

Reading Scripture II

What is genre? And why is it important?

Law

You shall not murder. (Exodus 20:13)

Poetry

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. (Psalm 42:1)

Wisdom

Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good. (Proverbs 13:21)

Historical Narrative

Jacob's father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" Jacob answered, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." (Genesis 27:32)

Prophetic Writings

The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (Joel 2:31)

Epistles

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-7)

Reading Historical Narratives

Rule #1: Always keep the big picture in mind – The Story of Salvation

1 Samuel 17:48-50

⁴⁸ When Goliath the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹ And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. ⁵⁰ So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David.

Luke 24:25-27

²⁵ And Jesus said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Rule #2: Do not look for moral examples (Moralism), but look for the grace of God (Gospel-paradigm)

Genesis 29:28-30

²⁸ Jacob did so, and completed Leah's week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

³⁰ So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

Rule #3: Historical narratives illustrate what is taught explicitly elsewhere.

2 Samuel 11:4-5

⁴ So David sent messengers and took Bathsheba, and she came to him, and he lay with her. Then she returned to her house. ⁵ And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

Rule #4: Not every part of the narrative has its own point. Often, the entire story (which can span several chapters) conveys a single point. In this sense, you have to read history patiently.

1 Samuel 17:38-39

³⁸ Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, ³⁹ and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." So David put them off.

Next week: *Reading New Testament Epistles*

Discussion Notes

Introduction:

The key to reading and understanding the Bible is to understand what genre is and how to read different genres.

Genre is a class or category of work. Each genre has its own rules and distinctive forms. For example, there are movie genres: action, romantic, drama, comedy, etc. Depending on the genre, you as the audience know what you're supposed to do. If there's a funeral scene and it's a drama. You know you're supposed to be sad or nervous or tense. If it's a comedy, be prepared to laugh. If it's an action film, then expect some car chase to come crashing through at any moment.

So genre let's you know what are the rules and strategies for reading a text. Much of reason people find reading the Bible so frustrating is because they apply the exact same rules and strategies across all genres.

Rule #1: Always keep the big picture in mind – The Story of Salvation

The grand narrative arc of the Bible is the story of redemption. From Gen. 3:15, we are told God will send a savior to rescue humanity. All subsequent historical narratives fills out for us who this savior will be. So in the story of David and Goliath, we are to see the story as part of this grand narrative.

The primary meaning of every story is Christ.

The secondary meaning is to give us an example of faith in God. We are to imitate David.

What does the David story show us? First, that Christ will defeat a seemingly impossible enemy – Goliath a picture of sin and death. And he will do it as our representative. We won't and can't do it ourselves. We need a champion to fight for us. And that our savior will be the king we long for, who will wisely rule over us.

Because every Bible story is part of the gospel arc, we can creatively look at OT stories and see how they point to Christ and the gospel. This is Covenant Theology. Redemptive history.

Rule #2: Do not look for moral examples (Moralism), but look for the grace of God (Gospel-paradigm)

Moralism: identify good people and bad people. Imitate good people and avoid mistakes of bad people.

Gospel-paradigm: stories of broken and lost people whom God shows mercy and grace to, and uses

What about using the story of Gideon and the fleece? We are not to imitate Gideon. We are to understand it is wrong to test the Lord. But yet God had mercy on Gideon and assured his faith. The grace of God

Rule #3: Historical narratives illustrate what is taught explicitly elsewhere

The law teaches us – you shall not commit adultery. When we read the story of David and Bathsheba, we see the devastating effects that breaking God's laws has in David's life.

Another principle is that historical narratives often don't explicitly tell us what was done was wrong. It often just matter-of-factly tells us what happened without commentary. This confuses readers. Is this behavior right? Historical narratives forces us to make judgments based on what we know from the rest of Scripture.

Rule #4: Not every part of the narrative has its own point. Often, the entire story (which can span several chapters) conveys a single point. In this sense, you have to read history patiently.

A lot of the time, historical narratives include details that add to the atmospherics – but don't have it's own separate point. So in the passage about David and the armor, it's all part of what seems to be an impossible battle between little David and gigantic Goliath. But to try to figure out what it might mean for us specifically about the armor is to abuse the text.

Therefore, reading history often requires great patience as you read several chapters, often telling us just a single point.