

BIB105 Biblical Hermeneutics

Unit 6b Old Testament: Narrative and Law

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Greetings. Good to be with you again. We are on the stretch run of our study on biblical hermeneutics and Bible study tools. And I'm excited to work through these last two lessons with you. The first one will be on the Old Testament in narrative and law. If you remember the last lesson, we wrapped up the New Testament, an overview of the New Testament with the epistles and Revelation. So let's get into our discussion of the Old Testament today. So, narrative. It is a literary form characterized by sequential time action and involving plot, setting, and characters. Kind of a wordy definition. Essentially, it's a story, things that we're very accustomed to here today. The meaning of a narrative or a story derives primarily from the actions of its characters. Instead of telling us how to live, it shows us how or how not to live. And we'll look at some of those examples in this lesson today of both how and how not to live. And then the purpose of these stories in Scripture is theological history in narrative form. So yes, these stories are very interesting and sometimes even very entertaining. There is theology within these, and so it's important to have that in mind as we are working through it.

So, what are some advantages and disadvantages of narratives in general? There's a ton of advantages. First of all, it's interesting to both children and adults, from the smallest levels of Sunday school to the most advanced doctrinal classes and seminaries. These stories are interesting. And even the world itself is fascinated by some of the stories of the biblical text and have made movies, even though definitely not from a Christian perspective, but are still very familiar with some of the narratives of the Old Testament. Second advantage is it pulls us into the action of the story. We love stories. Throughout our history, humanity loves sitting around hearing a story. And so back in ancient times, they had those who were very gifted at storytelling and people will gather around the campfire and listen to stories. And we even still have that today, just hanging out together and telling stories of life or experiences that we had. And we even see that in movie form as well. And then just the telling of a story, we just love it.

Usually, these narratives depict real life and it's easier to relate to when you see the struggles of these biblical characters that you esteem so much. In the New Testament, we're seeing people who are considered so faithful by God, like in Hebrews 11, and then you see some of their struggles. It helps us to get through some of our own struggles and to know that there's positive that's going to come out of it. They can also portray the complexities of life. We'll look at a few of those examples of just some very complicated situations that, again, life is complicated at times and there's just sometimes no clear answer. It makes it easier to remember. Like I said before, we've even seen Super Bowl commercials that talk about stories from the Old Testament, like Samson and Delilah, and David and Goliath. And so it's something that everybody remembers.

Number six, God can include himself as a character in the story. And we see that. He inserts himself in the narrative at times, all the way from the very beginning with walking through the garden with Adam and Eve in Genesis to having a conversation with Abraham and Sarah about them having a child to talking to Moses on Mount Sinai. So God inserts himself in part of the narrative, and that's really a beautiful thing to see our God interacting with us. We also see the entire character through struggle and triumph. Some great examples. David, of course, had tons of struggles but also lots of triumphs as well. And that's something again that we can relate to. And then it also relates shorter incidents and events to a larger story. So some of these smaller details, even some of the battles that... We see David conquering some of the surrounding nations as a king. Well, he paid a price for that. In the big picture, God's temple would be built by his son Solomon because David was a man of war. So sometimes there are these shorter, smaller incidents, they do fit within a larger story.

Some of the disadvantages of narratives. The meaning can sometimes be subtle and missed by the casual reader. If you're just reading and enjoying the story, sometimes we miss some of the theology with it. Sometimes there's false assumptions that narrative is only history, and not theology. So we just see this as historical events but we're not seeing any kind of theology within that. One point would be that all of the wives that Solomon had. And so it's just historical in polygamy. We don't see the theology that God's original design was one man, one woman for life. And so even though it's not explicitly condemned, we definitely see that there was definitely a consequence through Solomon having so many wives and the impact that it had on him spiritually. Another disadvantage is allegorizing. You can read too much theology into the story, and so some stories that were meant to teach some simple lessons can be drawn out and made into much bigger. And you just got to be careful of that. Take the passage for what it is and what it says.

So there's some literary features to narratives and I want to talk about a number of those. The first one is a plot. Just like any good story, you have an organizing structure that ties the story together. So the plot kind of answers the questions of what and how. Let's talk about the example of David and Bathsheba. So exposition. These are some of the aspects to a plot. So you have an exposition. The setting is described and the main series of events begin. And so it all really starts with David and Bathsheba. David's armies are out at war. He's back in Jerusalem, at his castle, not where he should be. He should be out with his troops, but he's back home. And obviously, we know he and Bathsheba have an affair. She gets pregnant, and so that immediately leads them to a conflict here that starts to arise as something in the exposition is incomplete, disorderly, unfulfilled. And this tension rises to a climax. So think about all those points of tension in the story of David and Bathsheba. David tries to bring Uriah back to be with his wife, and Uriah, being a man of integrity, doesn't do it. And so David has to come with a Plan B on how to hide his sin. And so he essentially sets up the death of Uriah by putting him on the front lines which had a high mortality rate. And that made him free and clear then to take Bathsheba as his wife. But the tension continues as the prophet Nathan rolls into the picture a year later. The baby is born and David thinks he's gotten away with things, but Nathan the prophet reveals to all, in front of everyone, the sin that David had committed

And so where's the resolution of that story? Unfortunately, the child dies as a consequence of David's actions, but we see David repent. We see him confess his sin, and Psalm 51 is that great psalm of confession that all of us, I'm sure, have used at different times in our life for sin that we've committed. So you see that conflict resolved in that story. Of course, there was sadness moving forward, but his relationship with the Lord had at least been restored with all the sins that he had committed in that whole story.

Setting is another literary feature. It deals with questions of when and where. So the example of Ruth is a great example of setting, how the plot goes from Naomi who is in Bethlehem. They had been traveling to Moab, her husband. Her husband dies. Her two sons end up getting married. Two sons end up dying. And so Naomi has her two daughters in law. And then we know that things aren't going well in Moab and so they decide to come back, and Naomi comes back with Ruth to Bethlehem. And of course, we know how that goes with Ruth and Boaz, and eventually the line of David from that. But that setting is key in looking at going from Bethlehem to Moab and back.

And of course, characters. You got to have characters to have any kind of narrative. And this answers the question "Who?" So one of the things that's helpful when you're looking at a story: Write down, just

make a list of the names of the key characters. Much like you would see in a playbill of a play or a musical that you're at and you see all the cast of characters listed, do the same with a story as you're reading in Scripture and write down just some details of their involvement in the story. And I think that you'll find some interesting lessons in that.

Some other literary features. You've got the viewpoint of the narrator which is the author of the book. And sometimes the author expresses his view to us clearly in summary statements. For example, in 2 Kings 17:7, the author says, "All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God." And so the failures that had just been listed prior to this, the author of 2 Kings essentially is connecting the dots for you by saying "Hey, this is because of their sin against God." So when the author or narrator does that, take note of that. That's just kind of a freebie and it's an easy one to notice and to include as you're looking for an interpretation and meaning.

The fifth point is comparison and contrast. This, of course, is an effective tool especially with people. A classic example is King Saul and David. Boy, those two, definitely comparison and contrast in leadership styles and personalities and spirituality. 1 Samuel 16:7. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God judges the heart. Classic verse and a good example for us today. And then the sixth point is irony. The situation is quite different and even opposite of the narrator's intended meaning. So one example is from 1 Samuel 5 and 6 with the high priest's sons, Hophni and Phineas. And they tried to use the ark as a good token to go battle the Philistines. Well, they lose the battle, the Ark of the Covenant gets stolen, and the Philistines take it back to their land. Well, that's not going to work. The Ark of the Covenant is wreaking havoc with the Temple of Dagon and all kinds of plagues. And so the Philistines are actually limping back with the ark and say, "Hey, you guys can keep this. We don't want it anymore." So just a lot of irony in that story from 1 Samuel.

So let's get into the Old Testament law, essentially the first five books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy. But why are there some laws that Christians today still adhere to, but they choose to ignore others? Are there things under the Mosaic Law that we're supposed to still follow? And so here's a traditional approach to the Mosaic Law. We've got moral laws within the Mosaic Law in these five books, and these are timeless truths regarding God's intentions for human behavior. Example is Leviticus 19:18 where it says "Love your neighbor as yourself." Well, that is something that is repeated in the New Testament and taught, obviously. And so when you see that happen, when you see the New Testament repeating some of the principles from the Mosaic Law, you can be certain then that this is something that kind of transcends the law given to Israel and Moses, and this is for all humanity. And we even see that with all of the Ten Commandments. Every single one of those Ten Commandments were, in some way, shape, or form, repeated and retaught as God's law in the New Testament.

There were civil laws, though. This was a nation, and so they had to have laws for governing and for how things worked with just the society. You got to have some of those boundaries. And these are things that we normally see in a country's legal system. So one of the things they had was Deuteronomy 15:1, that every seven years, they were to cancel any debts. This was an opportunity for people. Any kind of hardship they were experiencing or whatever, they could get off on those debts and get a clean slate. And of course, we know about the year of jubilee which was every 50 years. They were to give the land a rest, so they were to cancel these debts and just a chance for everyone to breathe and get a fresh start, which obviously Israel didn't follow through with that one very often, if at all.

And there were ceremonial laws. We had the temple. We had the sacrificial system. And so the ceremonial laws deal with these sacrifices, festivals, the activities of the priests. Deuteronomy 16:13 is one that says, "Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress." And so that's just an example and gives a list of things that occur during the Feast of Tabernacles and how they were to do that. So how can you tell which is ceremonial, moral, or civil? Of course, if it's a moral law, it's going to be retaught in other places in Scripture, particularly in the New Testament. And so look for those where those are repeated in the second covenant, the new covenant.

So, some more points with the Old Testament law. The context, the narrative context. The law is firmly embedded into the story of Israel's theological history. It is part of the narrative that runs from Genesis 12 all the way through 2 Kings 25. So there are some points here with each of these books of Moses that you just got to keep in mind as you're looking at those. Genesis, of course, plenty of narrative. And this was pre-Mosaic Law, of course, because you were just getting into some of the patriarchs there with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. But what was the laws that they had to follow, their moral laws? Because they had a very narrow spectrum of their understanding of God's plan for them and what was expected. So keep that in mind as you're reading Genesis.

In the Book of Exodus, chapters 20 to 23 in particular, including the Ten Commandments, have significant legal material. But the first 19 chapters are the narrative about Israel and Egypt and their deliverance. So some good narrative in there in the Book of Exodus, even though there's a lot of laws given. And then Leviticus, of course, the focal point is the encounter with God on Sinai and that narrative between God and Moses, but he gives a lot of laws there for the Levites, the Levitical priests, and a lot of the ceremonial laws come from that narrative.

The other two books of the Pentateuch, if you will, the first five books of Moses. The Book of Numbers essentially is the second year of Israel's wanderings, with chapters 13 and 14 being the focal point as they reject entering the Promised Land. That's the story of the 12 spies. And so they had a chance at Kadesh Barnea to go in and to take the land from there. Of course, you know how the story goes. Only two of the spies were like, "Hey, we can do it." The 10 acted out of fear. And so because of that and the people rejecting that opportunity, they had to wander for another 40 years. And then Deuteronomy, much of the book are speeches that Moses gives at the end of his days. These are things for the nation before he formally passed over leadership to Joshua, especially as they are just on the other side of the Jordan River and he knows that he's going to die. He's not going to be able to go into the Promised Land. And so he has some final words then for Joshua and the people.

So what's the covenant context, if you will, of the Old Testament? In Exodus 19:5, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession." So since the Old Testament is tightly intertwined into the Mosaic covenant, it is important to make several observations about the nature of this covenant. So number one, the Mosaic covenant is closely associated with Israel's conquest and occupation of the land. This was something they had to carry into and continue on during the time of Joshua as they established themselves as a nation. Two, the blessings from the Mosaic covenant are conditional, a lot of if-then statements throughout that as it relates to "If you do this, then I will do this. But if you don't do and follow my word, then of course, there will be consequences for that."

Number three, the Mosaic covenant is no longer a functional covenant. When Christ died on the cross, that was the end. That was the final fulfilment of the civic and ceremonial side of the Mosaic Law. Of course, those overarching moral principles that are retaught in the New Testament, those are obviously carried on. But with Christ's death and resurrection, he put an end to the Mosaic Law. We don't have to go back to that. We're not under that anymore. And then finally, we must interpret the law through the grid of New Testament teaching. That's just what we got to see because we're in the new covenant now, and so that's got to be our focal point.

All right. To wrap things up for narrative and law, the final lesson that we'll have, will be on the Old Testament as it relates to poetry, books, prophets, and the wisdom literature. And then that will be the end of our presentations for this series. So definitely enjoying it. And we've got one more good one, so I look forward to learning with you again here shortly.