

Session Outline:

For this specific two-part lesson, we recommend doing Part 1 and 2 on two separate class days because the Review Questions for Part 1 need to be completed before doing Part 2.

My Notes:

Old Testament Narratives, Part 1

I. Old Testament Narratives (0:00)

A. Beautiful and Complex

- 1. Example: teaching Noah’s Ark to children
 - a. While children may focus on the animals, adults are struck by the severity of the account of God beginning again with the human race.
- 2. Embrace the joyful complexity and artistry of the Old Testament stories.
 - a. These stories are not like Aesop’s Fables.¹
- 3. Old Testament narratives are not simple, fabricated stories to illustrate a moral, but are complex and beautiful, full of details and the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Examples: Book of Judges; son’s question about Noah’s Ark story

B. Reveal God

- 1. These narratives of God’s involvement with His covenant people and human history reveal God’s heart, His ways, His mystery, His fierceness and holiness.
- 2. God is not like us, just nicer and more powerful than us. He is altogether another Being.
 - a. God is not made in our image. We are made in His image.
- 3. God speaks for Himself about Himself.

C. Our Stories

- 1. As those who have been grafted in as wild olive branches into the Israel of God, these narratives are also our stories (Romans 11, Galatians 6).

6. They are usually easily remembered.
7. God can include Himself as one of the characters in the story.
 - a. Example: Speaker's writing of musicals; God's use of Himself and angels in stories
 - Speaker's own world view of what to expect in Christianity had been reduced to his experience, rather than letting Scripture inform his experience as to what was a normal experience for a Christian to have.
8. Be aware of the larger themes.
9. Do not make God fit into our 21st century box.
 - a. Examples: political parties; animal sacrifices
10. Read carefully and look for clues from the text.
 - a. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*
 - Example: Joseph's story for management principles; God was with him (foundation of success)
11. God is the Hero of every story.
12. Pay attention to the voice of the narrator.
 - a. Ask what the narrator knows.
13. Characters are complex.
 - a. Sometimes, even good characters make bad decisions, or bad characters make good decisions.

II. A Narrative's Components & Interpretation Principles (16:10)

A. Plot — What and How

1. Put the plot in the larger context of the character's journey with God, and the story will read very differently.
 - a. Example: Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac
2. Because we are influenced by the post-modern era and are motivated more by emotions rather than ideas, we project into the story and focus on what it would be like to emotionally experience those events, at the risk of excluding the main point of the story.
3. The larger plot puts the various episodes together.
 - a. Example: Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac is a mini-plot within the larger plot of Abraham's life with God.

B. Setting — Where and When

1. The Book of Ruth gives eight to ten clues of how exceptional Bethlehem is.²
 - a. Example: keeping the law; kinsman/redeemer principle is practiced
 - The subtle message is that Bethlehem was living correctly.
2. Read other books and commentaries to give insight to the setting such as:
 - a. *How To Read The Bible for All It's Worth*²
 - b. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*⁸

C. Characters — Who

1. Characters move the story along.
2. Notice what information the narrator does or does not give about the characters.

D. Viewpoint of the Narrator

1. Notice if the narrator is against what is happening in the story, or has taken a neutral stance.
2. Sometimes a neutral stance is frustrating for the reader, because we want the narrator to tell us how to view the event.
3. The narrator may assume those familiar with the Torah understand what is right or wrong, or the narrator leaves it to the reader to do his own study and research to find the answer.
 - a. Example: Book of Judges
 - b. The list of sinful behavior of the Israelites was long:
 - #1: The other nations had moved in while they were supposed to conquer the land.
 - #2: They were killing each other instead of killing the inhabitants of the land.
 - #3: They turned to other Gods.
 - #4: A Levitical priest led the tribe of Dan into pagan worship.
 - #5: An Israelite town attempted to molest a priest and raped his concubine.
 - c. Example: Japheth sacrificed his daughter

- d. The reader wants the narrator to give a sense of justice, but the narrator does not.
- 4. Sometimes the narrator will give an implied message.
 - a. Example: Israelites as Canaanites (Judges)
 - The narrator implies the Israelites should be judged as the other people groups who committed such sins were judged.
 - b. Example: Solomon
 - The narrator lists Solomon's material success, but the reader is to be familiar with Deuteronomy 17, which notes that a king should not acquire great numbers of horses, wives, or silver and gold, and takes thirteen years to build his own house, when it only took seven to build God's (Deuteronomy 17:14–20).

E. The Big Picture

- 1. We must see each mini-story in light of the big picture. This provides a better perspective.
 - a. Example: Israelites dying in the wilderness
 - Even after witnessing the most extreme and powerful manifestations of God on their behalf, the Israelites who died were the ones who were unwilling to fight for their new land because of the giants there.
 - We see through the big picture, that the Israelites did not let God's acts transform them.
- 2. Do not miss the bigger context of the story by allowing our emotions to too quickly enter into the reading of the story.

Note: Speaker does not lecture on the next two narrative components in class, but we have included them here as a reference for the homework assignment. DVD session goes directly to "H. Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Narratives."

F. Comparison/Contrast (not included in DVD)

1. This literary technique is a major device used in Old Testament narratives to develop plot and to move the story forward.
2. Recognizing comparison and contrast is critical to our understanding of narratives.
3. Notice these comparisons and contrasts between David and Saul as developed over many chapters in I Samuel.
 - a. Introduction of each:
 - Saul: impressive, tall
 - David: young, smaller
 - (God looks at the heart.)
 - b. In the face of danger:
 - Saul shirks his responsibility and buys his way out of fighting Goliath.
 - David defeats Goliath, taking on a responsibility not even his own.
 - c. Subtle differences:
 - Saul (implied) loses his father’s donkeys, and aimlessly looks for them, until taking his servant’s suggestion not to quit, but then not even recognizing the man of God who can help him.
 - David keeps his father’s sheep and protects them from danger, including lions and bears.
4. David is everything that Saul is not. Understanding these comparisons and contrasts helps us understand these narratives.

G. Irony (not included in the DVD)

1. Irony is the literary term used to describe situations where the literal or surface meaning of an event or episode is quite different—indeed, sometimes opposite—of the narrator’s real intended meaning.
2. Irony presents the narrative’s meaning with more force.
3. Irony allows the narrator to surprise the reader, often with humor in the subtle meanings.

4. In irony, actions and events may have multiple implications.

- a. Usually one of the characters, or even the reader, misses out on some knowledge when failing to see the multiple implications.

5. Irony enhances narratives, making them fascinating to study and enjoyable to read.

6. Examples: Listing Solomon’s material wealth, in light of Deuteronomy 17:14-20, is not praise but an indictment; the captured Ark of the Covenant is placed before the Philistine idol, but every day it falls and bows before God, and God strikes them with plagues; the Philistines thought they won the war and captured God, but God invaded Philistia, returning with their gold tribute back to Israel.

H. Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Narratives

1. An Old Testament narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine, but illustrates a doctrine or doctrines proposed elsewhere.
2. Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time.
 - a. Therefore, there is not always an individual identifiable moral application.

3. The narratives are not like *Aesop’s Fables* in that they are told to illustrate a simple moral, like *The Tortoise and the Hare*, rather they are part of an ongoing story.^{1,4}

4. What people do in the narratives is not necessarily a good example for us.
 - a. Most of the characters in the Old Testament narratives are far from perfect—as are their actions.
 - b. 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 this on the basis of what God has taught us directly and categorically.

- 5. Do not be “monkey see, monkey do” (do not just imitate exactly what is seen). Learn about God and His **ways** from narratives, not simply imitating what is read.
- 6. All narratives are selective and incomplete. All the details we want are not given.
 - a. What does appear in the narrative is everything that the inspired author thought important for us to know.
 - b. Example: John 21:25
- 7. Narratives are not written to answer all our theological questions.
 - a. They have particular, specific, limited purposes and deal with certain issues, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere in other ways.
- 8. Narratives may teach either “explicitly” by clearly stating something, or “implicitly,” teaching it without actually stating it.
- 9. In the final analysis, God is the Hero of all Biblical narratives.
- 10. Like interpreting the Gospels, note how the narrative is connected to the larger stories of Israel’s history and salvation history.

Old Testament Narratives, Part 2

III. Profound Points of Story, Verse by Verse (27:30)

Students share with other students what seemed most profound to them about Genesis 22:1–19, or new insights they received.

Speaker welcomes the Holy Spirit to enlighten the truth to them.

A. Observations About Genesis 22:1–19

- 1. Verse 1:
 - a. The time is later.

c. We wonder what was going through both Isaac and Abraham’s minds, and the inspiration behind Abraham’s answer.

- Example: Speaker’s childhood teaching of Isaac’s near death; visions of Pinocchio’s whale for Jonah’s story
- We bring much of our own pre-context or understanding when we read the Scriptures.

9. Verse 9:

- a. Isaac is bound.
- b. We wonder why he is bound.
 - Is Isaac fighting his father? What is his response?
 - We do not get any answers about those details from the text.

10. Verses 10 and 11:

- a. Abraham reaches for the knife, but the Angel of the Lord called to him to stop him.
 - From our pre-understanding, sometimes we think that Isaac was spared at the last minute, but from the text it seems to be sooner than that.
- b. Abraham answered again, “Here I am.”

11. Verse 12:

- a. The Angel of the Lord said now He knew Abraham feared God, because he had not withheld his only son.
 - The phrase, “only son,” is mentioned three times (verses 2, 12 and 16).
 - This reminds us of John 3:16, “He gave His one and only Son.”
- b. The Angel of the Lord said, “Now I know.”
 - We wonder if God did not know before this.

12. Verse 13:

- a. The ram is caught by the horns in the thicket.
 - While this may be a picture of Jesus’ crown of thorns, it is too early to try and make such comparisons. It is best to stay with the story in context as long as possible.

13. Verses 15 through 18:

- a. God swears by Himself.
- b. God reiterates the covenant He made with Abraham.
 - We wonder if God adds anything to the covenant at this time, and check it against the first mentions of the covenant (Genesis 12:2, Genesis 15:5).

14. Verse 14:

- a. The narrator adds a note: "And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'"

15. Verse 18:

- a. "All nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."
 - We would rather have the promise of blessing based on God alone, but here we see the weight of the condition of blessing in the covenant going forth and being released: our obedience.

IV. Overview of Genesis 22's Components (42:02)

A. Plot

1. The plot begins with conflict: how Abraham responds to God's seemingly outrageous request.
2. Tension rises as Isaac realizes there is no lamb for the sacrifice.
3. Abraham maintains faith, but faith in what?
 - a. Faith that he has rightly heard God?
 - b. Faith that Abraham will do his duty?
 - c. Faith that God will make this turn into something good because God is good?
4. Abraham takes the knife to sacrifice his son.
 - a. Will he do it?
 - b. Will God make him do it?
 - c. Will God find another way?
5. When we review this story against other Scripture and in light of the bigger picture, we see more.
 - a. God called Abraham at age 75.

5. Both Abraham and Isaac seem serene, even in this horrific scenario.

6. God receives new information: "Now I know...."
(verse 12).

D. Viewpoint of the Narrator

1. God is testing Abraham.

2. The narrator adds the note: "And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided'"
(verse 14).

E. Comparisons and Contrast

1. When we compare Isaac to the ram, we prophetically see Jesus in the future.

2. Abraham is also compared to Father God.

F. Irony

1. Isaac, the one who potentially is going to be the sacrifice, sees that the fire and wood are there, but there is no sacrificial lamb.

2. Humanity gets to keep their sons, but the Heavenly Father's Son still must be sacrificed.

a. The grace of God comes to man, but 2,000 years later there would be no one to stop the sacrificing of God's Son.

G. Summary of Story In Paragraph Form

1. God decided to test Abraham's faith with the unimaginable task of sacrificing his son. Abraham responded immediately and took wood, fire, a knife, and the child of promise, his son, Isaac. This time, Abraham did not do a dance. He did not have a different idea. He obeyed quickly. As he was about to kill his son, God stopped him and provided a substitute ram. Abraham sacrificed the ram and named the place, "The Lord will provide," or, "Jehovah Jireh." God was pleased with Abraham's faith and reiterated the covenant promises of blessing upon his descendants. God also declared the occupation of enemy cities by Abraham's descendants and that the blessings given to all the nations of the earth would be because Abraham obeyed God.

2. Abraham made powerful faith statements in his town: we will worship, we will return, the Lord will provide an offering, and a sacrifice for us (50:56 end).

Old Testament Narratives, Part 1 - Review Questions:

- 1. The goal of this exercise is to apply all of the Bible study tools you have learned from the previous lessons. Briefly re-read the document “Short Step-by-Step Outline Inductive Bible Study.” This document can be found as an attachment in *Biblical Studies, Lesson 1: Inductive Bible Study, Part 1–4*. Then, read Genesis 22:1–19 from your Bible. Rather than going through each step of the Inductive Bible Study as you have done before, on a separate piece of paper just write down your observations from Genesis 22:1–19. Then below, provide a summary of each of the Old Testament narrative components found in this same passage, these include: Plot, Setting, Characters, View Point of Narrator, Comparison/Contrast and Irony. (Take approximately 30–60 minutes to complete this exercise.)**

Plot: (What and How) In this particular story the plot begins with the conflict. How will Abraham respond to God’s seemingly outrageous request? The tension rises as Isaac realizes there is no lamb for the sacrifice but Abraham’s faith is rock solid. The question is, "In what does his faith lie?" Is his faith in that he has heard God, he will do his duty or that God will make this turn out for good because God is good? Abraham goes through the process to the point of picking up the knife to slay his son. Will he do it? Will God make him? Or will God find another way?

Within the larger story, Abraham has been obedient but sometimes with a mixture of his own solutions. God says leave your family, he takes some of them with him. God saves his wife and marriage and the covenant promise after Abraham thought it best to lie to the kings to protect his own life. He went along with his wife’s suggestion that Hagar

give him an heir. Abraham had consistently experienced the faithfulness of the Lord, His mercy, His rescue, His victory in battle, His appearance and announcement of a son, the mercy He was willing to bestow on Sodom and His ultimate judgment of Sodom.

Setting: (Where and When) The author tells us “Some time later,” to create some distance from the previous story. God directs Abraham to the “region of Moriah” and eventually to a specific mountain called simply the “mountain of the Lord.” 2 Chronicles 3:1 links Moriah with the location of the temple in Jerusalem. Abraham’s journey begins and ends in Beersheba. Father and son are alone in the moment, but the angel speaks from heaven. There are stones for the altar but no wood, thickets in which rams get stuck, so it seems like a bit of a barren mountain.

Characters: (Who) The main characters are God, appearing sometimes as the angel of the LORD, Abraham and Isaac. There are also two servants present. Additionally, the lamb is noticeably absent, while later a ram “mysteriously” appears. Both seem oddly serene throughout the story. God seems to get “new” information, “now I know” (verse 12).

View Point of Narrator: The narrator begins by telling us, “God tested Abraham.” We question from the text if Abraham had figured this out or not. The narrator adds in verse 14, “And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.’” The covenant name of God, YHWH Jireh (Hebrew) is the name Abraham gives the spot.

There are numerous prophetic pictures that the divine author surely intended. Isaac is referred to as “your son, your only son” by God three times, but never by Abraham. This refers to the fact that Isaac is the child of promise, but also foreshadows the words of John 3:16, “your one and only son.” Abraham is sent to Moriah, which is the location of Jerusalem, and also the place of the sacrifice of Jesus. Isaac even carried the wood (cross) up to the top of the mountain. The journey took three days, which may be more

symbolic than literal. Finally, Abraham’s response to Isaac, “God himself will provide the lamb,” is filled with faith, but also with prophecy.

Comparison/Contrast: The main comparison is between Isaac and the lamb, and prophetically to Jesus. Abraham is also being compared to God the Father.

Irony: The main irony seems to be in Isaac’s question, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Moving beyond the local story to the cosmic one, humanity gets to keep their sons but the Heavenly Father’s son does not get a reprieve.

2. Next, take 15 minutes to note Abraham’s journey with God by listing the various headings found in Genesis, chapters 12–25. This is the literary context of the story.

Chapter 12: The Call of Abram; Abram in Egypt

Chapter 13: Abram and Lot Separate

Chapter 14: Abram Rescues Lot

Chapter 15: God’s Covenant With Abram

Chapter 16: Hagar and Ishmael

Chapter 17: The Covenant of Circumcision

Chapter 18: The Three Visitors

Chapter 19: Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed; Lot and His Daughters

Chapter 20: Abraham and Abimelech

Chapter 21: The Birth of Isaac; Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away; The Treaty at Beersheba

Chapter 22: Abraham Tested; Nahor’s Sons

Chapter 23: The Death of Sarah

Chapter 24: Isaac and Rebekah

Chapter 25: The Death of Abraham; Ishmael’s Sons; Jacob and Esau

3. Take all of the information you have gathered from Review Questions 1 and 2 and use it to complete the 5-Step Interpretive Journey. (The 5-Step Interpretive Journey can be found on the document “Short Step-by-Step Outline Inductive Bible Study,” which is attached to *Biblical Studies, Lesson 1: Inductive Bible Study, Part 1–4.*) Write one paragraph per step.

Step 1:

God decides to test Abraham’s faith with an unimaginable task, sacrificing his son. This time Abraham does not add his own solutions but responds immediately by taking wood, fire, a knife and the child of promise, his son Isaac, to the place God directed him. He makes several FAITH declarations. “We will worship and we will return” and “God himself will provide the lamb”. As he nears killing his son, God stops him and provides a substitute—a ram. Abraham sacrifices the ram and names the place “The Lord will provide,” or YHWH Jireh (Hebrew). God is pleased with Abraham’s faith and reiterates the covenant promises of blessings upon his descendants, occupation of enemy cities and blessing all of the nations of the earth “BECAUSE YOU HAVE OBEYED ME.”

Step 2:

As far as we know Abraham had nothing written to teach him about God. He had to rely on his experiences with God Himself. While we have both the Holy Spirit and the written Scriptures that specifically forbid sacrificing our children, Abraham was likely aware some human sacrifice was practiced in his days. We are far removed from the violent conflicts and bloodshed of Abraham’s era. Still, there is a psychological, social, and spiritual divide as it is unfathomable to us that God would make this request to take our own children’s life. Abraham was a man of blood but we assume this was equally confusing and painful for him.

Step 3:

This story is about God testing Abraham’s faith, which was manifested in his obedience. The anchor of his faith is key. He had faith in the character of God, which likely led him to believe that the Lord would find a way to spare Isaac. We can read Abraham’s statements as “white” lies to control his son, the stalling tactics of a desperate man, or the confident assertions of a man of faith. The author of Hebrews said he had faith God would raise Isaac from the dead.

We need to believe that Jehovah Jireh is still the provider of all of our needs today, even when He is the one making demands.

Trust in God’s character and the history of His goodness to you. It is reasonable and rational to trust the same God who made the covenant with Abraham, prophesied and produced the promised child, kept him safe and preserved his family line when he makes an extreme demand on you.

Step 4:

As we move into the New Testament we can see how God used Abraham to paint a prophetic picture of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. Jesus was the Lamb God provided. He provides in all areas of life because that is Who He is. At the same time, we see that God is still looking for people of faith. Obedience and faith in His goodness are what please our Heavenly Father.

Step 5:

While the specifics of Abraham’s test will likely never be repeated, as it seems powerfully linked to the death and resurrection of Jesus and was a test connected to the fulfillment of the central covenant of the universe, the reality that we may be tested by God in some areas is true. Tests of faith come in many shapes and sizes. They are always a challenge, or else they would not be a test. Once we pass the test, then we have a “testimony” to share. However, we generally do not attribute sickness or torment as a test from God. These are rather the result of the enemy’s influence and life in a fallen world.

Abraham's response was marked by complete obedience and total faith all the while he saw this event as a time of God's provision. We should look for his provision even when He is making the demands.

It is interesting that God said, "Now I know". We often hear that tests are not so God can know, but so we can know what is in our heart and celebrate or adjust accordingly. While this may be true, it is intriguing to see the way God chose to speak about this, and it must be held in tension with many other Scriptures about God.

At one level, this seems like such an outrageous request, and it is. Yet, our nation requests that its sons and daughters die in battle for the cause of liberty. Christian parents raise kids to love God and follow Him though they may give their life on the mission field for His cause. Muslims who convert can face possible retaliation and death. Furthermore, perhaps we are too far removed from the reality of 1st century life. When people became Christians they were considered dead to their families. Paul felt like and believed that he had already died in the moment of conversion. "I no longer live but Christ lives in me." For the Lord, death is a doorway not an end. He knows that we are "but grass". It is a shocking request, but maybe not as shocking as we first thought.

Old Testament Narratives, Part 2 - Review Questions:

- 1. What was the blessing promised to Abraham as it relates to Genesis 22:1-18? What caused God to give him that blessing and what can we learn from Abraham?**

The blessing that was promised to Abraham was that God would bless him, make his descendants numerous, his descendants would take possession of the cities of their enemies and all the nations on the earth through Abraham's offspring. This blessing was given to Abraham because of his obedience to God. Because Abraham was willing to radically obey God, even when the act of obedience might

result in the death of his son, God rewarded Abraham with the most radical blessing found in Scripture. Abraham had a history with God and had experienced God’s faithfulness and goodness. Abraham knew God would provide. Sometimes we would rather believe that God’s blessings are based on Him alone, but in this narrative we see the weight of the condition of blessing in the covenant going forth and being released because of Abraham’s obedience. Through Abraham’s response to God we learn that God will reward radical obedience and faith in His goodness with radical blessings.

2. What statements did Abraham declare that show us his absolute faith in God to provide for the burnt offering?

Abraham made powerful statements of faith about his trust in God’s faithfulness and provision. In Genesis 22:5, Abraham declared to his servant that he and Isaac would go and worship and then return. In Genesis 22:8 Abraham declared to his son, Isaac, that God himself would provide a ram for the burnt offering. Then in Genesis 22:14, after God had provided the ram for the burnt offering Abraham declared and named that place, “the LORD Will Provide.” Abraham’s declarations of faith about God’s goodness, faithfulness, and provision became a permanent testimony of God’s provision.

Old Testament Narratives, Part 1 - Discussion & Activation:

- 1. Read again the Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Narratives found in Part 1 of this lesson. As you read through the list, see if an Old Testament story comes to mind that illustrates any one of these points. Find this story in the Bible and share it with several other students, and point out how the principle is demonstrated in the story. The purpose of the exercise is to see how these principles of interpreting shed new light on how you look at these stories.**

Old Testament Narratives, Part 2 - Discussion & Activation:

- 1. Gather together with a few students and discuss any new insights or revelations God has revealed to you about Genesis 22:1–19 that you had not known or had not understood before this lesson.**
- 2. Old Testament stories are often part of the big picture—God’s plans and dealings with people over long periods of time. What about one of your own life stories, can you see how it is woven into the bigger picture of your life? Partner with a fellow student and share your thoughts about how one of your life stories fits into the bigger picture of what God is doing in your life.**

1. Aesop, *Aesop’s Fables*, ed. D.L. Ashilman (New York: Penguin Group, 2007).

2. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

3. John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

4. Aesop, “The Tortoise and the Hare,” in *Aesop’s Fables*, ed. D.L. Ashilman (New York: Penguin Group, 2007).

5. Harold R. Eberle, *Christianity Unshackled* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2009).

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