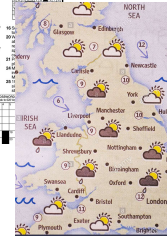
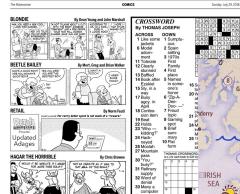


Understanding Historical Narrative

Graham Grove

2019

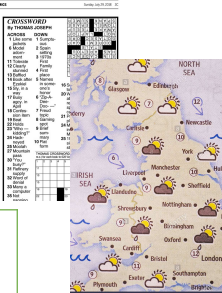
Genre



| | |
|---|--|
| <p>What is genre?</p> | |
| <p>What are the main genres in the Bible?</p> | |



Genre



| | |
|---|---|
| <p>What is genre?</p> | <p>The category or style of literature</p> |
| <p>What are the main genres in the Bible?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical Narrative and Gospel • Law • Wisdom and Poetry • Prophecy and Apocalypse • Letters |



What is historical narrative?

“Narrative is an account of events and participants moving over time and space; a recital with beginning and ending patterned by narrative’s principles of selection.”

Narrative → story

History → based on historical truth

Telling a story

When you tell a story about something that happened in the past, how do you tell it?

Telling a story about a person or event in the past

The story has

- A point, an idea, a theme
- A flow, an order with a beginning, a middle and an end

You share:

- Important details, relevant for the theme or idea
- How the story connects to other relevant stories
- Summarized information and paraphrased conversations

You don't share:

- Minor details unrelated to the theme

How not to tell a story

I got up at 10am and had cereal for breakfast. After this I washed my face, brushed my teeth, got dressed and drove to the library. First I looked in the mystery section, then I browsed through the science section and then moved into the philosophy section. I then walked across the road and stopped at the café and had a flat white. I used my loyalty card to get it. Bob walked past and he stopped and said "Hello." I said "How are you doing?" and he said, "I've been really busy at work. My mum has been sick and my son got in a fight at school yesterday." He told me about his new job and his kid's school and I told him about how my kids were going. I then left and drove home. As I drove through an intersection, a car coming perpendicular to me ran a red light. My car was badly damaged and I had a pain in my chest. An ambulance came and I was taken to the Emergency Department. They did a CT scan of my chest and it was normal. I felt better and so I called Nicole and she came and picked me up. After coming home I ate a pie for dinner and we watched a movie. I then went to bed and the following day I got up and had toast for breakfast. I spent the day preparing for a talk I had to give and then I came here.

How to tell a story

Yesterday started really well. I had a great morning, sleeping in, and then spending some time browsing at the library and having a coffee. I even bumped into an old friend who I hadn't seen for ages – and I was reminded how lucky I was after hearing about how things were tough for him.

Driving home though things changed dramatically. A guy driving his car through an intersection had a seizure as he was driving. Unfortunately I also happened to be driving through the intersection at the same time and he slammed right into my car. We were both taken to hospital. I was checked out and luckily there were no major injuries so I got to go home. The other guy, the one who hit me, also ended up in the Emergency Department, in the bed right next to me. He had a scan too and I heard the doctor tell him and his family the result – he had had a seizure because of a tumour in his brain. Poor guy!

I tell you what, it was a day that really made me feel grateful as after this I was picked up by Nicole and could relax over a movie and a meal that evening with no injuries and no illness. Yes, it was a day of contrasts that really reminded me of how lucky I am!

Narrative is not an exact security camera recording



A Note on Narrative Biography. Since we have entered the digital age, it is unfortunately and increasingly true that people exact inappropriately stringent standards on narrative biographies. By its very nature, a narrative biography must take certain liberties with the story it shares. Please do not expect cameralike accuracy! That is not the intent of this book, and to meet such standards, it would have to be a twenty-two-year-long video, most of which would bore even my mother to tears.

The words I have in quotations are rough approximations. A few of the conversations actually represent multiple meetings condensed into one. In some instances, stories are displaced in the timeline to fit the topical categorization. In other instances, people who were present in the conversation were left out of the narrative for the sake of clarity. All these devices are normal for narrative biographies; they are in fact normal for human mnemonics. Please read this book, and the narrative biographies it references, accordingly.

From Nabeel Qureshi's book "Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus"

| What Biblical Historical Narrative Is | What Biblical Historical Narrative Is Not |
|---|--|
| An account of an event with a full message | An account of an event with full details |
| A true message from God A story of truth | An account that is necessarily accurate in a literalistic and legalistic sense |

| What Biblical Historical Narrative Is | What Biblical Historical Narrative Is Not |
|---|--|
| An account of an event with a full message | An account of an event with full details |
| A true message from God A story of truth | An account that is accurate in a literalistic and legalistic sense |

Therefore

- All narrative in the Bible can teach us
- We can enjoy it and overlook contemporary world-view inconsistencies → e.g. differences in quotes or event order in the gospel accounts
- We can enjoy it allowing for varying opinion on “tricky” passages → e.g. Genesis 1-11, Jonah, Job,

Hearing a story

Some days later, while stalking his prey in the forest, the Lion was caught in the toils of a hunter's net. Unable to free himself, he filled the forest with his angry roaring. The Mouse knew the voice and quickly found the Lion struggling in the net. Running to one of the great ropes that bound him, she gnawed it until it parted, and soon the Lion was free.

Hearing a story

A Lion lay asleep in the forest, his great head resting on his paws. A timid little Mouse came upon him unexpectedly, and in her fright and haste to get away, ran across the Lion's nose. Roused from his nap, the Lion laid his huge paw angrily on the tiny creature to kill her.

"Spare me!" begged the poor Mouse. "Please let me go and some day I will surely repay you."

The Lion was much amused to think that a Mouse could ever help him. But he was generous and finally let the Mouse go.

Some days later, while stalking his prey in the forest, the Lion was caught in the toils of a hunter's net. Unable to free himself, he filled the forest with his angry roaring. The Mouse knew the voice and quickly found the Lion struggling in the net. Running to one of the great ropes that bound him, she gnawed it until it parted, and soon the Lion was free.

"You laughed when I said I would repay you," said the Mouse. "Now you see that even a Mouse can help a Lion."

Hearing a story

When you are reading a story, how do you read it?

Reading a story?

Start at the beginning and read through to the end

Don't try to understand a section of the story in isolation - think about how the fits into the bigger picture

A red starburst shape with a yellow rectangular box in the center containing the word "NARRATIVE!" in black, bold, uppercase letters.

NARRATIVE!

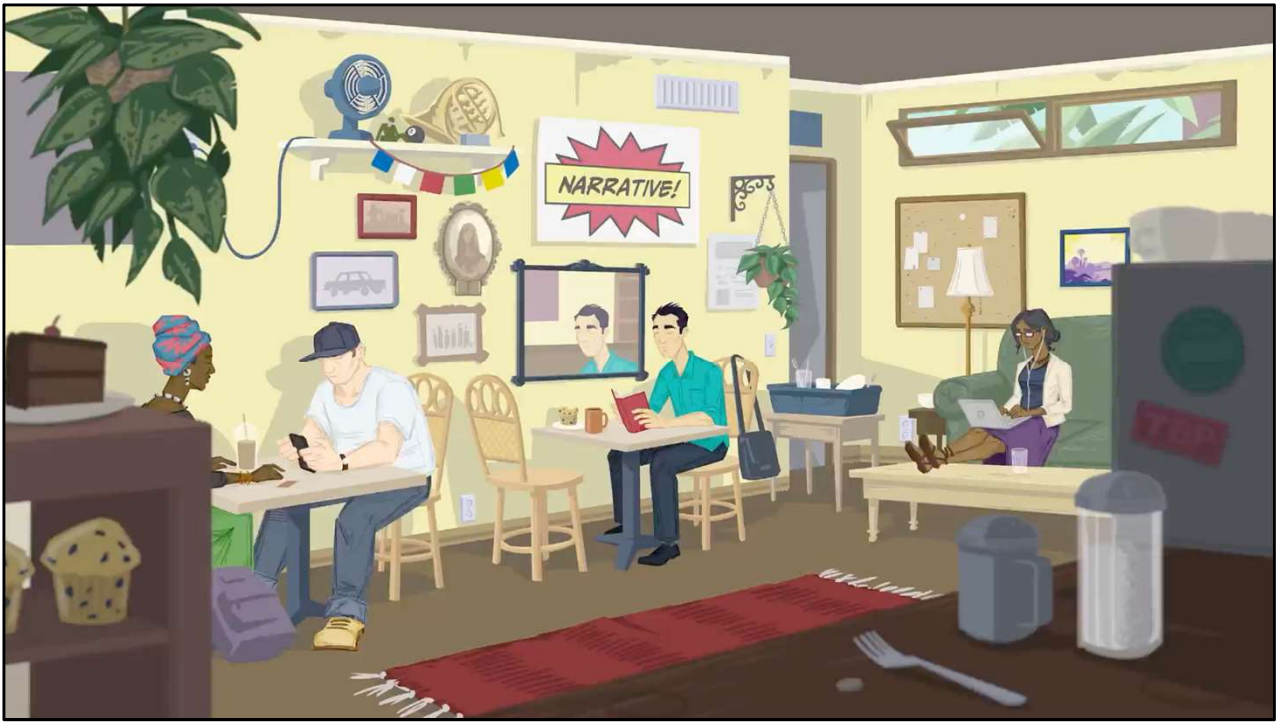
The word "Poetry" written in a black, cursive script font, set against a blue, textured, brush-stroke background.

Poetry

The words "DIS" and "COURSE" stacked vertically. "DIS" is in a black, sans-serif font above "COURSE", which is in a larger, bold, black, sans-serif font. The text is set against a red background with a blue circle and a yellow dashed line above it.

DIS
COURSE

Comments or questions?



Comments or questions?

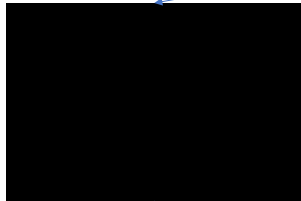
The bigger story of the Bible



| Estimated dates | Events |
|-----------------|--|
| 1900-1700 BC | Patriarchs |
| 1700-1300 BC | Slavery in Egypt |
| 1300-1200 BC | Exodus and conquest |
| 1200-922 BC | United kingdom of Israel |
| 922-722 BC | Divided kingdom; northern kingdom exiled in 722 BC |
| 922-586 BC | Divided kingdom; southern kingdom exiled in 587 BC |
| 550 BC onwards | Return to Israel of Jews |



The bigger story of the Bible



| Approximate dates | Events |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 400 BC – 4 BC | Silence |
| 4 BC | Birth of Jesus |
| 27-30 AD | Ministry of Jesus |
| 33-60 AD | The early church |



What are the key themes in this bigger story?

What are the key themes in this bigger story?

Rebellion against God / Sin / Exile from God's presence / Death /
Slavery

Forgiveness / Return to God's presence / Life

God's intervention / Rescue / Salvation / Love / God's faithfulness

So when reading historical narrative...

Read narrative as narrative - it is a story with a message

Read to understand the significant themes and messages of both

(a) The individual story itself

AND

(b) The story as it sits within the bigger message

Factual detour

What books in the Bible are primarily narrative?

Factual detour

What books in the Bible are primarily narrative?

| Old Testament |
|---------------------|
| Genesis |
| Exodus (first half) |
| Numbers |
| Joshua |
| Nehemiah |
| Ruth |
| 1 and 2 Samuel |
| 1 and 1 Kings |
| 1 and 2 Chronicles |
| Ezra |
| Nehemiah |
| Esther |
| Jonah |



| New Testament |
|---------------|
| Matthew |
| Mark |
| Luke |
| John |
| Acts |

Context

Grammatico-historical interpretation

Remember, narrative is written to specific groups of people in specific times in history

therefore

Context is always important in understanding narrative

Two key aspects to context to consider:

1. Historical and geographical context
2. Literary context

Understanding the geographical and
political stage helps us interpret narrative
A working example:

Open up to Genesis 1

When was it written and who was it's original audience?

Understanding the geographical and political stage helps us interpret narrative
A working example:

Open up to Genesis 1

When was it written and who was it's original audience?



Understanding the geographical and
political stage helps us interpret narrative
A working example:

Open up to Genesis 1

When was the world like back then?

What were some of the prevailing religious beliefs?

What were the beliefs about creation?

Understanding the geographical and political stage helps us interpret narrative
A working example:

Polytheism
Sun and moon as powerful gods



When was the world like back then?

What were some of the prevailing religious beliefs?

What were the beliefs about creation?

Chaotic creation without purpose
Humans irrelevant and unimportant



Understanding the geographical and
political stage helps us interpret narrative
A working example:

Read the narrative of Genesis 1

How is it speaking to it's original audience?

What are some of the themes that are apparent?

Understanding the geographical and political stage helps us interpret narrative

A working example:

Read the narrative of Genesis 1

How is it speaking to it's original audience?

What are some of the themes that are apparent?

One creator. Many created objects



Order and purpose



Human value and authority



Understanding the literary stage helps us interpret narrative

How we understand a story is informed by:

- What happened just before the story
- What happened just after the story
- Where the story fits in the larger story

How we understand the story is informed by:

- The words and phrasing used

Understanding the literary stage helps us interpret narrative

A worked example

Read Luke 10: 30-35

This is how one famous church Father interpreted the story:

- The man = Adam
- Jerusalem = heavenly city of peace from whom Adam fell
- Jericho = the moon signifying our mortality
- Thieves = the devil and demons
- Stripping and beating the man = of his immortality by persuading him to sin
- Leaving him half dead = being unable to know God
- Priest and Levite = the priesthood of the Old Testament being unable to bring salvation
- Samaritan = Jesus himself
- Binding of wounds = stopping sin
- Oil = hope
- Wine = exhortation to work in the Spirit
- Put on a donkey = belief in the incarnation of Christ
- Inn = the Church where travelers returning to their heavenly country are refreshed
- The following day = after the resurrection of Jesus
- Two pence = the promise of this life and of the life to come
- The inn-keeper = Paul the apostle

Understanding the literary stage helps us interpret
narrative
A worked example

Read Luke 10: 30-35

What happens directly
before the story of the
good Samaritan?

What happens directly
after?

How does this
influence your theme?

Understanding the literary stage helps us interpret narrative

A worked example

Read Luke 10: 30-35

What happens directly before the story of the good Samaritan?

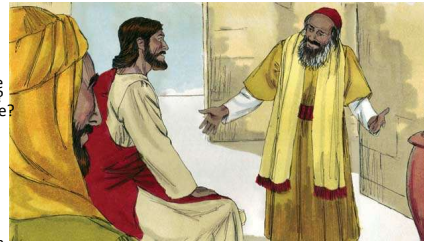
How do I love my neighbor?
And who is he?

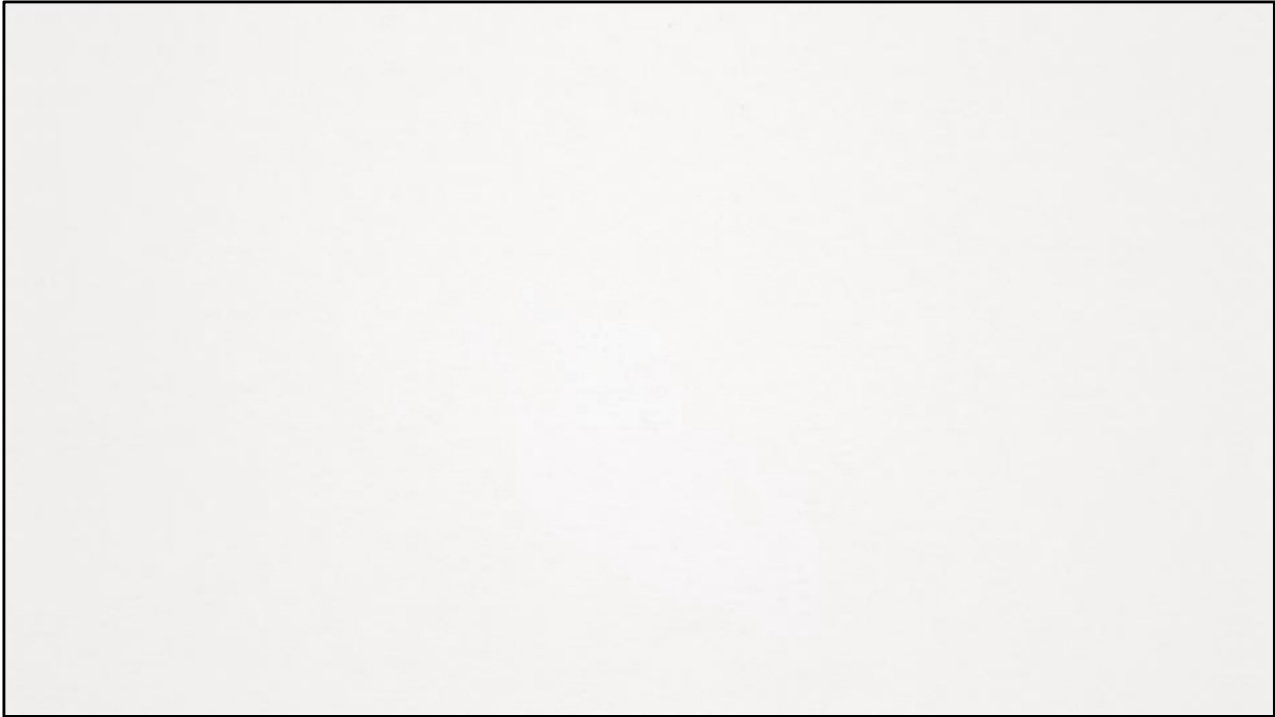
What happens directly after?

Love like this Samaritan man did

How does this influence your theme?

Jesus reminds us how important it is to listen to him





Comments or questions?

Work-shop – Using Context

Read Matthew 22:15-21

You might say the key idea is – “It’s good to pay your taxes”

But let’s think again...

What are the important historical and geopolitical aspects here?

- Where did Jesus live? What ethnicity was Jesus? Who ruled the land?
- Who were the Pharisees? Who were the Herodians? What were their ambitions?
- Who was Caesar? What was his ambition and his fears about his Empire?

What is wider literary context?

- What has been happening in the passages and chapters prior to this story?
- What happens in the passages directly after this story?
- What is the key climactic event in the book of Matthew?

Think about:

- What do you think is motivating the characters of the story?
- What are the potential emotions of the characters?

Why do you think Matthew put this story in his account / what do you think Matthew wanted his readers to think about?

What do you think the key idea(s) of this story is now / what is the take home message for you?



Work-shop – Seeing patterns

Read Acts 1:7-8

This looks forward to a pattern seen in Acts - What 3 stories or sections of Acts connect to this passage?

This looks backwards to a pattern and prophecy in the Old Testament – What Old Testament passage or story do you think this connects most closely too?