

Old Testament Narratives

- Principles for interpretation
 - Common Errors

Principles in Interpreting Narratives

An Old Testament narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine

An Old Testament narrative usually illustrates a doctrine or doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere

Principles in Interpreting Narratives

Narratives record what happened – not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. Therefore, not every narrative has an individual identifiable moral of the story

What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Frequently it is just the opposite.

Principles in Interpreting Narratives

We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We are expected to be able to judge that on the basis of what God has taught us directly and categorically elsewhere in the Scripture

Principles in Interpreting Narratives

All narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given. What does appear in the narrative is everything that the inspired author thought important for us to know.

Principles in Interpreting Narratives

Narratives are not written to answer all our theological questions. They have particular, specific limited purposes and deal with certain issues, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere, in other ways.

Principles in Interpreting Narratives

Narratives may teach either explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something without actually stating it).

Principles in Interpreting Narratives

In the final analysis, God is the hero of all biblical narratives

Common Errors in Interpretation

Allegorizing.

Instead of concentrating on the clear meaning, people relegate the text to merely reflecting another meaning beyond the text.

Common Errors in Interpretation

Decontextualizing.

Ignoring the full historical and literary context and taking the verse out of context (“A text out of context is a pretext for trouble”).

Common Errors in Interpretation

Selectivity.

Picking certain words and phrases to concentrate on.

Common Errors in Interpretation

False combination.

Taking unrelated parts of scripture and connecting them to make a point never intended.

Common Errors in Interpretation

Redefinition.

Changing the meaning to make it
easier to take

Common Errors in Interpretation

Extracanonical authority.

Using some sort of special external key to the scriptures to “unlock” the hidden meaning. Cults often do this. “No one knows the hour or the day...”

Common Errors in Interpretation

Moralizing.

Assuming that principles for living can be derived from all passages.

Common Errors in Interpretation

Personalizing.

Reading in such a way so that all parts apply directly to you.