

# C5 - Biblical Genres and Narratives

In the past, they do it the same way too, except that our genres today may not always be identical to the genres in the ancient times of the Bible. So, some of it may be strange to you like, “Wow, is this a genre? [Is] this is the way they write in the past?” Yes! It is common in their day, [but] not common in our day. That is why we need to look at some of them, and we shall review them today.

## Historical / Law Narrative

So, if you have your notes, look down at your first page, and you will see [a table headed] “Biblical Genres”. Now this table is very helpful because it summarizes for you the basic genres you should be encountering in the Bible, and [the table] classifies all the books under it. Largely accurate. Okay? Largely accurate. For example, when you talk about “Historical / Law Narrative”, you have Genesis because you read stories (narratives) there. Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy will maybe be more in the “Law” section. Then [for] Joshua, you [will] definitely have a lot of narrative/story-telling. Judges, Ruth, First & Second Samuel, First & Second Kings, they are all stories, [like] Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, [and] Jonah. So, that is why they are classified under “Historical / Law Narrative”. In other words, when you read these books of the Bible, you expect to read a story or a historical record.

## Wisdom Literature

Now, when you come to “Wisdom Literature”, that is a different style of writing. Okay? If you read Job and you want to read it like a story, you will be quite lost. And after a while, frustrated! Because if you do not pause and look, you will see that in this “Wisdom Literature”, Job has a bit of story, [but] then it goes into three cycles of conversation in which [Job and his friends] take turns to talk to each other. So, if you are going to “read a story”, but you [do not] have a story, [you may think]: “What/Why am I reading?” So, in your devotional reading, you [may] get stuck, you [may] get lost. It is like: “I do not even know who is talking now!” Because you were not paying attention to the genre.

You see how genre affects the way you read the Bible? You cannot expect everything to be a story because [the writers] have different style[s] of writing to communicate the message that is not based merely on the content. That is why genre affects interpretation. All right? (*Speaker looks at the wrong section and says “Then you have Song of Solomon, you have Lamentations.”*) Oh, sorry! That was Wisdom [Literature we were] looking at: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, I need to mention. You see, when you read Proverbs again, you will see certain literary devices e.g. “Three things I noted. Four things I know, etc.” You [may] think: “Wah, this is so *cheem* (so deep). So, what is the fourth? How come like never [say] very clearly?” Well, it is because that is the way [the writer is trying] to communicate - to get your attention. So, you are counting numbers in your head. All right? So, that is the way they use this literary device to get the truth across. And Proverbs are short sayings - not necessarily organized in any form.

Okay? So, [Proverbs] are like scattered gems, that [are] like flung out at you in a chapter. You just grab those that help. So, sometimes [for] a person who wants to study a certain topic, they will have to gather these gems on the same topic from throughout the book of Proverbs, because that was how it was written - as "Wisdom Literature". Ecclesiastes is a bit of a story, but [also] a bit of musing time. So, [the writer] developed a certain thought that he had, rather than a certain storyline.

## Poetry

[For] Poetry, you have Psalms, Song of Solomon, [and] Lamentations. Now, hard as it may be for some of us to believe, when we say that they are poetry, it means that [the ancient Israelites] actually sang them. Okay? They sang them in their days. They did not sing it in English. They did not sing it in Chinese. They sang it in Hebrew. So, if you know Hebrew, and you go back to [to the poem], you will see how it is all structured [in] the way so that [the Israelites] can see the alliteration. There are pauses and so on, and so forth - so that they could sing it. So, it is actually a song - not written the way we write songs today - but definitely the way they wrote it [back] then. So again, that should affect the way we read poetry. So, sometimes when you read Psalms, you [may think]: "How come they keep saying this over, and over, again? E.g. 'For the Lord is merciful and His mercy endures forever.' [It is] like, I know already! Do not keep telling me, you know? Save some space." Well, because [the Psalmists were] not trying to save space. They are trying to sing a song. Just as even today, you have choruses, right? So, when you sing, you repeat a chorus to drive home a certain truth. So, [understanding] genres will help you to understand the Bible and interpret it correctly.

## Biblical Prophecy

These are the prophetic books of the Bible. In other words, they are books that not only foretell (predict) the future, they also forth-tell (proclaim) the Word of God to the local people then, and even [to] the surrounding nations. So, what happened, interestingly, in prophetic books is this: Because today many of these prophecies are fulfilled in Christ in Jesus, in the New Testament, those prophecies that seemed foreign and strange to the Jews when they [had] first heard it is very close to our heart. For example, "Behold, the virgin shall be with Child, and bring forth a Son, and shall call Him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). The Jews in that day when they read it, they would be like, "Huh?" You know? If they know *Hokkien* (a Chinese dialect) they would ask, "*Gong see mi, ah?* (What are you talking about?)" or "*Shuo She Me, ah?* (the same query in Mandarin)" They would be like, "I don't know what you're saying!" But today when we read this verse, "Wow! Immediately precious!" It's a well-known verse for Christmas. Because it [has been] fulfilled.

Now, what happens is the passages in prophetic books - whether Isaiah or Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos Obadiah - all these books, totally makes sense to them. Because they live in those times when they talk about this nation; this regional location; what these people did; how the women dressed themselves and what they put on their faces. You [may] think, "These people are so weird! What is that?" [Yet] to [the ancient Israelites,] perfectly clear! Why? Because we must remember the prophets - they did not merely foretell, they fourth-[told]. They were the preachers of the day. They were addressing

the needs of the hour. They were talking to real people who lived in real time, with real needs and real struggles, calling them to repentance. So, [the prophets] were naming the places [the people] lived in; naming the things they were doing; naming the things they were using. And about 3/4000 years later, [when] you read back [these prophecies] you [may think], “I do not know what they are saying. Is this a person? Is this a place? Is this an animal? Is this an appliance? I do not know.”

That is why when you read prophetic books, [it] is always going to be challenging. And if you have tried it, I am sure you will find its soothing effects too because you do not know, half the time, what is going on! That is why you [have] got to study, right? That is why you [have] got to observe. That is why you [have] got to interpret and then/before you [can] apply. But with prophetic books, [it] is going to be hard when it is not a fulfilled prophecy in the New Testament; when it is a message to the people, [to] the surrounding nations of the day. Okay? So, let us keep that in mind when you read prophecy.

### **Apocalyptic Literature, The Gospels and The Epistles**

“Apocalyptic Literature”? You have [books like] Daniel and Revelation which talk about future events. Gospels? We have covered the last time: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. They are more like “Historical Narratives” except they center on the Person of Jesus. Then finally, in the New Testament, a whole bunch of [books] are called “Epistles”. They are merely letters written in that time. Today, we write the letters such as, “Dear so-and-so, how are you doing? I trust all is well with you.” So, we start that way. But in those days, you need to remember [the writers] are not weird. They are not strange. The people do write like Paul. [For example,] “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, greetings..” or “peace and grace to you.” This is how they write. Okay? So, please do not read “Epistles” as if they are strange or weird. This is their accepted style of writing a letter in those days. Once you get that into your head and understand it, then you will realize that [an epistle] is very normal letter - not some spiritual, mystical notes – [but is a normal letter] written to normal people who received it into their lives and found the amazing gospel that changed their lives. The gospel is what is amazing. And supernaturally empowered by God to change our lives. Okay? So, the style of writing [a] genre is normal. It is the standard way of writing.

### **A Scarlet Thread of Redemption**

So, this is what genres are and how they might affect us. As you can see, there are many, many different genres in the 66 books of the Bible. And when you bring [them] together, you do not have one style of writing. You do not have one culture. You do not have one timeline. You do not have only one group of people. So, when you bring [them] all together, the Bible is actually an anthology, a collection of many different books over time. Although it is a collection of many different books, from different backgrounds, different styles, yet they have one message: the message of redemption. From Genesis to Revelation, [this anthology / Bible] is telling us how God is going to save His people from their sins. So, this is why the Bible is so amazing. There are so many reasons for it to go in different directions. Yet in all the diversity that surrounds the 66 books of the Bible, that is a definite unity. In fact, some scholars say that they could find a scarlet thread of redemption throughout [the Bible]. That means you can see the red line of blood flowing through [the 66 books] because that is what God intended to do: To redeem us by

the blood of the Lamb (Jesus Christ). So many different poetic interpretations and understanding, communicating the unity of the Bible in its diversity - in spite of the different genres, [lies in the single message of redemption by Jesus Christ]. So, are you with me? Are you lost? Do you know what [are] genres? [Genres are] different styles of writing that affects the way you interpret the Bible, because not every book is the same.

Oh, one more thing, just to throw more spanners into the work. Within one book itself, there could also be multiple genres. Okay, so it's not like oh, book of Psalms, all songs, very neat and tidy. Right? So, you are pretty safe, interpreting from that light. Wow, Proverbs, Wisdom Literature, all well and good. Well, some books have in it, historical narratives, certain songs. Certain parts are actually different because they built all this literary devices inside one book, and so you need to be sensitive and aware of it.

Now, if all of you are okay, we are going to move on now to the next part, which is where we're going to dive in. Okay, we're going to bite right into the first one, which is narrative history, narrative history. Now, you would think that a religious book, like the Bible, should be full of rules and regulations. In fact, a lot of religious books are like that, rules and regulations, or some philosophical thought that makes you think. But the Bible, interestingly, is full of history; is full of records of what men and women did in real time and space. And yet, it's not completely human history, apart from God. There is this curious mix whereby we see men and women living in real time and space, yet interacting with the God who made the heavens and the earth. So, we call it faith-based history. And so, you see that throughout the Bible, when men and women exercise faith in the Creator God, in the Redeemer God, they find that the national life, or the individual life, get elevated to a new plane. But when they reject God in unbelief, then that part of history begins to decline into darkness, and sin. So that is the kind of history we're talking about in the Bible. Why? Why is it that so much of the Bible is history? Because the Bible wants to communicate to you and I, that God is not only real, but God works in real time and space in the lives of men and women in the past. In other words, this is not a myth. This is not a legend. This is not the concoction of a genius in his literary imagination. This is a down-to-earth record of men and women like us, who walk on this earth, who experience the reality of God in their life. And they chose to accept or reject Him and thus their story unfolded. And the Bible records that. To tell you how real God is and how much He wants to be a part of your life today. So that is why there is historical narrative.

### **Learning from historical narrative**

So, think about that for a moment. Have you been reading and studying the Bible thinking that it concerns men in the past and who cares! Or have you been reading the Bible thinking, "Hey, you know, this man may have lived in the past. But God recorded their stories to tell me something more than just how they live. They tell me how God wants me to live today." You see, when you understand the purpose and nature of historical narrative in the Bible, it then transforms your focus, and what you will look for when you read the story. Are you with me? So, if you think that just reading some stories, so that you could be inspired to your own achievements or your own goals, then you may be going down the wrong path. Because this is not just about human history, apart from God. This is about human history linked to God, and what faith in God means, what unbelief in Him will result.

So, look with me in First Corinthians 15, First Corinthians 15. And you will see that Paul said this about the resurrection in First Corinthians 15. Let me read it to you, as you turn to that passage and see for yourself the context. Paul said that "If Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins, and your faith is worthless." But Christ did get up from the dead. In other words, is, if the historical narrative of the Old and New Testament are just myths and legends, then we are just fooling ourselves. We should just close shop and go ahead and enjoy ourselves on Sunday morning; sleep in, play golf, queue up for your McDonald's, do whatever you want. Don't bother to come, because if it is just an idea, there's plenty of other ideas out there. If it's just a philosophy, there's enough in this world to fill your minds with those dreams.

But what Paul is saying is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is locked into human history in real time and space. It is not a myth, is not a legend. It's real. He walked on earth, He was raised from the grave; is not our imagination. Neither is it our hallucination. It happened. And because it happened, that's why we know we have the HOPE of eternal life. If not for the reality of this historical narrative, he said then your faith is worthless. So, I want you to understand that when the Bible is filled with this historical narrative, it is locking our faith and our experience of it in time and space, to let us know that it is real; that God worked in the past, and therefore He wants to work in your life today - if you exercise the same faith. The same is true for everything else you read in the Bible. From crossing the Red Sea, to the exile in Babylon. It's not a makeup history. It is what actually happened.

### **Principle 1: Reflect on the reality of historical events**

So, when you begin to read through the Bible and narrative in this way, you will then begin to think and interpret along the lines of the difficulties the men and women would face when they come to the edge of the sea. You will be thinking about the physical realities, or what it means to have to get an entire nation of 600,000 men (not including women and children) across in time for the Egyptian chariots not to catch up with them. And so, in this kind of time-pressure, in this kind of reality, you wouldn't in a swift say, "Oh, just trust in God." You see, that's how we simplify and we cheapen our faith today. We walk away thinking that, "Oh, just trust in God, everything will be okay." Like a wand, you know? So, you might as well read Harry Potter because I think that's more entertaining. Right? Because all you do is Whoosh. Done. Right? Or you just watch some other martial art movie or just watch - what's the latest? Marvel? Marvel Comics, right? I don't know. What's the latest one coming up? I think is the - what you call it huh - Infinity War! Yeah. So just find your stones and you solve the problems of the world. Why read the Bible? If that is true? You see what I'm trying to say is that the stories in the Bible is not Marvel comics, is not Star Wars. Okay? It's not - what's the other one? Superman-Batman deal. Okay? It's real. Problems are not solved with a simple formula. Man sweated under the sun, feared for their lives, trembled for their children, went through all the agony, and then they experienced God's salvation. If that's true for them, that's true for you and me. You understand how it works? Historical narrative?

And so, with this kind of understanding in mind, how do we study historical narrative? This genre of the Bible? Number one, look with me. Reflect on the reality of this events. Now, just now I was trying to bring you to the reality of these events, if you don't realize. I was trying to talk to you about the resurrection. I was trying to talk to you about the Red Sea. I was trying to contrast it with superheroes that you watch in

movie, to tell you, "Hey, we live in a world that is so filled with virtual reality." Because we live, honestly, our children grow up in a game world. Right? And they think, that's the real world. Sad to say, right?

In fact, I read in the news that in China, they are so into the game world that they have to have therapy, to bring them out of it, so that they come out to the real world. So, all kinds of things are happening. And we sometimes lose track and lose sense. And we think that everything is a dream, anything miraculous, or supernatural is like what I watched in the movie. So, what's my point? The Bible is not a movie. Okay? You can't interpret the Bible with your impressions and understanding based on what is in the movies. So, what do you do? You need to sit down and think how am I going through real life? If the Bible says that there is a sea, there is a sea, there is water. What does it mean? It means that if I were to fall into it, like any sea I swim in today, and I don't have help, I drown, I die. Right? It's not a cartoon. It's not like Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse. After I drown, get bloated, come up, push, wake up, carry on. That's cartoon. Get the picture? Reflect on the reality. These are the things that people went through.

### **Not using the benefit of hindsight**

Think about it. On the Resurrection morning when Mary, the mother of Jesus and the other women - they made their way to the tomb. They weren't trotting along as though, "Hey! Let's go watch that resurrection! Is coming now, you know? Nobody dies because Jesus-" they didn't know that.

You know, if you think that way, you're not reflecting on the reality. They were trudging to the tomb because they thought all hope was lost. That was how they felt. They felt that there is there's no life beyond the grave. It totally shocked them that the Gospel of Matthew says that they trembled, the Gospel of Mark said that they had fear in their hearts, because they don't know what to make of it. That is the reality. They were not anticipating the resurrection; they were full of misery. So, when you can reflect on this reality, then think about the times when you, yourself are full of misery; when you think that all is death, darkness, and gloom; when you think that all you have at the end of the road is a tomb. When you feel that there is a big stone rolled over the grave, and you cannot go in. Then think for the next moment reflecting on reality. What happened when they arrived, and they saw the stone rolled away? And the man said, "Jesus is not here. He is risen." I think at that moment, those women - if they know about virtual reality - they will be like, "Is anyone playing a trick on me? Anyone using any animation to try to con me?" But they didn't have all that technology then. And they were in a daze. They couldn't believe it.

Think about what happened when God worked in your life and you, yourself couldn't believe it. Think about what happened when the power of Jesus' resurrection operates in your life - freeing you from sin; the fear of God that struck your soul; the joy that fills your heart - that there can be a life beyond death, beyond sin, beyond the grave. This is what we mean by interpreting the historical narrative - by reflecting on the reality of this event. So, this is just an example of the Red Sea. I mentioned an example of the resurrection. There are many others like Daniel in the lion's den. You know today because of artwork, cartoon and all, usually you'll see Daniel smiling at the lion and the lion looking really silly, right? Or you think of a story of Shadrach, Abednego being bound in the fire, you know, then you might just think like, "Oh, no big deal." But think, reflect on the reality. If you are going to be thrown into the fire, how would you have felt? And these three young men actually had no assurance from God that He will save them,

right? So, think through these thoughts carefully as you read those passages. Many other stories in the Bible that you can think about - Joshua in his conquest of Jericho, etc.

## **Principle 2: Not everything recorded in history should be recognized as historical**

Now, two. Second, let's look at the second principle in interpreting historical narrative. Recognize that not everything recorded in a history should be understood as historical. This is like a total contradiction, right? Just now I was trying to tell you: Think about the reality of these events and so on, so forth, but you see, follow me carefully. Even in real life, you and I tell make-belief stories, don't we, right? In fact, we have an industry that writes fairy tales, make-belief stories (Aesop fables etc.) to teach truth. So now these stories are not real. Follow me carefully. But the fact that we do tell stories are real. Are you with me? So, you draw this principle to the Bible, in the story, in the historical narrative.

The stories told are not real; some of them, they are make-believe. But the fact that such a story was told by such a man - at this time, is real. And so, it is still accurate and true. What do I mean? Before you guys lost, get drifted off and go to sleep, turn with me to Second Samuel Chapter 12. Okay, 2 Samuel 12. Now you really got to turn to the Bible or else you will really fall asleep, or drift off and you won't be able to follow. Second Samuel chapter 12.

Now, this is [an] incident, an incident that happened after David committed adultery with Bathsheba and has her husband killed. Okay? So that story is real. So, you can see in the reality of that story, how wicked the human heart is - that even a man who is "a man after God's own heart" (i.e. King David) can, in a moment of folly, commit grievous sin. Again, in time and space, in our decision to believe or reject God, we see a real man who, even though he walked with God, chose to reject God in unbelief - in a moment of lust that lead to adultery, and murder. And after that, we read that the Lord, in verse one, send Nathan to David. So, Nathan, the prophet came, this part is real. And he came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a city, the one rich and the other poor." So, Nathan told a story in this story. Are you following? So, you have a historical narrative where someone real - living flesh - called Nathan, went to another man, real guy called David, and that he told a story. The rich man had very many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought, and he brought it up and it grew with him, and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now, there came a traveler to the rich man, he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him. But he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who came to him. Notice this close inverted quotation mark, verse five: "Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man." Why? Because David thought that that man was real. Are you following the historical narrative here? Okay, so David, the real guy here thought that this guy in the story was so horrible was real. He was greatly kindled against the man and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb four-fold because he did this thing, and he had no pity."

Verse seven. Nathan, the real guy in this story, said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord: The Lord God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel and delivered you out of the hands of Saul and I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms. And give you the house of Israel and

Judah. If this were too little, I will add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord to do what is evil in His sight?" So, how do we know that the story told by Nathan is not real? About the rich man and the poor man. How do you know? When David said, you know, "Assuredly the man who did this must die." How did Nathan reply? "Yes Sir, let's go arrest him." No, all right. If he said that, then probably this is real. "Let's go catch that horrible, wicked, rich guy who oppress the poor." But instead, Nathan turned around, looked at David and say "You are that man!" In other words, this is a make-belief story to draw David out to see that what he has done is wicked and wrong. Are you with me?

Now, here's the problem. If you don't read a story in its context, and figure all this out, what if you preach/teach or believe that that story within the story is real? E.g. "Do you know that God hates rich people who oppress the poor? You must never take another person's lamb." And you build a whole theology out of it. And then somebody points out, "You know what? That's a make-belief story within the real story." Wow, very *malu* (embarrassing) and *pai-seh* (ashamed), right? What worse is this: You misinterpreted the Bible. So, my friends, remember this principle: Recognize that not everything recorded in a history should be understood as historical, because the real men and women in the Bible do tell stories. Okay? They do explain certain truths that way. And it's not the real story. Okay. It's meant for an intention.

### **Principle 3: Not everything in a history or narrative should be emulated or affirmed**

Now, number three, remember that not everything in a history or narrative should be emulated or affirmed. Turn with me now in Matthew, chapter 14. Matthew chapter 14. Now just because something is inspired of God, and something is recorded in the Bible, it only means that that actually happened as it is described. In Matthew chapter 14, we read this words, starting with verse six. Verse six of Matthew chapter 14:

*but when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias, danced before the company and pleased Herod. So that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." And the king was sorry, because of his oath and the guests, he commanded it to be given. He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl and she brought it to her mother.*

Now, did this really happen? Did this really happen? Historical narrative? What do you think? Yes, it really happen. Now. Was it good or bad? Are they good or bad? It was bad. Right? So, this is not an example to emulate. You can't point and say "This, right there in the Bible. Why can't I go and dance? Why can't I go and dance in such a way to please someone to get my way? Why can't I ask for somebody's head on a platter? Why not?" Wow. Because that is the wrong interpretation of the Bible. Right? Not everything in the historical narrative is to be emulated or affirmed. And this extends to many other stories in the Scripture, in which although God didn't make a command and say, "This is wicked, this is wrong, put a stop to it." You need to read it for yourself. Remember? One of the principles is remember the character of God: He is righteous. He is holy. In Him is light; there's no darkness at all. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. So, everything that is wicked and wrong, that He forbids in the Scripture is not to be



emulated, affirmed, even if it is recorded in one of the stories. So do keep this in mind so that you do not draw the wrong example.

In fact, when I was in China, [it] is often quoted that Abraham lied to preserve his life. And therefore, it's okay for Christians to lie to preserve their lives because they are really imprisoned, arrested and some of them could be killed. So, they feel that it is okay. So, they quoted from a historical narrative and say that it's okay to lie because the father of faith lied and they really believe it. Is that accurate? Is that true? Is that to be affirmed? Is that to be emulated?

They gotta ask, "Does it conflict with the character of God? Does it contradict the commands of God?" So, you'll see a historical narrative in the Scripture only record what actually happened. It does not always tell us whether a story is within a story; you got to look out for yourself. That's why observe. It does not tell us whether what was recorded is something God is pleased or disagreed with. So, you got to interpret correctly. So, you can't just build your understanding and teachings on a superficial reading of a historical narrative. So, this brings me to the next point D,

#### **Principle 4: Not everything in history or narrative is explained**

Not everything in a history or narrative is explained. Sometimes we are not told by the text if a particular event is good, or bad. Okay, we are expected to judge for ourselves the basis of what we know about God, and what is taught elsewhere in Scripture. So, turn with me now to Judges chapter 14. Now, many people struggle with this character in the Bible; his name is Samson. In fact, you will read that Samson is a very strong man. He seems to be the Jewish version of the Greek Hercules. Because there seems to be some parallel. His distinguishing mark is his strength. But what is more perplexing and confusing is that the scripture often described, uniquely for this man, Samson, that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and then he exhibits those feats of remarkable physical strength. So, it seems that the scripture ties his physical powers to his spiritual enablement. Now, for most people, when you have that kind of ability attached to a link to the Spirit of the Living God, you would think that he must be a messenger of God, he must be a hero of the faith, he must be doing right! But what do we read here in Judges 14:5-6? Now let's read that and you'll see:

*Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah. And they came to the vineyards of Timnah, and behold, a young lion came toward him roaring, then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him. And although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.*

Look down a couple of verses to verse eight. And you read here:

*After some days, he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion and honey, he scraped it out with his hands and went on eating as he went, he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate, but he did not tell them that he has scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion.*

Now you're going to read a lot of such stories where Samson is concerned, and this has caused many Christians, when they read it, to be perplexed. So, tell me. Is Samson good guy, bad guy? Follow, don't follow? What should I do? Because the next thing you know, he tied, you know, the foxes with fire brands and set (people's homes on) vineyards on fire, then he carried up people's gates, you know, because he had great strength. He married, he tried to marry you know, a wife of the Philistines the enemy, and it seems like it's okay! And then he began to consort with that Delilah, which is like in the Bible, the epitome of adulterous relationship, and it seems to be okay. So, what is really going on? The Bible don't seem to say Samson, bad boy! Some of you may be looking for that. Samsung, no, no, stop doing that. You know, there seems to be no markers on him. So, what are we going to do?

Well, we know from other passages in the Bible, that his touching of the lion carcass violated his Nazirite vow. Okay, his Nazirite vow. In other words, as a Nazirite from birth, if you read his story, and then compare it with the Mosaic Law, comparing Scripture with Scripture, remember, you need to look at canon which means comparing all of Scripture, that Samson's choices were indicative of his increasing separation from God. He was going downhill. You see a man of poor character who consistently made poor choices. Although he was anointed and filled by the Holy Spirit, to perform feats of physical powers, he did some good. But at the end of the day, his choices lead to his own ruin and destruction. So, the Bible is warning us here: Don't follow his example. How's it warning us? He's letting you - showing you how he constantly make poor choices. And he was finally captured, had his eyes gouged out and then he became a slave. Is that how you want to have your life serving God - ending? If not, don't follow this example. Where is it stated? Nowhere. But how do you know? If you put together the character of God, how he violated the Nazirite vow, how he constantly went against his parents, then you would see that he was making poor choices.

### **Character and commandments of God**

So, you need to understand that God does not explain everything in a history or narrative. But He wants you and I to take His character that He has revealed, His commandments that he has given and read those narrative in that light. Regardless of whether it's Abraham, Jacob, Samson, David - just because a person has high office, just because a person has great powers - does not make what he does always right. Are you with me? That's why you got to interpret narrative history carefully. Okay. Everything has to be assessed, evaluated on the basis of who God is, and what He wants done; not on the basis of how great this man is, how powerful he is, and what great deeds he has performed. That is man's way of evaluating man's life. God wants us to evaluate every person's life in the light of His holy character.

### **Principle 5: All histories and narratives are incomplete, yet fully reliable**

[Point] E. All histories and narratives are incomplete, yet fully reliable. Now, this is a part that you and I wish, if you have thought about it, it's not so - I tell you why. Do you realize that in the Bible in the book of Genesis, it only gave us three chapters on creation and the Garden of Eden? I don't know about you. Wouldn't you want to know more about what happened then? How Adam and Eve lived? The animals? The environment? What are those rivers? Maybe you don't? Fine. Well, maybe you want to know what

happened before the flood? Who are those giants? What are those great deeds of valor? Or if you would back up a bit to Genesis five, maybe you want to know how can these people live so long?

So, when did they have children? Is pregnancy still nine months? Or is it nine years? You know, you have no clue. Of course, the women are thinking now, "Nine years of pregnancy!" (*Ni Zi Ji Qu Shen Ba!* You, go give birth yourself!) You'll give up yourself right? You understand what I'm trying to say here? There are hints of a very different world in the Bible. Yet you're given very little information about it. And that is the old world before the flood.

And then after the flood, what was the Tower of Babel? What they trying to build? What they try to do? What they want to see? What's wrong? How can they all speak one language? Wow, that's quite amazing. Then after they separated, all these questions will come to mind. And even if you narrow it down, narrow it right down to this a nation of Israel, there are so many things revealed in the Bible that you wish to know more about. E.g. Solomon! Wow, he made the gold so plentiful in his land that the silver is like nothing. Wow, that is quite a world I want to know what it's like when silver is nothing and gold is plentiful. What a life! Right? I want to see his throne; I want to see his chariots; I want to see his army. Because these are the things I see in movies, right? And this is real. I want to hear his wisdom, but so little about Solomon. In fact, you read more about how he later departed from God. You know, you read - good good good good good good good – sorry all bad already. Men, like in the heart very sad, you know? It's like, "Can I have more good or not?" But don't have. No details given. So, this goes on and on and on and on.

And if you're curious about the life of Jesus in the Gospel, you would like, "How is he like [as] a child? Did he have to queue up for primary school ah? The parents had to shift house. Is it why they went to Egypt and come back to Galilee? Yeah, because down there got "Phase One" already." Is it like that? Or is it something else? Also, you don't know what happened in his childhood. It's like you're tearing your hair trying to raise your child. Maybe give more examples so I can tell my child be like Jesus - but now Jesus have grown up. Then how about a teenager? Teenage years, so precious, right? They always say "Teenagers rebel. Rebel." But my child never rebel. So how not normal ah? So Jesus.

Jesus never rebelled. But then Jesus tell the parents, "Do you not know I need to be in My Father's house?" Oh wa... Then if I bring my child to church, you never come back with me from church and he told me this – how I say?

So, I want to know more. Yet, I'm not told more. You know why? Because the historical narrative in the Bible is not meant to satisfy our curiosity. Are you with me? It's not meant to answer every one of your questions. So, when you study the Bible and historical narrative, you need to accept the fact like Moses said, "The things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever (in Deuteronomy, chapter 29) but the things that are hidden, the secrets of the law, remains with Him." In other words, there are things that He didn't choose to reveal to us. Why? Because God in His wisdom decided you and I don't need to know. He knows we are curious. He wants to know. Maybe you want to know about the T-Rex, or the dinosaurs? You know, we seem to have a bit of description in Job but not too conclusive. So where did they live? How did they walk? You know what actually happened? You know, kids are so curious about dinosaur. If only I can point to one dinosaur, wah, he will be a believer. Because of dinosaurs?! But never mind. Curious, right? Curious, but you'll see my friends, historical narrative is not written to satisfy our curiosity; is written to reveal, progressively reveal God's plan of redemption. So, that's why every story in the Bible is written, to unfold this big story of how Jesus finally came. And if you notice with me, after the

story of Jesus has been completed, there are very, very few stories left. After that, all teachings! Because this is the one big story we need to focus on.

And you only have one book left that tells you what will happen in the future. And up till now, the book of Revelation remains a mystery to everyone, what exactly is going to happen? Why? Because all the stories in the Bible are meant to point to Jesus. So, that is God's purpose. You know, every author has a right to tell you what he wants to tell you and what he doesn't want tell you, right? That's a reality. So, he write from his point of view - is the author's intent. And so, you need to realize that not all histories and narratives are complete. They don't tell a complete story, suddenly "Poof!" Come out already. But they are fully reliable. So, you don't need to fear that the narrator suddenly maybe fell asleep or got tired and then didn't tell you the last part. If you - there's something you want to know and didn't know, you need to realize - purposely one! Okay, you don't need to know. I don't need to know. That's why it's not there! Okay? That's why the Bible is fully inspired; there is no error, okay? So, when you studied narrative, you need to understand that not all of it is complete history for our curiosity or benefit.

#### **Principle 6: History and narrative often illustrate but do not directly teach doctrine.**

Now, the next point, history and narrative often illustrate but do not directly teach doctrine. Okay, this is a thing that we need to understand. You try not to draw your major doctrines from the Bible. E.g. Turn with me to Matthew. Turn with me to Matthew and I show you an example. Matthew, chapter three, verse 13 to 17. This is a story of Jesus baptism in Matthew chapter three, verse 13 to 17. Now in Matthew chapter three, verse 13 to 17, we read the story of how Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him saying, "I need to be baptized by You and do You come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. Verse 16, and when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were open to Him. And He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, coming to rest on Him, Behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Now, you see, the mistake you can make here is to use this story to teach the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Right, because you see the three Persons' name, you see Jesus, you'll see the dove representing the Spirit of God. And you'll also see, or rather you'd read off the voice from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased." So, you feel what a neat package. All three that confirm God in three Persons proven. So, you go home feeling very happy, I proven it. What was the problem? The problem is this. Yes, the three Persons are named. How do you know that there are three Persons? How do you know that they are equally God? How do they know that they are equally worshiped as God? And how do you know how They coexist? But don't know. So, how? Don't teach doctrines out of narrative. That's how, why? Because to prove the Trinity is not based on a story. It's on the claims of Jesus to be God throughout the Gospels, proven by His resurrection, throughout the epistles, pointing him to Jesus as God, as well as other many other verses in the Bible in the New Testament, pointing out that the Holy Spirit is also God, possessing the same powers and status as the Father and the Son. That's why we have the doctrine of the Trinity. Not based on the story, but based on many verses in the Bible that teaches and reveal this to be true. Are you with me? So, what's

the point? The point is, no matter how move you are by a story, try not to teach doctrines out of it. Use it to illustrate doctrine, but don't base your doctrine on a story. Okay?

### **Principle 7: The meaning of a text is likely linked to what it says about God**

[Point] G. The meaning of a tax is likely linked to what it says about God. The meaning of the text is likely linked to what it says about God. Now turn with me now to First Samuel chapter 17. First Samuel chapter 17. Here is a famous story and with this story, I will close: The story of David and Goliath. The story of the David and Goliath. Now, when you read the story of David and Goliath, this story is often used to talk about how we take on our biggest foe, biggest enemy, right? David, this *katek* (short) guy, this short guy facing Goliath, this huge giant. So, then we begin to roll with it. Wow, we have the giant of that. We had the giant of broken friendship. We have the giant of unforgiveness. We have the giant of whatever else we face in our lives. So, we see giants all around. And so, I'm a David. I will take it on, because I have faced so-so. We begin to interpret a story in this way. But what does the Bible tells us? Let's look at verse 26. In chapter 17. Where is God mentioned or implied in this account? You see, the reality is this. When you read how David is reacting to the situation, David was on fire! He was convinced that what he is doing is in the name of the Lord; that this is not about him. This is not about his show of piety or spirituality. This is, you know, the name of God is at stake. It is being shamed, and he's standing out, standing up, going forward in order to confront a man who is not shaming Israel alone, but shaming the God who made the heavens and the earth; the God who is the Lord of Israel. And so, you'll see the Hero, or the Main Character of this story is not even David not to say Goliath. The real thing we should see in this story is how the glory of God is revealed. The power of God is demonstrated in a poor weak vessel like David, because His name was being shamed by a huge man who trusted in his own strength. That is the real battle. Are you with me?

And so that's why we have this last point: the meaning of the text is likely linked to what it says about God. So, when you read a historical narrative, try to find out what is it trying to teach me about God? What are you trying to stretch, tell me about the name of the Lord, about the glory of God, about (you know) the purposes of God. And when you have found God in that story, the message about God to you, then you can consider how it can be applied to your own life.

So, with this, I conclude my lesson to you about historical narrative, I hope you begin to see at least two things. Okay. Number one, genres affect interpretation, not just the content of what is written, but the way it is written. We have only Number 2, look at one genre, which is narrative. And I've explored with you how this narrative should be read and interpreted - as you observe, so that you can make right conclusions. Hopefully, with this help, you can read the historical narratives in your Bible with more meaning, with more clarity, and you can draw some good conclusions that helps you in your own pursuit of God.

Shall we give this time to the Lord now in prayer, and thank Him for what we have learned?

*Our Father in heaven, we thank you so much for what we have learned about historical narrative. It's easy to think that our faith is a matter of feelings or thought, that even the most pious among us may be tempted to think that we go forward in our own strength. But the records of all the stories in the Bible show us that men and women did great things for You because they trusted in You. The same way men and women fell away from You because they did not believe in You. We pray that as we study the historical narratives of the Bible, we will transfer the principles from their time and space into our own life today, so that our study of scriptures will enrich our faith and help us to believe in You and follow You in our day and age, to Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.*

All right, thank you, everyone. The class is over. But if you have questions, you can come forward. I'll be happy to answer them.