

Themes:

- **God's Sovereignty:** The narrative showcases God's movement throughout history and His faithfulness to His promises.
- **Covenant Relationship:** The importance of the covenant between God and Israel is emphasized, highlighting obedience and disobedience.
- **Leadership and Kingship:** The rise and fall of leaders and kings, and the implications of their faithfulness or lack thereof.
- **Judgment and Redemption:** The cycle of sin, judgment, repentance, and deliverance is a recurring theme.

Main Characters:

- **Joshua:** Leader who succeeded Moses and led Israel into the Promised Land.
- **Judges (e.g., Gideon, Samson, Deborah):** Deliverers raised by God during times of crisis.
- **Samuel:** The last judge and prophet who anointed the first two kings of Israel.
- **Saul, David, Solomon:** The first three kings of Israel, each with significant contributions and failures.
- **Ezra and Nehemiah:** Leaders who played crucial roles in the return from exile and rebuilding Jerusalem.
- **Esther:** Queen who saved her people from annihilation.

Story Narratives:

- **Conquest of Canaan (Joshua):** The entry into and conquest of the Promised Land, Canaan.
- **Cycles of Judges (Judges):** Israel's repeated cycles of sin, oppression, crying out to God, and deliverance by judges.
- **Loyalty and Redemption (Ruth):** A loyal Moabite widow becomes an ancestor of King David
- **United Monarchy (1 Samuel - 1 Kings):** The establishment of the monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon.
- **Divided Kingdom (1 Kings - 2 Kings):** The division of the kingdom into Israel (north) and Judah (south) and their eventual exiles.
- **Retelling the Story (1-2 Chronicles):** A selective retelling of the material found in the books of Samuel and Kings.
- **Return from Exile (Ezra - Nehemiah):** The return of the exiles and the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple and walls.
- **Preservation of the Jews (Esther):** God's providential care for His people during their time in exile.

Genres of the Historical Books

The main genre of the Historical Books is Historical Narrative (or Theological Narrative). These are stories that emphasize theological truths or teachings about God through the historical depiction of events and characters. These books are not primarily "history" books (as in simply trying to convey facts), but rather works of theology that present history from a God's-eye perspective. The historical books tell about God's repeated in-breakings into human history, whether by dramatic accounts of miracles, by God's speaking directly to people, or by his indirect presence, visible in the providential outworking of events.

While Historical Narrative makes up the majority of the Historical Books, here are other genres in these books as well, such as

- **Poetry/songs/laments** (Judg 5; 1Sam 2:1-10; 2Sam 1:17-27; 22; 23:1-7; 1Chron 16:8-36).
- **Genealogies** (Ruth 4:18-22; 1Chron 1-9).
- **Lists** (Josh 13-21; 2Sam 23:8-39; 1Kgs 4:1-19; 1Chron 11:26-47; 12:23-40; 23-27; Ezra 2; 10:18-44)
- **Letters** (Ezra 4:11-22; 5:7-17; 6:2-22).
- **Prayers** (Josh 7:7-12; 2Sam 7:18-29; 1Kgs 8; 2Kgs 19:15-19; 1Chron 17:16-27; 29:10-19; 2Chron 6; 20:5-12; 30:18-19; Ezra 9:6-15; Neh. 1:5-11; 9:5-37).
- **Speeches** (Josh 23-24; 1Sam 12).
- **Covenants** (Josh 24; 2Sam 7:4-16; 2Kgs 23; 1Chron 17:3-14; 2Chron 29-31; 35).
- **Prophecies** (1Sam 2:27-36; 2Sam 12:7-14; 1Kgs 9:3-9; 22; 2Kgs 19:20-34; 22:15-20; 2Chron 18).

V. Principals for Interpreting Old Testament Narratives

Look at the Levels:

Old Testament narratives have three levels. In the first level we find the individual narratives themselves, which involve the characters and the stories of what's happening to them. The next level centers on how these narratives fit into Israel as a nation and their covenant relationship with God. Thirdly is that of the whole universal plan of God worked out through His creation.

The top-level narrative goes beyond the OT into the NT. So when Jesus taught that the scriptures "...bear witness to me" (John 5:27-29) he wasn't speaking about every individual passage but of the ultimate top level of the narrative in which His atonement was the central act.

What narratives are not:

1. OT narratives aren't just stories about people who lived long ago. They're first and foremost stories about what *God* did to and through those people. If it is in the Bible, God is the hero of the story.
2. OT narratives aren't all allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings. Some Christians get carried away and over spiritualize the stories in the OT or look for secret or hidden meanings within them. This can lead to 'eisegesis', which is reading into the story something that is not there. We need to be careful that any allegorical interpretations are rooted in Biblical truth related to what the scripture is trying to teach (let scripture interpret scripture).
3. OT narratives are not to be always dissected detail by detail (*we don't care how big the fish was that swallowed Jonah... what's the point?*), but the details point to the overall point of the message. The elements of the story are the vehicle by which to communicate the central truth.

Principles for interpreting narratives:

1. First, establish contextually what's going on in the story and how this relates to what the author is trying to get across to his original audience. Look at the story from the '3 levels'. Then look for central or eternal truths and principles that can be applied to your life. But let the point of the story dictate the application of the text – don't force an interpretation or application.
2. Narratives oftentimes don't teach doctrine or moral lessons directly, but they can do so *indirectly* within the context of the story. Narratives aren't laws and won't come right out and teach a doctrine, but we can learn through the story based on the outcomes and point of the story. Sometimes we learn from these stories 'what to do' and sometimes they teach us 'what not to do'.
3. Narrative records what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen. Some of the stories are *descriptive* not *prescriptive*. Just because Abram lied about his wife, or Rahab lied about the spies, doesn't mean we should start lying about things in our lives.
4. Not all Bible characters that God used are always a good example for us (*here's looking at you Samson*). Historical narratives don't promote perfect characters, but real characters. Most of the characters in OT narratives are far from perfect. The same goes for their actions. We're expected to be able to judge that on the basis of what is taught within the narrative and elsewhere in scripture.
5. God is the central character in all of the Biblical narrative. Narratives are precious to us because they so vividly demonstrate God's involvement in the world and illustrate his principles and calling. Every story, every event, and every character's journey ultimately points back to God's purposes, attributes, and actions. Understanding this centrality helps readers see the bigger picture of God's redemptive plan and his interaction with humanity throughout history. History is ultimately '*His Story*': *His* sovereignty, *His* faithfulness, *His* character, *His* plan, and *His* purposes. So a great application question is: '*how can this narrative help me in my relationship with God?*'