

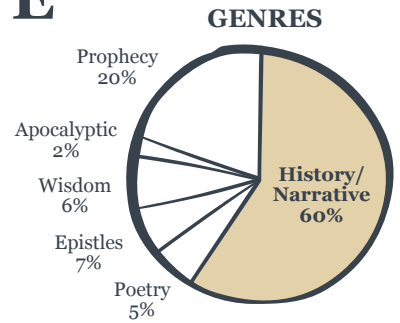


HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Narratives make up approximately 60% of the Bible. Why? Because the Bible does not want to simply tell us information but to sit with the text and wrestle with its implications. As one scholar puts it:

All storytelling is implicitly didactic, and because it involves the reader's imaginative involvement, powerfully so. Furthermore, the images we derive from narrative become part of us, so that it becomes difficult to distinguish what we were before we read from what we have become through reading stories.*

Here are three things to keep in mind when reading historical narratives:



1. BIBLICAL HISTORY IS MORE THAN JUST RETELLING EVENTS

Whenever we read or hear about events that happened in the past, we hear someone's perspective on what happened. In other words, events are put through the filter of a narrator, who edits and stylizes what happens to inform, persuade, and sometimes entertain a particular audience. Biblical history is the same way. The biblical authors are stylizing history not just to inform the reader about what happened but also to persuade the reader to think and live differently based on the retelling of events (see Luke 1:1-4).

HISTORY IS NOT LIKE THIS:



IT'S MORE LIKE THIS:

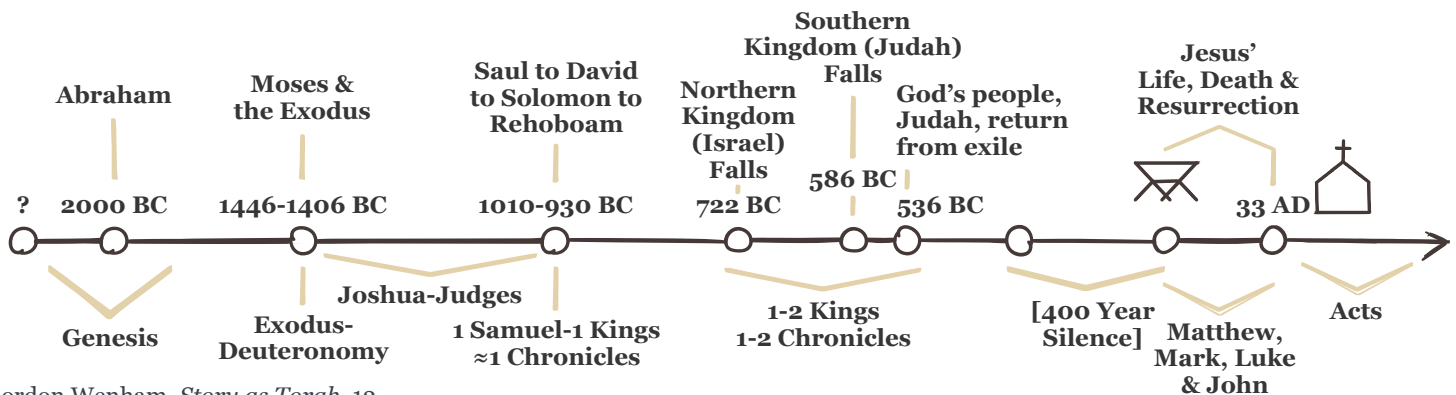


2. KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRESCRIPTIVE VS DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

A prescriptive text means the author tells the reader what happened and that the reader should live similarly. A descriptive text means the author states what happened but should not be imitated. How can we tell the difference between the two? The answer is found in other places within the Bible. Sometimes the Bible will outright say the character's actions were commendable or not. Other times, we can infer that the character did something right or wrong based on ethical commands within the Bible.

3. SEE THE MACRO-STORY BEHIND THE MICRO-STORY

Rather than being a hodge-podge collection of ancient stories, all Bible stories lead somewhere. So when a historical narrative happens, the reader has to eventually zoom out and ask, "How does this connect to the bigger story?" (For help, see the timeline below).



*Gordon Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 12.

HOW TO READ HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Using the inductive bible study method, we can use the same three-step process to understand any passage of Scripture (Observe, Interpret, and Apply) and ask more specific questions related to this genre.

OBSERVE - WHAT DOES THIS SAY?



Read the scene

Just like a movie is made up of dozens of scenes, in the same way in the biblical narrative, there are multiple scenes as well. Generally speaking, chapter and paragraph breaks in the text are good indicators of when a scene might start and stop.

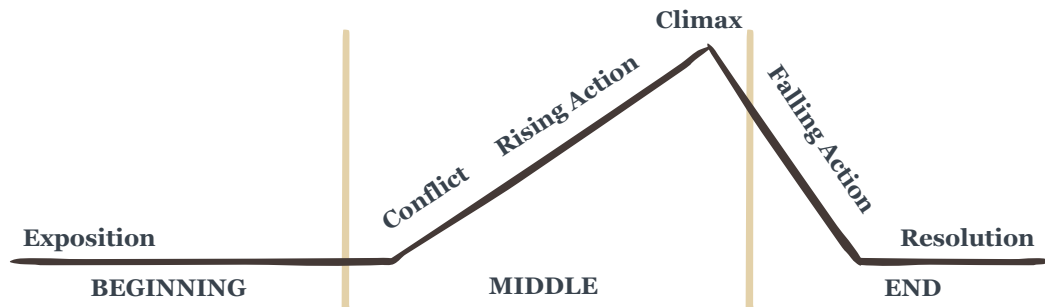
INTERPRET - WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?



Analyze the scene

Setting - Where are we in the biblical timeline, and how does that impact the story? Where is the location of this story, and why might that matter?

Plot - What's the tension, climax, and resolution? In your own words, summarize what's happening in this scene. (See plot chart.)



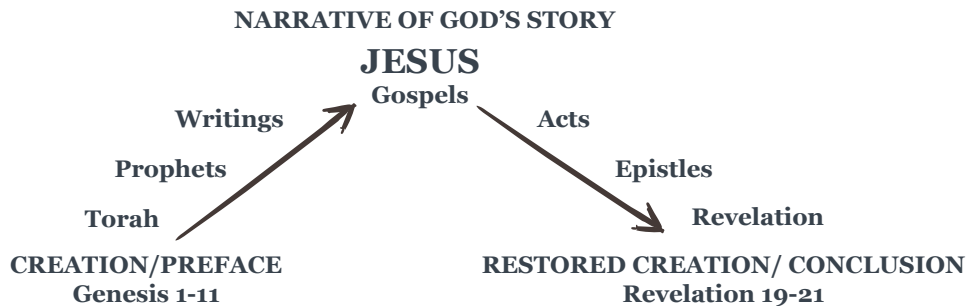
Character - Who is in this scene, and what do we know about them so far?

Dialogue - What is significant about what is said? (Dialogue is generally one of the best clues to determine the meaning behind the text.)

Patterns - Do you notice any repeating words, phrases, or actions? Why might that be significant?

Zooming Out - How does this scene fit with the stories that came before and after in the text?

Foreshadowing - How does this story look ahead to the Bible's "bigger story," namely, Jesus and His kingdom? (See "Narrative of God's Story" chart.)



APPLICATION - WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?



Embody the scene

Is the text describing or prescribing a character's actions or group of characters? What is this scene calling us to do or not do? Think or not think?