

# How to Understand and Apply the Bible

Michael Cranford

## Tools (part 2): Background resources – literary and historical

Study Bible

Commentaries

Pastoral

Exegetical

Expositional

## Interpreting Old Testament Historical Narrative

1. The narrative portions of the OT cover roughly 40% and, viewed as a whole, reveal the unfolding of God's plan for his people across history.
2. Narrative has three levels that we need to regard in different ways when we think about what the text means.
  - a) The top level is the big picture of God's plan in salvation history. God is the hero of the Old Testament.
  - b) The middle level is God's plan for his people (Israel) in their historical context: how they respond to God in covenant relationship and how he responds to their faithfulness/disobedience.
  - c) The bottom and most basic level is to see the story as the unfolding of God's plan for specific individuals.
3. The OT narrative is intended for us (Romans 15:4)—but secondarily. Therefore, we take steps to interpret it that include starting from the original context and cautiously moving to our culture and our individual lives.

## Interpretational principle:

The text cannot mean something to us that it never could have meant to the original readers.

## Things to look for as we read historical narrative:

- Parts of the story that directly relate to commands in the law
- Statements by the narrator (or by God himself) that reflect God's point-of-view
- The first point of dialogue in a scene
- Repetition

## Sample passage to look at:

### 2 Samuel 11:

<sup>1</sup>In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup>One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, <sup>3</sup>and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." <sup>4</sup>Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. <sup>5</sup>The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

### 2 Samuel 12:

<sup>5</sup>David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! <sup>6</sup>He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

<sup>7</sup>Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. <sup>8</sup>I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. <sup>9</sup>Why did you **despise the word of the Lord** by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. <sup>10</sup>Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because **you despised me** and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'"

## Historical Narrative:

Interpretation to application, step by step

### Old Covenant

View the action through the lens  
of the law

Principles: What do we  
learn about God? What do  
we learn about his  
expectations for his  
people, Israel?

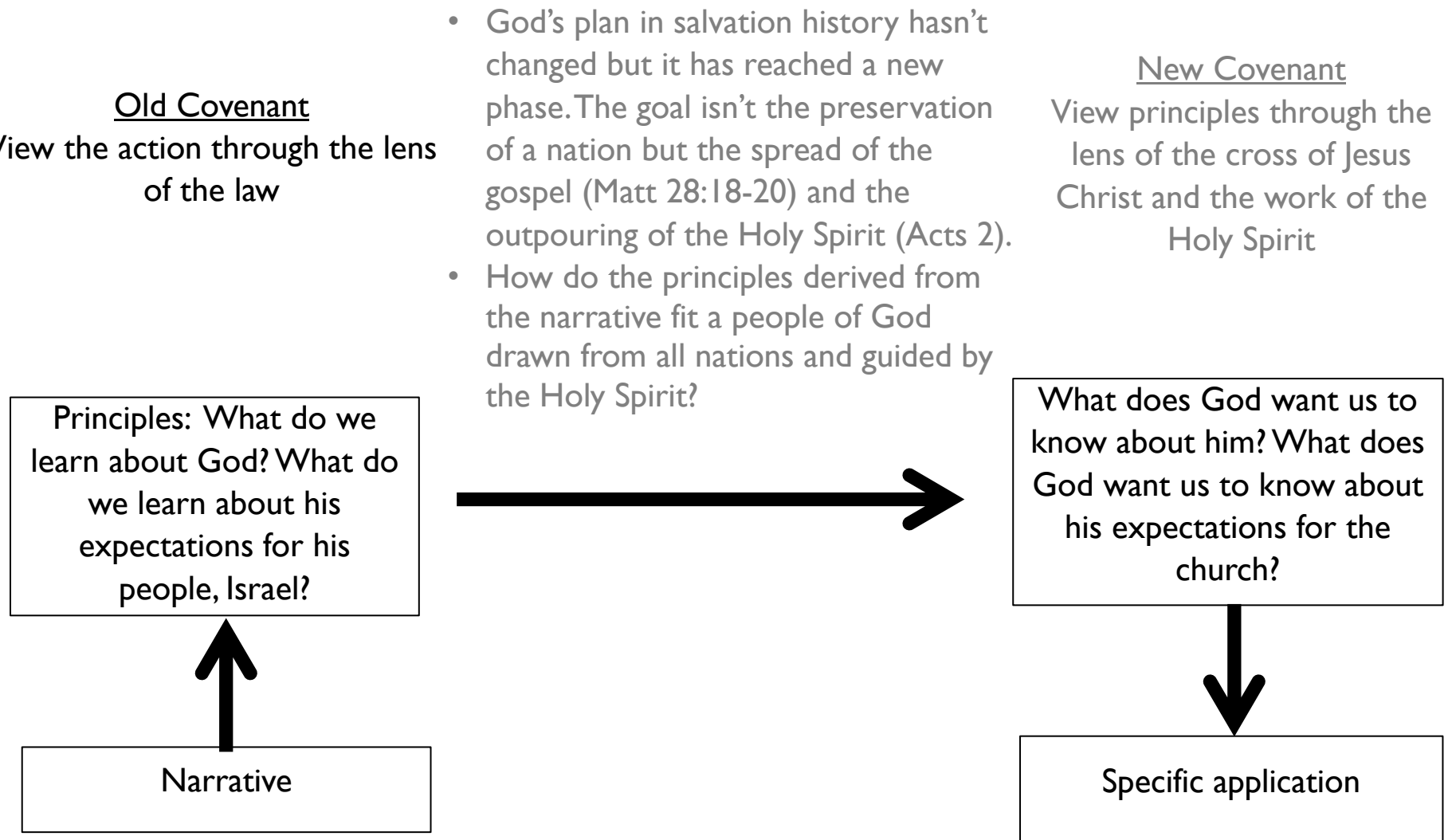


Narrative

- How does this story fit into the big picture of God's plan in salvation history?
- How does this story fit into God's plan for the nation of Israel in this historical setting?
- What does the story reveal about God's plan for the individuals involved?
- Consider how the law provides a moral backdrop to the story
- Look for clues to God's point-of-view
- Take note of the first point of dialogue in a scene
- Note any repetition in the story
- Specific story

## Historical Narrative:

Interpretation to application, step by step



## Historical Narrative:

Interpretation to application, step by step

