

Literary Genre: Historical Narrative

Literary genre is a category of written works. Recognizing the type of writing prepares one for how to read and observe the text. For example, historical narratives are stories of what God did to and through people. The stories may not have a moral lesson, because they record history whether good or evil.

There are lots of examples of this genre: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.

When you encounter historical narratives, you can read them literally and take the natural meaning of the words.

The stories usually emphasize God's nature and revelation as He interacts with human beings from the beginning with Creation and to the end in the process of fulfilling His promises to Abraham. Some stories may be difficult to understand, because God may not explain how and why He did certain things.

How should you read a historical narrative?

Read each story as a unit.

Understand the plot.

Study the character(s). Some characters may be bad examples, but observing what not to do can be just as important as what to do.

Look for accounts of the same event in other books and observe the additional details that could help you understand what is happening.

Because the stories are so true to life, they can help us understand our own lives.

Other religions have supernatural events and base their "bible" on stories that are mythical and fictional. How do you know the stories of the Bible, including supernatural events, are historical and true?

There is archaeological evidence that substantiate people, places and events. For example, one of the oldest and significant stories in the Bible is the Exodus that indicated the early presence of the nation of Israel in Egypt.

An Egyptian statue was discovered in Goshen featuring an Asiatic skin tone and "mushroom" hair style usually associated with people from the area of Canaan. The statue's clothing also featured a multi-colored tunic.

The Bible records this feature of Joseph: **Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his other sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a multicolored tunic. (Gen 37:3)**

The statue also had a throw stick on one shoulder which was a significant symbol of political leadership. Thus this statue of a person from Canaan was in some important leadership role in Egypt.



There is geographic evidence that substantiate an event.

The Waterway of Joseph (Bahr Yussef) can be seen today as a canal connecting the Nile River with Lake Moeris in the area of the Faiyum Oasis. No one knows how this 200 mile waterway came to commemorate a non-Egyptian name, but its function was to: a) control the flooding of the Nile River, b) regulate the level of the Nile River in the summer, and c) provide irrigation for the immediate area. The Waterway of Joseph is dated to the reign of Amenemhat III and the early rise of the city of Avaris in the region of Goshen.

Nile flood records, discovered in 1844, were inscriptions on a cliff face marking the flood heights of the Nile. During the reign of Amenemhat III (12th dynasty), consecutive years were found to have floods 9 meters over normal or 4x normal volume of water.

The construction of the Canal of Joseph reclaimed over 150,000 acres of the marshy Faiyum Oasis. Amenemhat III would celebrate this accomplishment and chose to be entombed in a pyramid in Dahshūr nearby.

The only ancient historical record that may be associated with this canal is found in the Bible, and it is the narrative of Joseph.



Teacher Note for this lesson is at:

<http://Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/25Curriculum/Class6-8/print/Bible.LitGenre.HistoricalNarrative.6-8.pdf>

Literary Genre: Historical Narrative Teacher Notes

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When you encounter historical narratives, you can read them literally and take the natural meaning of the words.

The stories usually emphasize God's nature and revelation as He interacts with human beings from the beginning with Creation and to the end in the process of fulfilling His promises to Abraham. Some stories may be difficult to understand, because God may not explain how and why He did certain things.

Help the student understand what a historical narrative is by using examples.

An example of emphasizing God's nature and revelation:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. (Gen 1:1-5, NIV)

An example of interacting with human beings:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matt 3:13-17, NIV)

An example of God's commitment to fulfilling His promise to Abraham:

"Therefore say to the Israelites, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

"For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezek 36:22-28, NIV)

How should you read a historical narrative?

Read each story as a unit.

Show the student that stories in the Bible can span over multiple chapters (i.e. the story of Creation recorded in Genesis 1 and 2), or recorded in different books of the Bible (i.e. the faith of the Centurion recorded in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10).

Understand the plot.

Help the student understand what a plot is and what to look for.

By observing the sequence of events and how they affect the next event, one might see a cause and effect. What was the event's consequence. Does this affect the next series of events? Is this plot part of a larger plot? What can be learned from this?

Study the character(s). Some characters may be bad examples, but observing what not to do can be just as important as what to do.

Encourage the student to ask questions to sharpen their observation. What choices did the character make? What was the consequence? How did it affect their future choices? What does this reveal about their character?

Look for accounts of the same event in other books and observe the additional details that could help you understand what is happening.

Because the stories are so true to life, they can help us understand our own lives.

Provide an example for the student such as the Crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ found in Matthew 27:32-55; Mark 21:21-41; Luke 23:26-49 and John 19:16-37.

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Inform the student that the Bible is the only religious book that has extensive archaeological and anthropological evidence, geologically accurate, and extra-biblical historical records confirming events, people, places and dates. No other ancient written document has this amount of corroborating evidence.