

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth

(Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart; 3rd edition)

Chapters 5 – 8

Chapter 5: Old Testament Narrative – Their Proper Use

Old Testament Narrative Is

- Purposeful retelling of historical events to give people meaning and direction in the present

Old Testament Narrative Is NOT

- Allegory with hidden meaning
- Moral lessons
- Normative unless taught explicitly elsewhere
(i.e. do not do _____ just because _____ did it in the Old Testament)

How does Hebrew narrative work?

- Three levels
 - God's universal plan (big picture)
 - God redeems a people (old + new covenant)
 - Individual narrative (story of Abraham)
- Omniscient narrator (decides what to include)
- Scene focused, little character development

How does Hebrew narrative work?

- Characterization by dialogue, parallelism
- Dialogue generally key points in story
- Designed to be heard so note
 - Repetition
 - Structural pattern
- Always ask, “What is God doing here?”
- Notice implicit teaching
 - Implicit does not mean hidden!

Implicit in Ruth

- Ruth converted to faith in the LORD
- Boaz was a righteous Israelite
 - e.g. keeps law of gleaning, redemption, 2:3-13, etc...
- Foreign woman in King David's line
- Bethlehem is an exceptional town
 - Ruth is during Judges, people keep the Law

Cautionary don'ts

- Don't moralize
 - Narratives are historical, not illustrative
- Don't pick and choose
 - Need to see the whole narrative to get point
- Don't decontextualize
- Don't misappropriate
- Don't redefine
 - e.g. 2 Chronicles 7:14 was for Israelites, not America

What I learned

- Narratives teach us a lot but not everything and that's why we have the whole Bible.
- Read and study in multiple levels
- Try to focus on God in the narratives at least as much as on the characters and incidents.
- Be aware of the implicit; might be helpful to note these in the Daily Bread

Chapter 6: Acts – The Question of Historical Precedence

Why a separate chapter?

- Everything about Old Testament (OT) narrative (and other tools learned so far) applies to Acts
- Problem: How *we Christians* read Acts
 - We often read Acts as normative
 - We don't read OT like that
- Interpretative challenge:
 - Is Acts' intention about “how we do church”?
 - Is Acts' intention something else?

Acts

- No biographies of apostles
- Very little about church organization (e.g. every church should have XX pastors, YY fellowships, etc...)
- Little interest in standardization (e.g. every church should do ABC)
- Church expansion only towards Rome

Therefore, authors think...

- Acts unlikely intended to be “how to do church”
- Acts very likely intended to be a model for overall function of church
 - Mission + dependence on Holy Spirit
 - Joyful, triumphant, loving, sacrificial
 - Changes lives + communities

Principles for applying

- Not normative (obligatory) unless explicitly stated or shown to be the intention of the author
- Specific details are often incidental to the main point of the author
- Incidental should not become primary to the main point/intent

Principles for biblical precedent

- Not valid to use analogy based on event as though the event gives biblical authority
 - e.g. Gideon's fleece to find God's will
- Narrative may have illustrative and “pattern” value even if it is incidental
 - e.g. speaking in tongues (Acts, 1 Cor 12-14)
- For Christian practice, biblical precedent may be considered repeatable pattern
 - e.g. baptism by immersion

What I learned

- Keep overall theme in mind when reading Acts
- Daily Bread writing should focus on the intent of Acts, not how to practice something
- Distinguish between something that is recorded vs. something that was intended to teach
- Avoid ambiguous matters in writing Daily Bread
 - e.g. in Acts 8, how were Samaritans believers prior to receiving the Holy Spirit?

Chapter 7: The Gospels – One Story, Many Dimensions

Audience considerations

- Four unique gospels, each distinctive and authoritative
- Not written by Jesus but about Jesus by others
- Jesus' immediate audience:
 - Jewish, rural, agricultural, Aramaic-speaking
- Gospels' immediate audience
 - Gentile, urban, pagan, Greek-speaking
- Part of genius of universality of gospels

Context considerations

- 1st century Judaism
 - May need outside help
 - Immerse oneself in it
- Form of Jesus' teaching
 - Parable, hyperbole, etc...

Context considerations (cont...)

- Gospels constructed from oral tradition
- Teachings arranged by the Holy Spirit's inspiration to the authors
- Sometimes original context is unknown
- Some questions to ask:
 - What is Holy Spirit's intention in the arrangement?
 - Who is Jesus' audience?
 - Why did author write what he did?

Context considerations (cont...)

- Think horizontally
 - Comparable passage in other gospels
 - Find uniqueness about our passage
- Think vertically
 - Historical context of Jesus and author

Interpretation tools/principles

- Selectivity
 - Author included/excluded; expand/contract
- Arrangement
 - How it is arranged to make the point(s)
- Adaptation
 - Same material, different emphasis

Application tools/principles

- Teachings and imperatives
 - Culture matters (e.g. What's a Samaritan?)
 - Jesus' imperatives do not function like Old Testament Law
 - Teachings do show us what citizens of the kingdom of God are like
- Narratives and miracles
 - Illustrates the power of God
 - May teach directly (rich young man)

Application tools/principles

- End times (eschatological) framework
 - God is working to bring the end
 - Jews in Jesus' day thought the end was coming very soon
 - Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God
 - Beginning of the end, not end of the end
 - “Already, not yet” tension

Application tools/principles

- End times (eschatological) framework (cont...)
 - Don't need to be “*Left Behind*” friendly but very important to keep in mind
 - Jesus brought forth the kingdom of God
 - We live out its ethics until Jesus returns!

What I learned

- Try to understand teachings the way Jesus' original hearers would have heard them
- For Daily Bread, try to connect with surrounding passages (difficult because of space)
- Avoid temptation to harmonize / try to “get into the heart and mind” of the author
- Think about the kingdom of God

Chapter 8: The Parables: Do You Get the Point?

Be careful w/parables

- Not allegories
- Don't read too much into them
- Do use all the tools discussed already

Four Types

- True parable (story)
- Similitude (illustrations from everyday life)
- Metaphor (“You are the salt of the earth”)
- Epigram (surprising, memorable statements)

Function

- Some are word pictures
 - Parable of the Sower
- Others function to call forth a response
 - Parable of the Prodigal Son
- All have a “punch” to them
 - Understand points of reference and audience to get the full “punch”
 - *(see book re. Parable of Good Samaritan)*

Notes on context

- Some parables are “contextless”
 - Due to oral tradition
 - Jesus' original audience is unknown
 - e.g. Parable of the Lost Sheep (Mt 18:12-14; Lk 15:3-7)
 - Setting + audience different
 - Same teaching
 - Universally applicable
- Look for Holy Spirit's inspired intention

Tools/principles

- Original audience did not interpret; they “got” it
- Translate the “punch” and the point into our context
- All parables teach about the kingdom of God – not only moral stories

What I learned

- For Daily Bread, communicate both the “punch” and the point
- Understand the parable the way Jesus' audience understood it
- Note surrounding verses of a given parable; it may lead to richer understanding

Thanks for listening!