Lesson 9: Grammatical Interpretation (part 4)

INTRODUCTION TO GENRE & Interpretating NARRATIVE

I. What is GENRE and why does it matter?

A. A Borrowed Word

1. Genre is French word that means a ***kind/****sort of thing*. It is related to the Latin word *genus* which is used in zoology to refer to kinds of animals.

2. It is a literary word describing different kinds of literature.

3. The Bible is composed of several genres of literature. Understanding what genre you're dealing with can affect the way you interpret a passage.

a. You don't read **comics** the same way as the **news.** They each have their own rules of communication.

b. Likewise, one should not read Psalms the same way as Philippians. The Pss are poetic, repetitive, and dramatic, while Philippians spells out doctrine & practice.

B. A Variety of Options

1. The major categories of genre in the Bible are:

a. Narratives: recounting of stories

b. Law: requirements, prohibitions, & procedures

c. Poetry: artful composition of emotive thought

d. Prophecy: insights into problems of the past or present, or foretelling of God's plans

e. Letters: addressing concerns or encourage a particular audience through instruction and exhortation

a. Each of these categories has sub-varieties, as well.

b. These categories often **overlap** with each other.

(1) Poems are often embedded within narratives. **Jonah 2:2-9.**

(2) Prophecy can be written as either poetry (**Isaiah 1**) or as prose (**Isaiah 7**). Note: One advantage of modern translations is that they format for poetry.

(3) "The Law" contains as much narrative as law codes.

(4) Letters may contain prophecy, narrative, or poetry.

II. Guidelines for Interpreting NARRATIVE

1. More than Moral Lessons

a. A common mistake in reading OT stories is to think that their primary purpose is to give good moral examples.

b. Of course, OT stories do provide us with examples of those living by faith (**Heb. 11**) and those failing to do so (**1 Cor. 10**). These stories are written for our examples (**1 Cor. 10:11**), but that does not mean that this is only reason or even the primary reason.

c. God intends for us to benefit from what was written to His people Israel long ago. But in interpretation we want to see the original purpose.

2. Prophetic Histories on Israel.

a. The stories of the OT are written by prophets to give an inspired perspective on Israel's past. When reading these stories, ask yourself what the original audience would have learned about their nations' relationship with God.

b. Stories in the Torah.

(1) Genesis serves as an introduction to the Torah (Gen-Dt). It provides the background to the giving of the Law.

(a) The primary lesson is how God brings about His plan despite the failures of the forefathers.

(b) Thus the story of Joseph & Potiphar's wife is not primarily about principles for avoiding temptation.

(2) Exodus recounts how God brought Israel out of bondage and made a covenant with them governed by the Law. The covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai looms over all the Old Testament.

(3) Numbers reveals how Israel almost broke the covt but God mercifully extended it to the next generation.

c. Stories in the "Former Prophets"

(1) In the Jewish tradition, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, & Kings are the first (former) books of the prophets. They give a prophetic **evaluations** of Israel's history.

(2) **Joshua** shows how God fulfilled His covenant duties with Israel in giving them the land to the degree that they were believing & obedient.

(3) **Judges** reveal how corrupt Israel became after the conquest. They needed a godly king to lead them.

(4) **Samuel** shows what happened when Israel chose its own way (Saul as king) instead of waiting for God's choice (David as king). God initiates a covenant with David to lead His people into the everlasting kingdom.

(5) **Kings** outlines Israel's covenant unfaithfulness over the centuries that led to their losing their land. God fulfilled his covenant warnings at Sinai.

d. Stories in "The Writings": In Jewish tradition, the last third of the OT contains other historical books (Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, & Chronicles) which give moral examples and evidences of God's sovereign work in preserving his people.

(1) **Ruth** recounts how God sovereignly & graciously worked in the lives of David's ancestors who grew in their trust & faithfulness.

(2) **Esther** recounts how God sovereignly preserved His people in Babylonian captivity even though His people were mostly godless.

(3) **Daniel** gives examples of faithful men obediently waiting for God's kingdom plan to unfold.

(4) **Ezra & Nehemiah** show how God restored Israel to its land & renewed his work among them.

(5) **Chronicles** highlights the **positive** aspects of Israel's past and showing signs of God's intention to renew the kingdom of David again.

3. Christian Histories in the New Testament

a. The 4 gospels and the book of Acts tells the stories of Jesus, his disciples, and their early followers.

b. Each gospel writer has a different focus on the life of Christ.

(1) Matthew, written to Jews, presents Jesus as **King**.

(2) Mark, written to Gentiles, presents Jesus as God's **Servant**.

(3) Luke, written to a Gentile. presents Jesus as the perfect **Man**.

(4) John, written to all, presents Jesus as Son of **God**.

c. Acts continues the perspectives found in the Gospel of Luke, that God has a plan to bring the nations to Himself.