

NARRATIVE

Over 40% of the OT is narrative — more narrative than any other literary type.

- No form of communication is more vivid.
- We live our lives in story form.

The purpose of biblical narratives is to show God at work in creation and among His people.

- Reveal God, glorify God, and help us to understand and appreciate Him.
- They also provide illustrations and many other important lessons to our lives.

Fee and Stuart note that there are 3 levels of biblical narratives:

1. *Top level* - the whole universal plan of God — dealing with universals, the story of redemption.
 2. *Middle level* - centres upon Israel, God's chosen people.
 3. *Bottom level* - centres upon the individual.
- Every OT narrative (bottom level) is at least presented on one of the other two levels.
 - A narrative is best interpreted as a part of a greater whole.

What biblical narratives are not:

1. Not just stories about people living in OT times — primarily stories about God.
 - God is always the hero.
2. Not allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings.
 - They do not answer all of our questions on a given issue.
3. They do not always teach directly — they usually illustrate points made elsewhere.
 - Not always a moral, but a good illustration.
4. Each individual narrative or episode within a narrative does not necessarily have a moral all of its own.
 - Usually the point is made in the overall picture.
 - Evaluate it as a unit, not atomistically.

Literary Aspects of Narrative

- **Scene** - the scene is about the most important unit in the architecture of the narrative.
 - The action is broken up into separate sequences, each scene representing something that took place at a particular time and place.
 - Emphasis is put on the deeds done and the words spoken

- Usually made up of two or more characters
- In biblical narratives, one of the most distinguishing features is "the pervasive presence of God."
 - He is usually one of the characters in the scene.
- **Plot** - the beginning, middle, and end of the story
 - Traces the movement of the incidents, usually centering upon some conflict.
 - As the plot thickens, it moves towards a resolution or climax — where the decisive step in determining the outcome of a conflict is taken, and from there, the outcome is either a resolution or some sort of tragedy.
 - The plot is heightened by a sense of pace — the narrator can direct the speed of the story.
 - Short sentences
 - Omission of detail
 - Avoidance of lengthy character descriptions.
 - Verbatim repetition slows down the pace.
 - Direct speech, interjection of the narrator's thoughts.
- **Point Of View** - from what perspective is the story told?
 - Whose side does the narrator take?
 - The narrator can identify himself with a particular character — spatial.
 - The narrator can tell the story in past tense or interject explanatory comment — temporal.
 - The narrator can give the inner thoughts of the characters — psychological.
 - The narrator can sometimes give an evaluation or analysis of the actions in the story— ideological.
- **Characterization** - Rarely does the Hebrew narrator describe characters in much detail, so the interpreter must pay special attention to the details given.
 - e.g. Esau was ruddy and hairy, Rachel was exceedingly beautiful, and Eglon was obese.
 - Sometimes characters are presented in apposition to one another, and the intent is for the reader to compare the two.
 - e.g. Rahab and Achan, Samuel and Eli's sons, David and Saul, Ruth and Orpah
- **Setting** - locates the plot and characters in the space/time world — sets it in history.
 - Sometimes the geographical setting is extremely important later on in biblical history.
 - Mt. Moriah — Abraham and the Temple
 - Bethlehem — Boaz, David, Jesus
 - Sometimes the setting adds atmosphere to the story because of the associations that it already had previously — Beersheba, Bethel, Horeb

- **Dialogue** - a high proportion of dialogue in biblical narrative.
 - Note the place where the dialogue is first introduced, for that will be an important moment in revealing the character of the speaker — perhaps even more than in the substance of what is said.
 - Note also where the narrator has chosen to introduce dialogue instead of narration.
 - When one character repeats the statement of another character, pay close attention to see if it was quoted verbatim, or if there was any deviation or alteration whatsoever — that may be significant.

7. Stylistic Devices --

- *Repetition* - repeated words, phrases, or even sentences were used to express a certain emphasis, meaning, or development in the text.
 - *Key Word* - significant word or wordplay (naked/crafty, etc.)
 - *Type Scene* - repeated motif; texts that are similar in content and structure (e.g. well scene, lying about wife as sister, barren woman giving birth, etc.)
- *Omission* - gaps in the story, shows the writer's selectivity (e.g. Chronicler overlooked David's sin)
- *Inclusion* - delineating the limits of a text (e.g. Exod 6: 13 and 26-27).
- *Irony* - the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning

Interpreting Narrative

1. Identify each scene of the narrative.
 - Summarize the words and actions of the main characters.
 - Look for the narrator's point of view in the details.
2. Analyze the plot of the narrative.
 - See how it rises to the climax.
 - How the writer paces the plot and highlights the high points of the story.
3. Determine the point of view from which the narrative is recorded.
 - How does the narrator tell the story?
 - Which character does the narrator focus on?
 - Does the narrator reveal the thoughts and emotions of the characters?
 - Does he add a critique of the action?
4. Notice the details of the scene.
 - How are the characters described?
 - Where the action takes place may also add to the significance of the events.

5. Examine the dialogue the author uses to narrative the story.
 - Where is that dialogue introduced into the narrative?
 - How does the author move back and forth between dialogue and narrative?
6. Note the stylistic devices used by the author.
 - Repetition, omission, inclusion, irony
7. Understand the biblical world and the writings preserved from that time period.
 - e.g. creation epics, flood story

Fee and Stuart add these principles:

1. Do not expect a direct teaching of a doctrine, but realize them as illustrations of doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere.
2. Realize that narratives record what happened, not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time.
 - Not every narrative has an identifiable moral to the story.
 - What the characters do is not necessarily a good example for us to follow.
 - Most of the characters are far from perfect and their actions are too.
 - We are not always told at the end whether what happened was good or bad — we are expected to know biblical teaching from elsewhere.
3. Realize that all narratives are selective and incomplete.
 - Not all of the relevant details are given, but what is given is enough.
4. Narratives are not written to answer all of our theological questions.
5. Narratives may teach implicitly or explicitly.
6. God is always the hero of all