

Genre: Historical Narrative

Genre: the category of literature to which the text belongs classified by style, form, or content

Historical Narratives: truthful, timeless stories describing God's personal, progressive, providential, and purposeful activity among his people—first Israel, then the church—and the nations, and their responses to him

God's activity is personal. In Genesis 1:1 we are introduced to the leading character in the Bible's story, God. The story of creation conveys God as personally involved with the story of humanity. He spoke the world into existence. He formed man after his own image and likeness from the dust of the ground. He filled man with the breath of life. God is personally involved in the creation story and that sets the tone for how he relates to humanity throughout history. Even as God remains transcendent (outside of and in control over his creation), he is ever immanent (personally present in his creation and with his people).

God's activity is progressive. The history of the world and mankind is not circular; it is linear. It began through God's creating grace and it will end through God's recreating grace. God's activity is what progresses the timeline of history along. God, eternally existent, outside of time and space, knows the purpose for which mankind was created and has the means to accomplish that purpose through humanity's story. The historical narratives of Scripture convey the progressive activity of God from creation (Genesis 1:1), fall (Genesis 3:6), redemption (Genesis 3:15), and new creation (2 Peter 3:13).

God's activity is providential. Solomon wrote, "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). Paul wrote to the Romans that "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). These works of God are examples of his providential activity in history. God gives, grows, and guides history generally and his people specifically to accomplish his will.

God's activity is purposeful. God has revealed his character in part. His actions flow out of his character. He will not move history along indefinitely. He does not exercise control as a vanity exercise. God's activity among his people and in his creation is all about accomplishing his purpose and his purpose is that all his ways would be known among all nations so that all peoples would praise him (Psalm 67:2-3).

Types of Historical Narratives

Accounts: stories of events, encounters, entities, and experiences that relay factual information, such as routes traveled, strategies taken, victories accomplished, transactions made, or worship offered

Numbers 21:4-9	the story of Israel's subjection to and deliverance from fiery serpents
Joshua 6:1-27	the story of Jericho's fall
Ezra 1:1-10	the story of how the return from Babylonian exile began
Matthew 2:16-18	the story of the slaughter of the innocents

Biographies: stories of individuals typically noted for their extraordinary role in redemptive history, either positively through their faith in and obedience to God or negatively through their rejection of and rebellion against God

Genesis 38:1-30	the story of Tamar's ruin, rejection, and redemption
1 Samuel 1:21-28	the story of Hannah's dedication of Samuel
Luke 1:5-80	the story of John the Baptist's conception, birth, and development
Acts 5:1-11	the story of Ananias and Sapphira's divisive deception

Comedies: stories of blessing in which the players experience the fullness of life, fruitfulness of work, and divine favor in the midst of circumstances that would lead the observer to conclude the only outcome to be suffering or sorrow

Genesis 50:15-20	the story of how God used Joseph's situation for good instead of evil
Job 42:10-17	the story of the restoration of Job's fortunes
Esther 8:1-8	the story of the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's wicked plan
John 11:38-44	the story of Lazarus' resuscitation

Foundational Principles for Interpreting Historical Narratives

1. Analyze, don't allegorize.
2. Distinguish description from prescription.
3. The parts make no sense apart from the whole.
4. Imperatives (commands) and interrogatives (questions) are important.
5. Where's God?