HERMENEUTICS

Biblical Narratives

- *How to Read the Bible as Literature* by Leland Ryken, Chapters 2 & 3
- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Fee and Stuart, Chapter 5
Ryken’s Rules for Reading the Stories of the Bible

Rule #1: Look upon the story as an invitation to share an experience with the characters.
The Building Blocks of Stories

1. **Setting**
2. **Characters**
3. **Plot**

**Setting** is the physical, temporal, and cultural context of the story.
The Building Blocks of Stories

1. Setting is
   - Physical
Setting is also

- Temporal
Setting is also

- Cultural
The functions of a setting

- To **set the mood** or tone of the story
  - Jonah
  - Elijah
- To **symbolize**
  - Ex. 14
  - Ruth 2:2
- To **provide structure** and **unity**
  - Wells: Ge. 21, 24, 26, 29
- To identify the **worldview** & culture
  - Dan. 3, Dan. 5
  - Gen. 11
Ryken’s Rules for Reading the Stories of the Bible

Rule #2: Pay attention to every detail of setting, and analyze how the place, time and culture of the story contributes to the message of the story.
The Building Blocks of Stories

1. Setting
2. Characters
3. Plot

Characters make things happen and produce action.
How Characters are Portrayed

1. Direct Description
   - Joseph (Ge. 39:6)
   - Rebekah (Ge. 24:16)

2. Other Characters’ Responses
   - Daniel (Da. 6:5)
   - David (1 Sam. 16:11, 17:42-44)

3. A Character’s Words or Thoughts
   - Amnon (2 Sam. 13:1-2, 14-16)
How Characters are Portrayed

4. Self-characterization
   - Job 23:10-12, 29:1-25

5. A Character’s Actions
   - King Jehoash (2 Ki. 13:14-19)
   - David’s mighty men (2 Sam. 23:8-17)
Rule #3: Use every relevant detail in a story (direct descriptions, responses of others, the character’s own words and thoughts, self-descriptions, and actions) to get to know each character in the story.
The Building Blocks of Stories

1. Setting
2. Characters
3. Plot

The plot is the arrangement of the events.
The Plot Centers on the Conflicts

- How will the characters **behave** in the conflicts of the story?
- How will the protagonist (the one you hope will win) **resolve the conflicts** of the story?
Types of Plot Conflicts

**Physical**
- Man against environment
  - The Exodus (De. 8:2-4)

**Character conflicts**
- Man against man
  - Jacob and Esau, David and Saul, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar

**Moral or Spiritual conflicts**
- Man against himself
  - Samson, Solomon
Ryken’s Rules for Reading the Stories of the Bible

Rule #4: Identify the nature of the plot conflicts (man with environment, man with man, man with himself) in a story, and discover how they develop and are resolved.
Stories Awaken Our Curiosity

- Why does this story interest me?
  - Gideon (Jdg. 6-8)
- How does it make me a participant?
  - Cain and Abel (Ge. 4)
Ryken’s Rules for Reading the Stories of the Bible

Rule #5: Ask yourself as you read, “How is this story creating in me suspense, interest, and curiosity?”
Travel with the Protagonist

- Will he make it?
  - It may all depend on the choices he makes
    - Abraham
  - It may depend on the way he reacts after making mistakes
    - Saul
- Good stories get us to live the plot out with the protagonist
  - Time and location differences DISAPPEAR!
Ryken’s Rules for Reading the Stories of the Bible

Rule #6: Pay attention to the protagonist (the one you hope will win) in a story. Stick close to him, because he is involved in a life experiment whose goal will be to reveal something important about human experience and values.
Ryken’s Rules for Reading the Stories of the Bible

Rule #7: Try to determine what makes the story one story, even if it has many episodes. This will lead you to understand the story’s framework and parts.

Review Terms:
- Unity
- Coherence
- Emphasis
Ryken’s Rules for Reading the Stories of the Bible

Rule #8: Ask yourself as you read, “How is the protagonist being tested?” and “What are the choices being offered him?”

Review Terms:
- Types of Tests
- Antecedents
- Occurrence
- Consequences
Ryken’s Rules for Reading the Stories of the Bible

Rule #9: Notice what important changes happen between the beginning and the end of the story, what causes the changes, and how the changes transform the characters.

Review Terms:
- Tragic plot
- Pathetic plot
- Comic plot

Review Terms:
- Admiration story
- Degeneration plot
- Revelation story
Ryken’s Rules for Reading the Stories of the Bible

Rule #10: Be on the watch for foils, dramatic irony, and poetic justice in the narrative. Storytellers use these to get a reaction from you, and to help you grasp the story’s meaning.

Examples:

erdale

Foil – Lot is a foil for Abraham, Cain is a foil for Abel

Irony – Job’s ending fortune, Samson’s ending folly

Poetic Justice – Absalom’s death, Haman’s hanging
Rule #11: Ask yourself, “What would the story be like if this detail was omitted?” and you will have a clue as to why the storyteller included it.

HINTS:

- Storytellers make it a point to NOT “get to the point” directly or quickly
- They make you wait, watch, and walk with them
- You will have to work at understanding the morale of the story, just like they did
Rule #12: How does the story’s action and characterization affect how you feel about the events and characters? Look for a pattern of approval and/or disapproval to tell you what the story means.

Example:

Naboth and his vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16)
8 COMMON ERRORS

1. Changing a narrative into an allegory
   ♦ Don’t look beyond the clear meaning in a story and make all the details symbols of something else, if the story is not an allegory
   ♦ The nature of an allegory is to be a fictional construction. Therefore, no historical narrative is a full allegory.
8 COMMON ERRORS

2. Decontextualizing a story

♦ Don’t ignore the historical and literary contexts and concentrate only on small parts of the story.
♦ You’ll miss the clues the writer has given for interpreting the story as a whole unit.
8 COMMON ERRORS

3. Selectively choosing what parts to interpret
   ♦ Don’t concentrate on only specific words and phrases, ignoring others, and failing to balance the parts and the whole.
4. **Falsely combining elements in a story**

- Like mixing a compound from whatever chemicals you find at hand, this can have explosive results.

- Example: Thinking David recaptured Jerusalem by combining 2 Sam. 5:6-7 and Judges 1:8
8 COMMON ERRORS

5. Redefining terms and sayings
   ♦ Don’t divert and constrict the meanings of a story and its elements to deflect the impact upon your own situation or condition.
   ♦ Example: “Gen. 19 reveals the divine disapproval of rape, and not of homosexual activity” – common GLBT interpretation
6. **Employing extracanonical authority**

- Don’t use an external “key to the Scriptures” to seek for truths in the story not otherwise knowable.
- Example: Mormons use the Book of Mormon to interpret John 10:16
- Example: *The Bible Code* is a book that looks for numerical patterns in Hebrew & Greek letters
7. Moralizing

- This happens when you automatically make every story illustrate a moral, like *Mother Goose’s Nursery Rhymes* or *Aesop’s Fables* do.

- Example: The Israelite experience as slaves in Egypt is not a lesson on how to handle adversity
8 COMMON ERRORS

8. *Personalizing or individualizing*

- Not all parts of the Bible are intended to impact every single person’s problems.
- No Biblical narrative was written specifically about you, or about me.
- Don’t be a “monkey-see, monkey-do” reader of the Bible stories … see Matthew 27:5