

## 5. Time for a story...

(How to read Old Testament Narrative)

### Introduction

Narrative is telling a story and 40% of the Old Testament is narrative!

- The Old Testament is *our* spiritual history.
- The promises are *our* promises.

### 1. What is a narrative?

Narrative = purposeful historical stories written for people in the present.

**It is God's story – (his)story is our story**

The three parts of a narrative:

(1) characters, (2) plot and (3) plot resolution

Narrative in the Bible is like a cake – with layers:

#### Layer 1: The grand meta-narrative

- the 'story of redemption'

#### Layer 2: The two covenants

- First covenant – story of the people of Israel
- Second covenant – story of Jesus and church

#### Layer 3: Individual narratives

- The many stories that make up the Old Testament.

### 2. What are O.T. narratives?

1. Tell of *what happened* – what God did in the history of Israel.
2. May illustrate teaching found elsewhere in scripture.

### 3. Features of Hebrew narrative

1. **Narrator** - storyteller with a point-of-view.
2. **Scenes** - linked together to make a whole.

**Question:** Why do you think the writers of narrative write in scenes?

3. **Characters** - central element, described as status or profession – not visually.

**Question:** When we write stories today, we describe people by how they look. Why didn't the Old Testament writers do this?

4. **Dialogue** – there is a rhythm between dialogue and narrative
5. **Plot** - beginning, middle, and an end
6. **Structure** – designed to be read out loud and memorised and employs various techniques.

**Activity:** For example, what keyword(s) are repeated in Genesis Chapter 37?

### 2. Theocentricity!

Now there's a big word! In all Old Testament Narratives, **God** is the central character.

### 3. Reading between the lines

When reading Old Testament narrative there are often details that are both explicit and implicit.

**Activity:** Read Ruth 1:1-16. What had Ruth 'done' that is not explicit in the text? And Boaz is in the genealogy of Jesus!

### 4. Common mistakes we make...

Here are the most common errors people make when reading Old Testament narrative:

1. **Allegorising** – thinking there's a 'hidden' meaning in the text waiting to be discovered.
2. **Personalising** – thinking it's about us or applying to us/church and not everyone else.
3. **Moralising** – Assuming every text teaches a principle for living. Just because a character does something doesn't mean we should!
4. **Decontextualising** – focusing in on a text or picking a text and ignoring others. Or even applying our culture to the text! For example, you cannot ask the text what it teaches us about the ethics of genetic cloning!

**Remember:** Narratives are precious examples of God's involvement in the world.

### 5. Four simple questions...

When reading Old Testament narrative, here are four simple questions we can ask ourselves.

1. Are the character(s) giving good and/or bad examples?
2. Why did the author think it was important for us to know what he is telling us?
3. Is teaching (found elsewhere in the Bible) being illustrated?
4. How is God the hero in the text?