

.: Hebrew Narratives

Each growth group will study one of these passages over the next week:

- Jacob's Family - Genesis 37 - 50
- Earth swallows Korah, Dathan & Abiram - Numbers 16
- Elijah and Ahab - 1 Kings 16:29 - 21:53
- Pentecost - Acts 1 & 2

Principles for Interpreting Narratives

- An Old Testament narrative usually does not directly teach doctrine.
- An Old Testament narrative often illustrates a doctrine taught explicitly elsewhere in scripture.
- Narrative record what happened – not what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. Therefore narratives do not have individual identifiable moral applications.
- What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Frequently, it is just the opposite.
- Most of the characters in Hebrew narratives are far from perfect – as are their actions.
- We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened is good or bad. We are expected to be able to judge this on the basis of what God has taught us directly and categorically elsewhere in scripture.
- All narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given. What does appear in the narrative is everything the inspired author thought important for us to know.
- Narratives are not written to serve as a history book.
- Narratives may teach explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something without stating it).
- Narratives are not written to answer theological questions.

Cautions for Interpreting Narratives

Allegorizing.

Instead of concentrating on the clear meaning of the narrative; people decide that the text merely reflects another meaning beyond the text. There are allegorical portions of Scripture, but no historical narrative is at the same time an allegory.

Decontextualizing

Ignoring the full historical and literary contexts, and often the individual narrative, people concentrate on small units only and thus miss interpretational clues. If you take things out of context enough, you can make almost any part of scripture say anything you want it to.

Selectivity

This is similar to decontextualizing. It involves picking and choosing specific words and phrases to concentrate on while ignoring others and ignoring the overall sweep of the narrative being studied. Instead of listening to the whole to see how God was working in Israel's history, it ignores some of the parts and the whole entirely.

Moralizing.

This is the assumption that principles for living can be derived from every passage. The moralizing reader asks the question: "What is the moral of the story? Or "What can we learn about handling adversity from how the Israelites endured their years as slaves in

Egypt? The problem with this approach is that it ignores the fact that the narratives were written to show the progress of God's history of redemption, not to illustrate principles. They are historical narratives not illustrative narratives.

Personalizing

This refers to reading the scripture, supposing that any or all parts apply to you or your group in a way that they do not apply to everyone else. This is a self-centered reading of the Bible.

Examples of personalizing would be, "The story of Balaam's donkey reminds me that I talk too much."

Or, "the story of the building of the temple is God's way of telling us that we need to build a new church building."

Misappropriation

This is to appropriate the text for purposes that are foreign to Biblical narrative. This is what is happening when people test God based on Gideon's fleece in Judges 6:36-40.

False Appropriation

This is to read into the Biblical narrative suggestions or ideas that come from contemporary culture that are simultaneously foreign to the narrator's purpose and contradictory to his point of view.

False Combination

This approach combines elements from here and there in a passage and makes a point out of their combination, even though the elements themselves are not directly connected in the passage itself.

Redefinition

When the plain meaning of the text leaves people cold, producing no immediate spiritual delight or saying something other than what they wish it said, they are often tempted to redefine it to mean something else. For example, taking passages that plainly speak of Israel and apply it to the United States or wherever they live.

Notes:

