

- I. Interpreting Old Testament historical narrative
 - a. Purpose: In laying the foundation for our survey of Old Testament historical narrative we want to first identify the literary form of Old Testament historical narrative and know some general principles in interpreting Old Testament historical narratives so that we would be better equipped in knowing these portions of Scripture.
 - b. Identifying Old Testament historical narrative
 - i. Old Testament historical narrative is a specific type of narrative.
 1. Some scholars might not see this as a distinct category while some do.
 2. Historical narrative “*is national and not familial or tribal*”¹
 3. Thus, historical narrative does not imply that regular narratives are somehow not historically factual.
 4. Instead, Old Testament historical narrative focuses on the nation of Israel/Judah.
 - ii. Historical narratives tend to be more of “*a series of accounts...with cause-effect sequences given much weight than plot.*”²
 - iii. In historical narratives, God often speaks through the representatives of the kings or the prophets.³
 - iv. Books that have many historical narratives within them:
 1. Joshua
 2. 1 & 2 Samuel
 3. 1 & 2 Kings
 4. 1 & 2 Chronicles
 - c. General principles in interpreting Old Testament historical narratives
 - i. Identifying the intention of the text⁴
 1. This should be the first aim in our interpretation after we have read a passage.
 - a. Analogy: Not knowing the intention first is like a kid drawing and saying he does not know what he’s drawing until he’s finished.
 2. Sometimes the intention is stated in the text.
 3. Sometimes the intention is not explicit.
 - a. Look for repetition
 - i. For example, what is repetitious in Genesis 39?
 - ii. What does it reveal as to the purpose of the text?
 - b. Consider how the text fits into the greater context of the section or book.
 - ii. Considering the theology of the text

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, “History”, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers), 91.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Flesh: How to preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts*, (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications), 4.

1. Some of the accounts of events in narratives are not moral examples to emulate.
 - a. Narrative is often more descriptive rather than prescriptive.
 - b. When possible, the proper interpretation of other portion of the Bible must be taken into account in interpreting particular narrative events.
 - i. The prescription found in the Bible must be the basis of interpreting the descriptive events in Old Testament narrative.
 - ii. The Bible's genre of law, proverb, prophecy and epistle might be important at this point.
2. Asking theological questions of the text⁵
 - a. What does this account tell us about God?
 - b. What does it tell us about the human condition?
 - c. What does it tell us of the world?
 - d. What does it tell us of the people of God and their relationship with Him?
 - e. What does it tell us of the individual believer's life of faith?
3. The details here under "Considering the theology of the text" are essential steps in dealing with the tough "nasty" portion of narratives in the Bible.
 - a. "Don't be afraid to wade into the nasty narratives of the Old Testament, for it's in the nasty stuff you'll find the God of scary holiness and the incredible grace waiting to reveal himself."⁶
- iii. Watch the characters
 1. Who are the main characters in the narrative?
 - a. Why are they important and what purpose do they serve in the text's intention?
 2. Who are the supporting characters in the narrative?
 - a. They are the foil for a reason, so why are they mentioned and how does this serve the text's intention?
 3. God is always in the narrative, even if He is not explicitly mentioned
 - a. This is why it is important to ask the theological questions of the text (see above).
- iv. Attention to the details of each scene⁷
- v. Be conscious of the setting
 1. There might be relevant background information that aid in interpretation.
- vi. Discern the point of view even within dialogues

⁵ Ibid, 29 footnote 1, quoted from Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth, New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holdman, 1999), 604-605.

⁶ Ibid, 74.

⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Narrative", *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers), 80.

1. Distinguish between dialogues and straight narrative.
 2. Non-dialogues serve as the “Voice of God” about the event.
 3. The dialogue can portray the point of view of the speaker.
 - a. This is true unless the narrative makes it clear otherwise that the dialogue is a lie.
 - b. Point of view from human dialogue might not be truths from God.
- vii. Understand the plot
1. The plot is the development of each stage within the narrative.
 2. The plot is how each scene relates to each other!
- viii. Since historical narratives usually have built in cause and effect sequences, sometimes the narration in the text provides a commentary of God’s objective perspective concerning the matter.
1. For example, consider Hezekiah, king of Judah in **2 Kings 18**
 - a. He was right with the LORD (**v.3, 5**)
 - b. He did this by practicing righteousness (**v.4, 6**)
 - c. As a result, the LORD was with him (**v.7**)
 - i. He did not have to serve Assyria (**v.7**)
 - ii. As an effect of this, he even defeated the Philistines (**v.8**)
 2. Similarly, see **2 Kings 17:19-20** of God’s perspective given in the narration.
- ix. Since God often speaks through the prophets in historical narratives, pay attention to the recorded dialogues of the prophets, since they are God’s Word.
1. **2 Kings 17:9-18** mentions that God sends prophets to warn the people (**v.13**)
- x. Consulting the Prophetic genre
1. Sometimes the Prophetic books in the Bible are contemporary with the historical events recorded, and consulting them will provide context information that would help interpret the historical text.
 2. At other times, prophets mentioned in the historical narrative have their own book written in the prophetic section of the Bible.
 - a. For instance, **2 Kings 20:1** talks about Isaiah, son of Amoz, whose prophecy is recorded in the book of Isaiah.
- xi. The context of God’s relationship to His nation through their covenant relationship is an important lens in interpreting historical narratives.
1. For instance look at **2 Kings 17:15**: *“They rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and went after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the Lord had commanded them not to do like them.”*
 - a. There is the mention of the rejection of God’s covenant.
 - b. The violation of God’s covenant explains a lot of what God is doing with Israel.

2. The blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant to Israel are conditional to her covenantal faithfulness
 - a. **Leviticus 26**
 - b. Examples of promised blessings (v.1-13)
 - i. Raining season (v.4)
 - ii. Land yield produce (v.4)
 - iii. Live securely in the land (v.5)
 - iv. Peace in the land (v.6)
 - c. Examples of curses (v.14-39)
 - i. Enemies will rule over them (v.17)
 - ii. Seven fold plagues (v.21)
 - iii. Beasts of the fields destroying their children (v.22)
3. **Deuteronomy 28**
 - a. Examples of promised blessings (v.1-14)
 - i. Their enemies are defeated (v.7)
 - ii. All the nations will fear them (v.10)
 - iii. Good storehouses (v.12)
 - b. Examples of curses (v.15-68)
 - i. Pestilences (v. 21)
 - ii. Drought (v. 24)
 - iii. Scattered (v.64)