

Old Testament Narratives: *Part 1*

Narrative

- “A purposeful story retelling the historical events of the past that are intended to give meaning and direction to the people of the present”
- 40% of the OT is narrative (30% of the Bible)
 - Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, Jonah, & Haggai
 - Also parts of Exodus, Numbers, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, & Job
- In the NT: The Gospels & Acts are largely narrative
 - Though they will be dealt with separately
- How do we read, interpret, and apply them to our lives?

The 3 Levels of Narratives

- Meta-narrative (The “Big Picture”)
 - The story of God’s redemptive work throughout all of Creation and human history.
 - God is the central character of every Bible Narrative
- God’s people (The middle level)
 - The story of God calling for Himself a people (Israel in the OT, the Church in the NT).
- The individual (The first level)
 - The story of God working in and through the lives of individuals.
- All Narratives have all 3 levels
- Example: Gen. 12:1-3
 - Meta-Narrative: God is seeking a redeemer for humanity
 - God’s people: He chooses one man from among the lineage established in Gen. 10-11 to set aside for Himself a special people to accomplish this work
 - Individual: The call is to Abram of Ur

What Narratives are NOT!

- Allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings
- Not stories to teach moral lessons
 - There may be lessons to learn, but that is not their main function

- Though they do not directly teach, they do act as illustrations of what is taught explicitly elsewhere in Scripture.
 - Ex. David & Bathsheba vs. Exodus 20:14
- They are **descriptive**, not **prescriptive**
 - They describe history
 - But are not necessarily calling their readers to copy the described behavior

Hebrew Narrative Characteristics

- The Narrator: Who is telling the story
 - Rarely identified
 - Portrayed as fairly 'omniscient'
 - Knows what is happening in almost every setting
 - And sometimes within someone's mind/setting
 - Responsible for the point-of-view from which the story is told
 - *Joseph narrative*
- The Scene(s)
 - Self-enclosed mini-stories within the larger narrative
 - When the setting changes, the scene normally changes

Example: Gen. 37

Joseph squeals on his brothers (v. 2)

His brothers hate him because of parental favoritism (v. 3-4)

Joseph's 2 dreams (v. 5-11)

Joseph searches for his brothers (v. 12-17)

His brothers' betrayal (v. 18-31)

The Ishmaelites enter

Joseph is sold

Rueben mourns

The brothers plot to deceive their father

Jacob's sorrow (v. 32-35)

Joseph goes to Egypt (v. 36)

- The Characters
 - Central elements to each scene

- Not centered on physical appearance
 - And when such traits are mentioned, ask why
 - *Ehud's left-handedness (Jud. 3:15)*
 - *Saul's appearance (1 Sam. 9:2)*
- More interested in issues of status, profession, and tribal designation
- Often appear in contrast or parallel
 - Contrast: How are the two people different?
 - *David & Saul*
 - *Joseph & Judah*
 - Parallel: How is this person like another?
 - *John the Baptist & Elijah*
 - *Mary (Luke 1 & 2) & Hannah (1 Sam. 1 & 2)*
- Their words and actions are the predominant mode of revealing characterization
 - *Joseph's actions of tattling & bragging (Gen. 37)*
 - *Joseph's actions & dialogue with Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39)*
- Dialogue
 - Often a significant clue about the plot and character of the speaker
 - Contrastive dialogue often acts as a means of showing differences in characters
 - *Saul & David's confrontations*
 - Often act as a summary or emphasizes crucial points through repetition of speech
- Plot: “The events that make up a story or the main part of a story.”
 - Focus on a buildup of dramatic tension that is eventually released
 - Normally thrust forward by conflict
 - And comes to a resolution
 - Can be simple or complex
 - Hebrew narratives are normally more fast-paced than modern narratives
 - Thus, take note when it is slowed down by elements like:
 - Dialogue
 - Elaboration of detail
 - Repetition

Oral History

- Remember that these stories were meant to be HEARD first
- To make a story memorable, narrators used various tools
 - Repetition
 - Key words
 - Resuming a narrative after an interruption or detour
 - Stereo-typed patterns or cycles
 - *Judges*
 - Inclusion: “The form of repetition where a narrative is begun and brought to conclusion on the same note or in the same way”
 - Chiasm: a pattern of A B C B A
 - Foreshadow: where something is briefly noted in an early part of a narrative is picked up in detail later on