

Lesson 9 Notes – 02/21/2008

***How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Part II**

In our second textbook, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, chapter 3 and following constitutes the main thrust of the book. The authors want to acquaint us with the various major GENRES of literature in the Bible. By genre we mean kinds or types.

1. Narrative or historical
2. Gospel (a specialized form of narrative)
3. Letters and epistles
4. Prophetic
5. Poetry and song
6. Wisdom
7. Law
8. Parable (found mostly within other genres, like the Gospels)

Since we will not be able to cover all of these types of Biblical literature in detail, it is important to read the textbook and take good notes to become comfortable with the unique characteristics of each genre. While the entire Bible is subject to the principles of interpretation we have already studied, each genre has some special or unique attributes that need to be noted so we can better grasp the intended meaning of each author.

Narrative or Historical Literature

1. Narratives are historically based stories told to preserve the past and give meaning and direction for succeeding generations.
2. The Biblical stories are not just history. The stories were carefully chosen and crafted by the authors (and The Author) to help weave together a much larger story. This story, called by some scholars the “meta-narrative,” is made up of two main components. Every story in the Bible fits into this kind of over-arching storyline. Those two components are:
 - a. The almighty Creator is at work in the history of mankind
 - b. He is working to bring into existence and keep a people who are uniquely His
3. An important aspect of Biblical narrative seldom noted is that it was originally written to be heard, or listened to, by an audience. Actual copies of Biblical manuscripts in the Old Testament times would have been extremely rare. Hebrew believers would not be reading these stories, but listening to them being read or recited from memory by a priest, rabbi, or elder. As a result the stories would need to be short, with the barest detail, and with some repetition and expressive language to make them easy to remember and pass on.
4. About 40% of the Old Testament and 50% of the New Testament is narrative in form.
5. Common characteristics of Biblical narratives:
 - a. *Narrator* - the usually unnamed teller or recorder of the story. Usually thought to be the author of the document containing the story.
 - b. *Characters* - one or more key individuals who are the main “actors” in the story. Their physical appearance is seldom described; only their character traits and interaction with

- the situation is important to the storyteller.
- c. *Scenes* - a series of one or more vignettes in which the story takes place.
 - d. *Plot* (story line) and *resolution*
 - e. *Dialogue* - dialogue (speaking) by the characters helps identify the key message of the story and the turning points of the plot
 - f. *Structure* - (see #3 above), a fast paced, to the point arranging of the narrative
6. Application of the narrative. We often struggle to know just how to bring the individual Biblical narratives over into today as far as application. Remember, their main purpose was to show God involved in history to bring about, deliver, and preserve His people. That is the same key lesson we need to draw from each of them today. Beyond that we notice:
- a. How the New Testament viewed the Old Testament stories
 - 1. Romans 15:4 - teach and encourage us to produce hope
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 10:6-11 - examples and warnings
 - 3. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 - make us wise concerning salvation; to be used for teaching, rebuking, correcting and instructing in righteousness
 - 4. Look at how Jesus used the stories
 - b. Do not try to moralize or allegorize. Do not try to make the individual stories teach more than they did for their first hearers. Remember, it cannot mean today what it did not mean originally!

The Book of Acts

Most of what has been said above applies equally to the Book of Acts. The most important difference is that we see many things in Acts as well as the Epistles which we consider important/necessary to imitate in God's church today. This is often referred to as "binding examples."

- 1. I believe the authors of our textbook err in discounting and seeking to nullify this aspect of Acts and the Epistles
- 2. By the end of the 1st Century and into the 2nd Century, early church literature clearly shows that those next few generations of Christians believed the things the Apostles and early churches practiced were "normative" – a pattern for them to follow. This included regular observance of the Lord's Supper, contributions for the poor, Sunday meetings with activities like singing and teaching, and more.
- 3. We cannot divorce Acts from the Epistles in the New Testament. Acts often shows the practices that the Epistles were advocating and providing a doctrinal reason for.
- 4. This is not an attempt to provide a detailed explanation of what is and is not binding on the church today from what we read in the Book of Acts. But it seems to me that we are on much safer ground trying to imitate the practices of Acts and the Epistles than we are by advocating that we ignore their apostolic origins.

Effective Bible Study

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