In short, God will heal the land when He sees the fruits of national repentance."³

Memory Verses

2 Sam. 7:11-16** – The Davidic Covenant. God promises that one of David's descendants will sit on his throne and rule forever.

Assignment

Complete the *Psalms and Proverbs Assignment*.

³ Stephen Green, *Christian Voice*, June 2003.