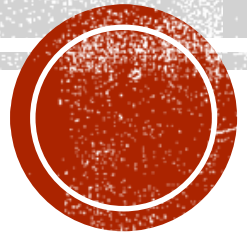


THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCRIPTURE: PART VIII

The Interpretation of God's Word:

Genre, Literalness, and Narrative



THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCRIPTURE

- The Nature of God's Word (Scripture's Doctrine)
- The Makeup of God's Word (Scripture's Canon)
- The Preservation of God's Word (Scripture's Text)
- The Transmission of God's Word (Scripture's Translation, 3 Parts)
- **The Interpretation of God's Word (Scripture's Meaning, 6 Parts)**



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

- What is genre?

Genre is simply a category of art, music, or literature. Typically, works included in a specific genre have similar structure and content. However, there is no rule that says any particular piece of literature must exactly fit every distinction of a specific genre

- Why the silly pronunciation?

This, as well as many other things in life, can be blamed on the French

- Why is it important?

Different genres communicate through different means. If we don't understand **HOW** the genres desire to communicate, we will undoubtedly misunderstand **WHAT** they are communicating



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

- An example of genre confusion:

Exodus 14:27-28

As the Egyptians fled into it [the Red Sea], the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. ***The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained.***

Exodus 15:11-12

"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; ***the earth swallowed them.***



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

- An example of genre misunderstanding:

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it

Proverbs 16:31

Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.

Proverbs 19:11

Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

Therefore, to misidentify or misinterpret a genre is both problematic and dangerous, and is one of the chief sources of poor biblical interpretation and application!



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

- Types of genres in the Bible:
 - Genealogies (**Genesis 5; Matthew 1**)
 - Historical Narrative (**1,2 Kings; 1,2 Chronicles**)
 - Bio (**Gospels**)
 - Law (**Leviticus**)
 - Epistle (**Romans, James**)
 - Poetry/Song (**Exodus 15; Psalms**)
 - Proverb/Wisdom (**Proverbs; Job**)
 - Prophecy (**Isaiah, Jeremiah**)
 - Apocalyptic (**Daniel; Revelation**)
 - Lament (**Psalms 137; Lamentations**)



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

Things to notice about the genres in the Bible:

- Genres do not have to be full pieces of literature in and of themselves
- Genres can incorporate *other* genres in small amounts
- Some genres are inherently mixed. Prophecy, for instance, is very flexible, and uses a mixture of poetry and apocalyptic
- There are smaller speech types that don't quite qualify as genres:
 - Hyperbole/exaggeration
 - Metaphor/simile
 - Idioms



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

- What does interpreting the Bible “literally” mean?

It primarily means that we interpret the Bible with the nature of the genre in mind

Therefore, “literal” is typically not a helpful term – it has no real firm meaning from genre to genre. We interpret all things based on context.

Each genre has, for lack of a better word, its own rules, generally known and acknowledged by all

- So, let us follow the *rules* for each genre!



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

- Narrative Rules

Narrative is an incredibly important genre to understand. It is, by far, the most used genre in Scripture.

Therefore, to know the rules of how narrative works, is to unlock a good deal of Scripture.

What then are the rules for this genre?



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

- Narrative Rules

1. Not all narrative is prescriptive, some is descriptive
2. It is not just history, and the provision of facts
3. Context is king in interpretation
4. Look for authorial, editorial, narrator, or key actor comments
5. Thematic statements and repetition
6. Plot progression



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THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

Not all narrative is prescriptive, some is descriptive

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance
(Acts 2:1-4; ESV)

Should this be our experience as well?



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THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

It is not just history, and the provision of facts

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon"
(Matthew 15:21-22)

Why call the woman a Canaanite? Compare with Mark 7:24-25



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THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

Context is king in interpretation

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. *The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart*, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." (1 Sam 13:13-14; ESV)

What, precisely does this statement mean?

David commits adultery, kills Uriah, his loyal servant, and is forgiven.

Saul unlawfully sacrifices to God, spares other things for sacrifice, and has the Kingdom removed from him. Why?



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

Context is king in interpretation

[Samuel to Saul]: The LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and ***do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?***" And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD..." (1 Sam 15:18-20; ESV)

[Nathan to David]: Why have you despised the word of the LORD, ***to do what is evil in his sight?***... David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." (2 Sam 12:9, 13; c.f. Psalm 51)



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David is contrite, Saul is arrogant. This must give some insight into being a man after God's own heart!



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THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

Look for authorial, editorial, narrator, key actor comments

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. (1 Sam 3:1-3)

The fact that the word was rare, that Eli was almost blind, and that the Lamp had not yet gone out, give the impression that God is far from his people, but with significant symbols of hope



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THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

Thematic statements and repetition

The king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, *to destroy, to kill, to annihilate* any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, *children and women included*, and to plunder their goods
(Esther 8:11; ESV)

The repetition here drives home the importance of the death and destruction given over to the Jews. But what does it mean? (Cf. 1 Sam 15:1-3)



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

Thematic statements and repetition

In Susa the citadel itself the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men... [and] the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, but ***they laid no hand on the plunder***... The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed 300 men in Susa, but ***they laid no hands on the plunder***. Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but ***they laid no hands on the plunder***. (Esther 9:6, 10, 15-16; ESV)

The repetition here drives home the importance of not plundering. But what does it mean? (Cf. 1 Sam 15:1-3)



THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: GENRE, LITERALNESS, AND NARRATIVE

Thematic statements and repetition

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" ... And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him... And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone..."

(Mark 1:24-25, 34, 43-44; ESV. See also 5:43; 7:36; 8:30)

The repetition of this theme is important in Mark. How does this relate to the important thematic statement of Mark 1:1 and the triumphal entry in 11:1-11, where Jesus allows the confession of his coming as the kingdom?

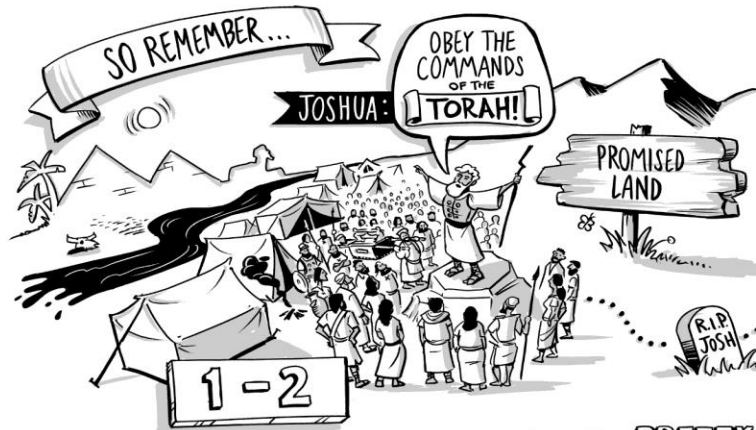


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JUDGES

ISRAEL'S TOTAL FAILURE

3-16



THE EMPOWERMENT OF GOD'S SPIRIT
≠
ENDORSEMENT OF HUMAN CHOICES

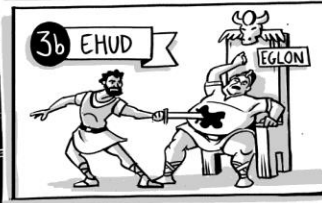


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17-21



ISRAEL FAILS TO DRIVE OUT THE CANAANITES



CORRUPTION OF ISRAEL'S JUDGES



CORRUPTION OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL