

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

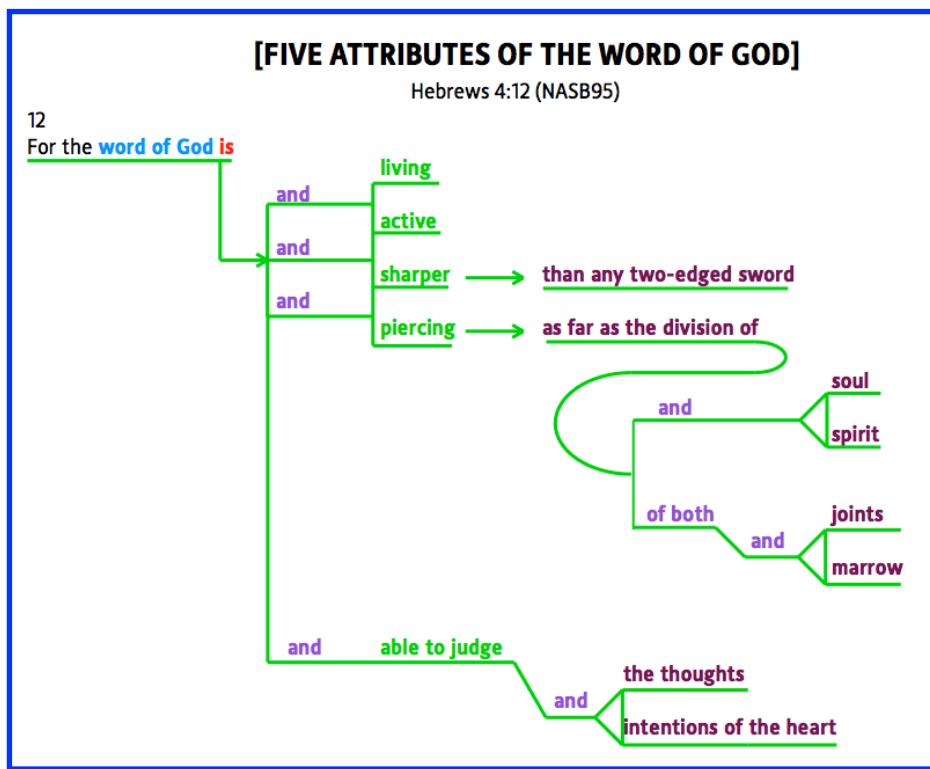
How to Study Narrative

Lesson #6

Teacher’s Tip

“By practice we trade a talent of knowledge, and turn it to profit. This is a blessed reading of scripture, when we fly from the sins, which the Word forbids, and espouse the duties, which the Word commands. Reading without practice will be but a torch to light men to hell.”¹

Outlining Hebrews 4:12



Teaching Outline:

“WHY YOU SHOULD USE YOUR BIBLE TO EVANGELIZE THE LOST”

- I. **YOUR BIBLE IS LIVING** (To Convict the Lost)
- II. **YOUR BIBLE IS ACTIVE** (To Work on Lost Souls)
- III. **YOUR BIBLE IS SHARP** (To Cut Through the Excuses of the Lost)
- IV. **YOUR BIBLE IS PIERCING** (Penetrating to the Innermost Being of the Lost)
- V. **YOUR BIBLE IS ABLE TO JUDGE** (Judging the Hearts of the Lost)

¹ Thomas Watson, *How To Read The Scriptures With The Most Spiritual Profit*, pgs. 68-69

This study will be devoted to studying narrative. Large portions of the Bible are narrative e.g., Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua - Job, the Gospels, Acts and portions of other books. In our first lesson we learned that narrative is not merely biblical history, but theology communicated through history. God chose specific events in history to reveal himself to us. Studying narrative requires its own study methods. In this lesson we will learn how to extract truth in the narrative portions of Scripture.

I. HOW TO STUDY NARRATIVE

Narrative portions of Scripture are many. Often it is hard to teach narrative because of the size of individual sections. If a person focuses on one or two verses, the thrust of the story as a whole is lost. If we attempt to teach the entire story, then one has a problem of getting through so much material and finding practical application.

- A. **Genesis 37-50** deals with the Joseph story. All of these chapters are a single unit all focusing on God's sovereign dealings to preserve Israel through Joseph. If you only teach a few verses you may miss the purpose or thrust of the whole story. If you decide to teach the whole story you are plagued with a mountain of material and miss many of the practical lessons in the narrative.
- B. You are studying **the book of Job**. You realize the book is a story with a beginning, middle and end. The book has one central message and each part of the story contributes to that central message. How do you teach the smaller sections without missing the intended meaning of the whole? How do you teach the whole book and not confuse people with too much material?

II. POSSIBLE OPTIONS IN TEACHING NARRATIVE

- A. **Teaching a small section out of a large narrative.** If you decide to teach a small section, let's say two or three verses out of a large portion of narrative, certain things must be remembered.
 - 1. Your purpose should be to teach what God intended to teach and what the author meant to teach to the original audience by what they wrote. You are trying to teach your specific section in light of the grand theme of the entire narrative.
 - 2. You must be careful not to read New Testament truths into Old Testament texts. Putting New Testament truths into Old Testament passages is eisegesis (reading into the text) and the goal of Bible study should be to do exegesis (reading out of the text). It is important when studying narrative to remember the hermeneutical principle of "Progressive Revelation" which states that God reveals truth progressively and we must interpret each passage in light of what the audience of the book knew up to that time, not

what we know now. After you examine and interpret a text in its historical context, then you can consider how other texts help you understand the text in its context (cross reference).



3. Always show how your section fits into the big picture God intended to reveal. When teaching a small section of a large narrative it is necessary to show how your small section is a building block of the whole. This can usually be done in just a few sentences, but it needs to be done.
4. If you are going to use *a small piece of narrative as an illustration or example*, make sure you explain that you are using it as an illustration or example. This is a legitimate use of narrative (**see Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:1-11; Heb. 11; I Pet. 3:1-6**). While it is okay to derive application from positive and negative examples found in narrative, we must not ignore the author's intended meaning. You would want to first mention the author's intended meaning and then say that you are going to be looking at whoever you are looking at in the text as an example.
 - a. In **Gen. 39** we see Joseph resisting Potiphar's wife. This story is an excellent example of how to flee immorality, a truth clearly taught in both the Old and New Testaments (e.g. **Eccl. 7:26; I Cor. 6:18**). Yet the Joseph story was not written to teach us about fleeing immorality. The many episodes in Joseph's life show us how God preserved the nation Israel, through Joseph. A person may use Joseph's flight from Potiphar's wife as an illustration of fleeing moral

temptation, but he must point out that it is an illustration not the primary meaning of the text.

- b. In **Job 25:4-6** we read, "*How then can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman? If even the moon has no brightness And the stars are not pure in His sight. How much less man, that maggot, And the son of man, that worm!*" Does this text teach we are maggots and worms or that we are worth as much as maggots and worms? Does this teach that no one can be just before God? Is the son of man here Jesus? Who is speaking? Why? What is the theme of Job and how does this passage fit into the theme? Would it be okay to take this passage and "use it" to teach worm theology e.g., "*woe is me, I am just a worm.*"

B. Teaching a large section of narrative. One may decide to teach a large section of narrative. If this is the case you should follow these guidelines.

1. Determine the theme or intent of your passage as a whole. Your smaller section must support the theme. Your interpretation of what the author meant to teach must be part of and fit the theme of the book or section.
2. Ask yourself, "Can I teach the story in summary fashion and deliver a clear and practical message?" Stories are strong communicating tools. Don't feel you can't make an impact on people by just telling the story well. Remember that two people can tell the same story and one person can make it boring and the other very interesting. Be engaging!
3. If the section you are studying teaches a specific truth like redemption (Exod. 4-13), you may want to summarize the story, pointing out that the main point is God's redemption of Israel from Egypt. Then, using cross references explain in more detail what the Bible says about the doctrine of redemption and its importance for the Christian using your text as a focal point. In this way you teach the theme, the story, and accentuate the main doctrine associated with the main point of the text.
4. Whenever teaching a large section attempt to communicate the main thought. Don't get caught up in the mountain of details. *Only focus on the details that point to the main theme or thought.* There will be many good points you will not be able to mention. Just mention those that support the main theme that the author is trying to communicate.
5. One of the hardest things for new teachers to do is force themselves not to try and teach everything that they have discovered in their study. Remember, it is better to teach less truth better than more truth worse. Tell yourself that it is impossible to teach everything that can be taught when studying any text, especially a large one, and that things must be left out.

C. When Teaching or Preaching Work at Making Narrative Come Alive

1. *Verbally paint the landscape of the preceding context leading up to the text you are preaching.*
2. *Describe what is said in the text you are preaching in more detail.*
3. *Work at drawing your listeners into the historical context.*
 - a. Use the words “*imagine,*” “*ponder,*” “*consider,*” “*there you are!,*” and other words and phrases like them to get your listeners into the text.
 - b. *Speak to people as if they are there, “You are watching all of this! You look on with horror!”*
 - c. *Employ rhetorical questions, “So what do you think David was thinking when he approached Goliath?”*
 - d. *Use direct address in the application of your preaching/teaching, “you,” “your,” “yourselves.”*
 - e. *Strive to create a sense of investigation as you work your way through the text, “And what do you think God thought about this? Well let’s look at our text and find out.”*
 - f. Narrative provides good opportunity to teach the Word of God in an engaging, practical, memorable way. Work at making it interesting.

III. SUMMARY PRINCIPLES FOR STUDYING NARRATIVE

A. Teaching a Small Section out of a Large Narrative

1. Teach your text in relation to the theme of the story.
2. Remember not to violate the principle of progressive revelation. Don't read New Testament truths into Old Testament passages and imply that the original audience or author knew about them.
3. Show how your passage fits into the theme of the whole book or section.
4. If you use a narrative story as an example or illustration, make sure you point out that you are using it is an example or illustration and still mention the main theme or idea of that portion of Scripture.

B. Teaching a Large Section of Narrative

1. Determine the theme.

2. Can you teach the story in summary fashion and still have it be clear and practical?
3. You may want to use your text as a focal point for communicating a doctrinal truth from the main theme of the book or section.
4. Make sure you relay the main thought of the whole narrative or select one truth that teaches or supports the main thought or theme.

C. **Regardless of the size of the text, work at making narrative come alive!**

IV. HOME WORK

Let's say you are going to teach **Genesis 22:1-19**. Using your newly acquired Bible study skills for studying narrative, answer the questions below.

- A. What is the theme of Genesis?
- B. How does **Gen. 22:1-19** fit into the theme of the book?
- C. Explain in a **short paragraph** how you might teach this section of Scripture in the following ways:
 1. Summary method (summarize the whole story and emphasize key doctrines/principles/application).
 2. Doctrinal spring board method (Find one key portion of the narrative, a verse or a phrase that relates to the overall meaning of the text. Then explain what you would do to emphasize that key portion of the narrative and turn it into a study/sermon).
 3. Illustration method (Find a part of the narrative that you think would make a good example, positive or negative. Write a short summary statement of the narrative as a whole and how the meaning of the narrative fits in to the

overall theme of Genesis. This is what you would tell them before you look at the example found in the text.).

- D. If taken by itself, is the story found in **Gen. 22:1-19** clear and practical? What lesson/s (those that fit the theme) can be learned from this passage?

- E. If you were teaching this passage, what major truths or doctrines could you focus on?

- F. Try and find at least five cross references from the New Testament which you might refer people to when teaching the main theme of this text that would help explain the text's theological significance.

- G. Write out a vivid, engaging description that attempts to rope your listeners into the text right before Abraham lifts the knife to sacrifice Isaac (maybe a paragraph or two). Use a sanctified imagination, what is reasonable to assume, by putting yourself in Abraham and/or Isaac's place.