



how to study

THE BIBLE

— old testament narrative —

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE: NARRATIVE

DESERT SPRINGS CHURCH

Charles Simeon (1759-1836), an English evangelical clergyman, is known in his teachings and writings for the principle that “the point of the text should be the point of the sermon.” By text, of course, he meant the Bible. We could equally say that, for all Christians, “the point of the text should be the point of application.” The point of the text should also be the point of discipleship, as we seek to encourage, warn, build up, and counsel others.

If the point of the text is the starting place for everything, then finding out the point of the text is of first importance. And since this is not subjective, with each person determining the text’s meaning in a different manner, there are rules and principles to follow. And there are various tools and techniques to help us in following the principles. That’s what this seminar is all about: the point of the text, and how to get there.

Here’s one more quote from Charles Simeon:

“My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there. I have a great jealousy on this head; never to speak more or less than I believe to be the mind of the Spirit in the passage I am expounding.”

GOALS OF THIS SEMINAR

- ◆ To identify what is unique about biblical narrative (we’ll limit this to Old Testament narrative; that is, we will view “gospel” as a different genre).
- ◆ To explain how Old Testament narrative prepares us for, and looks forward to, Christ (using the book of Joshua as an example).
- ◆ To recognize how one book of Old Testament narrative (Joshua) contributes to the whole Bible’s teaching on God’s redemptive plan for His people.
- ◆ To avoid missteps in applying Old Testament narrative devotionally, and correspondingly to employ principles that lead to healthy spiritual growth.

JOSHUA: PART OF “1 BOOK” OR “1 STORY”

0.1 “KINGDOM” AS UNIFYING THEME OF THE BIBLE

Vaughn Roberts, in his book *God’s Big Picture*, works off a quote from Graeme Goldsworthy to define the kingdom of God: “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing.”¹ Vaughn lists several stages, using the letter “P,” such as:

- ◆ Pattern for the Kingdom: Garden of Eden.
- ◆ Partial Kingdom (glimpses of the kingdom, God’s presence in the tabernacle/temple). A people for the King, and a place for the people.

0.2 TOPICS/THEMES

- ◆ Place: For the first time Israel as a nation has a *place*. As part of this the idea of “rest” is also a key topic in Joshua.
- ◆ God fulfilling promises to the fathers (Genesis).
- ◆ God’s presence (casts out fear, means we don’t operate out of our own strength)
- ◆ The need to “trust and obey.”

0.3 JOSHUA AS A PARALLEL TO THE BOOK OF ACTS

- ◆ Compare: Both are after a set of books (the first collection in each testament) and this set of books presents a foundational teaching. OT = law (God’s standards) and covenant. NT = grace in the substitutionary death of Christ. Second, both describe the struggle of God’s people establishing a “place” in the middle of pagan people groups.
- ◆ Contrast: OT “come and see” (optional), NT “go and tell” (not optional).

¹ Vaughn Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 21.

0.4 RELATION TO OTHER SECTIONS OF OT

JOSHUA	PSALMS
<p>This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Josh 1:8</p>	<p>but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.</p> <p>...</p> <p>In all that he does, he prospers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ps 1:2-3</p>

DEUTERONOMY	JOSHUA
<p>... if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, (14) and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Deut 28:13-14</p>	<p>... being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Josh 1:7</p>

LESSON 1

HOW DOES BIBLICAL NARRATIVE WORK?

Ronald Giese

1.1 DON'T START WITH ANSWERS, START WITH QUESTIONS

... we must relentlessly query the text. ... Asking questions is the key to understanding.

...

Insight or understanding is the product of intensive, headache-producing meditation on two or three propositions and how they fit together. This kind of reflection and rumination is provoked by asking questions of the text. And you cannot do it if you hurry. Therefore, we must resist the deceptive urge to carve notches in our bibliographic gun. Take two hours to ask ten questions of Galatians 2:20, and you will gain one hundred times the insight you would have attained by quickly reading thirty pages of the New Testament or any other book. Query. Ponder. Chew.²

1.2 HOW DOES JOSHUA FIT INTO THE WHOLE BIBLE?

Many of us have read the Bible as if it were merely a mosaic of little bits— theological bits, moral bits, historical-critical bits, sermon bits, devotional bits. But when we read the Bible in such a fragmented way, we ignore its divine author's intention to shape our lives through its story ... If we allow the Bible to become fragmented, it is in danger of being absorbed into whatever *other* story is shaping our culture, and it will thus cease to shape our lives as it should ... Hence the unity of Scripture is no minor matter: a fragmented Bible may actually produce theological orthodox, morally upright, warmly pious idol worshippers!³

² John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), pp. 93-94.

³ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 12.

1.3 WHAT IS ONE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE?

Before we talk about asking questions of narrative, let's get a brief introduction to what narrative is. Below is a text you can memorize, along with gestures.

There are 3 (GESTURE) main types of books on the shelf (GESTURE) called the OT: Prose, Poetry, and Prophecy.

The first kind of book is called Prose.

[Definition:]	Three other names for this are "narrative," reading a "story" (GESTURE), and "drama" (GESTURE), since prose has characters and plot.
[Examples:]	Three examples of prose are: Genesis, Samuel-Kings, and Ruth.
[Key:]	The key to understanding prose is looking (GESTURE) for emphasis (GESTURE). This is often found by reading between the lines (GESTURE).

What we learn from this introduction to narrative:

- ◆ We say “Samuel-Kings” since four books in our Bible—1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings—were originally one book, or scroll, in ancient times. So part of Bible study is understanding breaks and continuations between books of the Bible (just like we do on a verse or paragraph or chapter level).
- ◆ By “reading between the lines” we don’t mean something that is subjective. Authors give us clues as to what they are teaching, without coming right out and saying, “Here’s the point I’m making.” In other words, narrative teaches *indirectly* instead of directly.

1.4 WHAT MODE OF NARRATION IS THIS?

A key difference between narrative and drama (a play or movie) is that narrative has a narrator. We see the story through *his* eyes.

Read a story in “3D”!! Meaning pay attention to 3 modes of narration:⁴

MODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
DIRECT	A simple reporting of events, thus fast-paced, at first glance “just the facts.”	... And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. Gen 12:8-9 ESV
DRAMATIC	An author quotes speech, as if a scene from a play/drama. Thus we’ll see double quote marks. This slows the pace down.	[Judah spoke to him, saying] “I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.” Gen 43:9 ESV
DESCRIPTION / COMMENTARY	An author elaborates on some details of the setting or character. Think of a parentheses: that is, parenthetical remarks to give some background information. Or, the author inserts his own opinion or gives an explanation or “judgment call” on something.	Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord. Gen 13:13 ESV Another example would be comments on whether a certain king is good or bad.

⁴ Three or four modes of narration are mentioned by many authors. Here’s one example if you’d like to read more about this: Leland Ryken in his *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 43.

1.5 SAMPLE TEXT: JOSH 15:63

The third mode of narration above, the “description” or “commentary” mode, is a kind of BTW (“by the way”). When we think of “Oh, and by the way,” we think the information to follow is minor. On the contrary, in biblical narrative BTW’s often have important information to share. And information this is linked to similar pieces of information before or after, in that same book and within the whole Bible.

But the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the people of Judah could not drive out, so the Jebusites dwell with the people of Judah at Jerusalem to this day.

Josh 15:63

This is a good example of an “out of sequence” piece of information.

What is the significance?

This sets us up for the next important mention of the Jebusites, which is 2 Sam 5. This chapter, 2 Sam 5, is the first of what some call the most important 3 chapters in the book of 2 Samuel: chapters 5, 6, and 7.

This “trinity” of chapters starts with David taking the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites. And the trinity of chapters reaches its climax in the last chapter, 2 Sam 7, in which God makes His covenant with David and David’s “house” (2 Sam 7:8-17).

2 Samuel 5:2 has the LORD saying to David:

“You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.”

2 Sam 5:2

“Shepherd” is the common Hebrew word *ro’eh*, and “prince” is the less common Hebrew *nagid*.

“Shepherd”: This is the first time that a human being is called a “shepherd” as figurative sense, i.e., a king.

1.7 SAMPLE PHRASE: “THE SERVANT OF THE LORD”

The book of Joshua starts with the title Moses has, that of “the servant of the LORD”:

After the death of Moses **the servant of the LORD**, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, (2) “Moses my servant is dead ...”

Josh 1:1-2a

Verses about “the servant of the LORD”:

- ◆ “So Moses the **servant of the Lord** died there in the land of Moab ...”

Deut 34:5

- ◆ “Remember the word that Moses **the servant of the Lord** commanded you, saying, ‘The Lord your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.’”

Josh 1:13

14 times Moses is called “the servant of the LORD” in the book of Joshua.

Who are the others in the Bible that are called “the servant of the LORD”? Remember to use online searches for not only this exact phrase, but variants of it.

What are some variants?

1.8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Free Online Resources

BIBLE

ESV Study Bible (online version is free with the purchase of a hardcopy ESVSB)
www.esvbible.org

Blue Letter Bible (maybe the best single website for Bible study; start with the “Help” click choice at the top to view tutorials on how to use the site)
www.blueletterbible.org

Bible Gateway (also excellent for advanced searches of the Bible)
www.biblegateway.com/keyword

Bible Study Tools (maybe the best place to compare translations)
www.biblestudytools.com/compare-translations/

COMMENTARY

Blue Letter Bible (commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and other study tools)
www.blueletterbible.org

Bible.org (commentary, sermons, and introductions for each book of the Bible)
www.bible.org/passage

Bible Study Tools (lots of classic commentaries and some good Bible dictionaries)
www.biblestudytools.com/library

Dr. Constable’s Expository Notes
www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm

Beginning Books on Studying the Bible in General

Fee, Gordon D.; and Stuart, Douglas.

2003 *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

This is a beginner-level introduction (about 280 pages) to the various genres of the Bible. It has chapters on New Testament epistles, parables, Old Testament narrative, gospels, psalms, wisdom literature, the prophets, and more.

Duvall, J. Scott; and Hays, J. Daniel.

2005 *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

If the Fee/Stuart book above is the beginner-level, this is the intermediate. A number of Christian college see this as a textbook for their basic “How to Study the Bible” course. At around 450 pages, like Fee/Stuart this has a chapter on Old Testament narrative, but it is more detailed. This book also has more general information on Bible study than Fee/Stuart: things like how to read a book on the level of sentences versus paragraphs versus discourse, how to do word studies, the role of the Holy Spirit, etc.

Adler, Mortimer J.

1972 *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*. New York: Simon and Schuster (originally published in 1940).

This is not written from a Christian point of view but rather was intended (and used for decades) as a textbook on reading a book—any book. There are plenty (sometimes you’ll feel like too many) rules and principles here to read about. This is a thick book with a lot of information, but it’s a classic and it deserves the name—great advice scattered throughout this work for reading any book.

Books on the Storyline of the Bible

Roberts, Vaughn.

2002 *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

It has been said that the Bible is both “stories” and a “Story,” or “many stories” and “One Story” at the same time, or “many books” and “one Book.” This book is a great introduction (a paperback of only around 150 pages) to the “One Story” or “One Book” part of that equation. “Many people read the Bible as if it were ... a collection of independent books that can each be read without reference to the others” (p. 19).

Bartholomew, Craig G.; and Goheen, Michael W.

2004 *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

A book with similar goals to Vaughn’s book above, this is longer (about 230 pages). If Vaughn’s book is on the beginner’s level, this is on the intermediate, with, for instance, more interaction with bibliography, and several maps to help understand the history of Israel. The book was actually written as a textbook for first-year university students (at a Christian university).

Books on the Genre of Biblical Narrative

Long, V. Phillips.

1994 *The Art of Biblical History*. Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Though a shorter paperback (around 230 pages) this is definitely on more of a college level--plenty of footnotes and interaction with scholarship. As the word “history” indicates, this has a little more of a focus on the Bible as history, and looking at history writing (or historiography) than a look at narrative (stories and how they work). For instance, Long answers questions like “Is the Bible a history book?” and “Is historicity important for the Bible?”, and he discusses topics like differences between history and fiction, and the value of various literary analysis approaches to the Bible.

LESSON 2

HOW CAN WE SEE CHRIST FROM THE BOOK OF JOSHUA?

Trent Hunter

2.1 ARE WE JUST SEEING THINGS?

Luke 24: 25-27

1 Peter 1:10-12

Matthew 5:17

2 Corinthians 1:20

Hebrews 1:1-3

2.2 CLEARING THE FOG OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

- Three common approaches to seeing Christ in the Old Testament
 - Seeing Christ here and there
 - Seeing Christ on every page
 - Seeing Christ from every page

- Three horizons for seeing Christ from anywhere in Scripture
 - The immediate horizon
 - The unfolding horizon
 - The whole-Bible horizon

- Three questions for seeing Christ from Old Testament narrative
 - How does this story anticipate the kind of salvation Christ will bring?
 - How does this story anticipate the kind of people Christ will save?
 - How does this story anticipate the kind of savior Christ will be?

2.4 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Introduction to the Bible's books and parts in light of Christ

Alexander, T. Desmond

1998 *The Servant King: The Bible's portrait of the Messiah*. Vancouver: Regent Publishing.

This is a nice short book to take you across the whole Bible, showing how the promise of a savior (Messiah) in Genesis 3:15 is worked out across the Bible's various stages.

Dever, Mark

2006 *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made*. Wheaton: Crossway.

Mark Dever is a pastor and this is a book of sermons he preached across several years—one sermon per book of the Bible.

Goldsworthy, Graeme

1991 *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.

Goldsworthy is a gold-standard for Bible college students in doing two things: explaining how the Bible centers in Christ, and walking through the Bible step by step. It's not too short, and it's not too long. It's the more readable introduction to the Bible for Christians from high school up.

Schreiner, Tom

2013 *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

Schreiner is famous for his lucid, clear, and comprehensive writing. This is a long book but should be thought of as a reference. He works, for the most part, book-by-book across the Bible showing how each book is structured and contributes to the Bible's overarching theme of God's glory in salvation through the savior king, Jesus Christ.

Smith, Colin

2004 *Unlocking the Bible Story Study Guide Volumes 1-4*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

Smith writes for a popular level. Each volume comprised of around twenty chapters, each unpacking a different theme in Scripture. Each theme is unpacked in the context of a specific moment in biblical history, and each chapter spends a page or so showing how that theme culminates in Christ.

Wellum, Stephen

2007 “Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants,” in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*. Nashville: B&H Academic.

This is the best chapter-length explanation of how the Bible fits together that I have read and I recommend this frequently. Wellum deals specifically with the Bible's covenantal structure showing how the Bible's salvation plan progressively unfolds and culminates in Christ. Baptism, of course, is the sign of the new covenant in Christ. Wellum shows us what's “new” about the “new covenant.”

For daily Bible reading

D.A. Carson

2006 *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God's Word, Volume 1 and 2*. Wheaton: Crossway.

Carson is just solid. Each of these two volumes is based on a year-long Bible reading plan. Between both volumes Carson manages to provide commentary on pretty much the entire Bible. If you don't use this as a help when reading through the Bible, use it as a reference for understanding the Bible as questions arise. Carson is always showing how the parts relate to the whole.

In depth

Alexander, T. Desmond

2008 *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Kregel.

Alexander follows several of the Bible's themes across Scripture. It will appeal to the person with measure of theological curiosity, as with the rest of the books in this category, and will help inform some good instincts for how to read the Bible with the whole Bible in mind.

Alexander, T. Desmond

2012 *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

This is Alexander's walk through the Pentateuch. As it relates to Joshua, this is the background to Joshua. Joshua picks up where the Pentateuch leaves off.

Dempster, Stephen

2003 *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.

This is a serious, somewhat dense, but not hard to understand walk through the Hebrew Old Testament. Read it once through, mark it up, and then use it as a reference. This is a great book for those who plan to teach from the Old Testament.

Dumbrell, William

2002 *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

An excellent survey of the Old Testament, unfolding its contents in a theologically thoughtful and clear fashion. This is another excellent resource for those who would teach from the Old Testament.

House, Paul

1998 *Old Testament Theology*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.

House works book by book, and within each book he works section by section. So, this serves as a good go-to for an introduction to a specific book, but it's not as accessible as some of the titles above. For each book he provides what he calls, "Canonical synthesis," which is his way of showing how the material in that book informs our reading of the whole Bible.

Wellum, Stephen and Gentry, Peter

2012 *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants.*
Wheaton: Crossway.

This volume is huge and I put here mostly as a way of referencing an abridged version of this book that will come out within the next 12 months. Wellum and Gentry show how covenant as the backbone of the storyline, and explain how the Bible's various covenants progressively unfold God's plan toward it's culmination in Christ.

Commentaries on Joshua

Davis, Ralph

2006 *Joshua: No Falling Words.* Scotland: Christian Focus.

A solid, thorough, and accessible commentary on Joshua by a reliable Old Testament scholar.

Ellsworth, Roger

2008 *Opening Up: Joshua.* England: DayOne Publications.

A short and simple resource for leading a Bible Study or supplementing your own read through Joshua. Ellsworth provides questions for reflection through each section of the book.

Jackman, David

2014 *Joshua: People of God's Purpose.* Wheaton: Crossway.

David Jackman is famous for his careful exposition and his grasp of the Bible's structure. This book will read like something between a commentary and a sermon manuscript. If there was one book to buy on Joshua, though it's at the end of this list, it would be this one.

LESSON 3

HOW DO WE READ JOSHUA PERSONALLY AND DEVOTIONALLY?

Ryan Kelly

3.1 GETTING ALL THE WAY AROUND THE BLOCK

Dave Helm's Chart⁵



⁵ David Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God's Word Today* (Crossway, 2014).

3.2 PRINCIPLES FOR PROPER APPLICATION OF SCRIPTURE

- Right application must build upon right interpretation
- Something can be biblically true but not in a given passage

3.3 COMMON MISSTEPS IN BIBLE READING

- The Telephone Book Approach (flip, point, read)
- The 8 Ball Approach (for decision making, problem solving, etc.)
- The Apple-a-Day Approach (just doing it is all the matters)
- The Hobby Horse Approach (which can be theological, moral, or societal)
- The Trivial Pursuit Approach (discovering new tidbits)
- The *Lectio Divina* Approach (reading until “something speaks to me”)
- The “Where’s Waldo (Jesus)?” Approach (a game to “find Jesus on every page”)
- The Homebody Approach (stick with the safe, familiar, favorite parts)
- The Proverbial Approach (on the hunt for good sayings or new favorite verses)
- The Word-Study Approach (discovering rich, maybe related, words in the passage)
- The “About the Bible” Approach (reading good material on God, the Bible, doctrine, or the Christian Life, but not the Bible)

3.4 GOALS OF BIBLE READING

- To know God
- To commune with God; to hear him speak afresh
- To praise God
- To stand in awe of his grand plan
- To find true, spiritual comfort
- To “get our souls happy in God” (George Mueller)
- To renew our minds; to reform our thinking/worldview
- To grow in godliness
- To help us “walk with Him” throughout the day

3.5 TOOLS FOR APPLICATION IN BIBLE READING

- Prayer – before, during, and after reading
- Dialogue
- Play preacher
- Know your sins
- Journaling
- Take it with you (write out one verse out and return to it throughout the day)
Tell someone later

- Read with others, especially family
- Meditation and/or memorization (i.e., slow down!)
- Questions

3.6 QUESTIONS TO ASK TOWARDS APPLICATION

- What does the passage teach me about God?
- What does the passage teach me about his plan?
- What does the passage teach me about myself?
- How does it show me my sin/need?
- What does the passage confront in my life?
- How does the passage show me Christ, the cross, and my salvation?
- How else does the passage offer hope, comfort, joy, etc.?
- What does the passage want me to do, change, and/or believe?
- Would the biblical author now recognize my application of this passage?

3.7 WHAT'S UNIQUE TO APPLYING OT NARRATIVE?

- It's harder to apply than some other genres (e.g., NT epistles)
- It teaches illustratively, not directly
- God is sometimes the hidden character in the story
- It emphasizes God's unfolding plan (promise/fulfillment)
- It points ahead to the coming of Christ, but not always the same way
- The characters in the story are always "mixed bags"
- Stories are often an exposé of sin – and thus a powerful warning (1 Cor. 10:6-12)
- Emphasizes waiting on the fulfillment of God's promises – pilgrimage
- God is always the hero

3.8 MISSTEPS IN APPLYING OT NARRATIVE

- Misappropriating – Putting myself in the wrong sandals of the story
- Generalizing – Appropriating very specific promises for myself
- Universalizing – Assuming that what God commanded them/then he does me/now
- Decontextualizing – Treating a story as vignette, not part of a whole book/story
- Moralizing – Drawing simple moral lessons when a bigger point is being made
- Eclipsing – A possible implication eclipses a primary aim of the passage
- Allegorizing – "Finding" a meaning or connection not intended by the passage

3.9 RESOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING OT NARRATIVE

The Gospel Transformation Bible (Crossway)

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Zondervan)

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart, *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* (Zondervan)

Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens* (Zondervan)

3.10 SOME TEST-CASES IN JOSHUA

