

Responding to God Word: How to Faithfully Interpret the Bible
Men's Bible Study at Park View
A Study of Old Testament Narratives
May 3, 2005

Many of us have heard stories from the Bible since the time we were children. But perhaps we many of us have not examined the deeper meaning of these stories, particularly in light of New Testament teaching. The purpose of this study is to examine the function of the stories in the Old Testament. These study -- or narratives -- make up about 40% of the material in the Old Testament. We will look in some depth at one particular story – the account of Samson and Delilah.

As Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart have said, it is helpful to think of Old Testament narratives on three levels:

- the top level tells of God's universal plan
- the middle level tells of the call of Abraham and later the people of Israel
- the bottom level tells many stories of individuals

They explain further: "All narratives have a plot and characters. The Old Testament narratives, however, have plots that are part of a special plot, and have a special cast of characters, the most special of whom is God himself."

It is not always easy to ascertain the purpose for the inclusion of each individual story in the Bible. Some of the stories include characters and actions that must not be considered ideal for Christian living.

However, it is helpful to remember that God is the hero of *all* the Biblical stories, regardless of the individual ethics of the characters in the story. It is not always easy to determine whether the characters are to be praised or condemned for their actions. The narrative simply tells the story without moralizing. Today we will study one such narrative.

After reading the scripture from Judges, answer the questions that follow. These questions can apply to many different biblical stories. They help us to respond to the story in some depth.

Read Judges 16:1-22

Who are the main characters in this story? What is their relationship to each other? Describe their characteristics.

What purpose does the main character have in mind? What conflict arises when this purpose is pursued?

What is needed for resolution of the conflict? Who tries to bring resolution? What is the nature of the resolution sought or achieved?

What emotions or feelings are expressed or identified in the text? To what thoughts, activities, events or ideas are they linked?

With whom do you identify in the story? Why did you make that choice?

What seems puzzling in the text? What is surprising? What do you like or dislike as you read?

What is the relationship between men and women in this story?

Who has power or influence in this story? How is power or influence used? Who is marginalized? Poor? Unnamed?

How might Jesus have responded to this story?

What behavior in this story is a good example for Christians today? What behavior is a bad example? On what basis did you decide?

What cultural practices in this passage stand in contrast to our modern culture?

What modern day situations or problems come to mind as you read this story?

How is God at work in or behind this story?

What practical lessons can we learn from this story for our life as Christians today?