

The Power of History-Reading Bible Stories Rightly

What is a story? What is history? Where do we find examples of history in the Bible?

What are the main options that Christians have tried in approaching Bible History?

1. **Allegory**
 - a. Symbolism is EVERYWHERE. Let's go find it. Origen (died 254 A.D.) is famous for this approach. Each passage has a three-fold meaning (literal, moral, and spiritual). But what restricts our spiritual interpretation from imagination?
 - b. Galatians 4:24 and 2 Corinthians 3:6 are "proofs"
 - c. Approach is making a comeback today with "symbology" and Dan Brown, etc.

2. **The Moral-of-the Story is...**
 - a. This approach comes more from Aesop's fables, not Bible. THE MOST POPULAR METHOD OF BIBLE STUDY-Sunday School books are notorious for this
 - b. Approach wants relevance, and is usually impatient with taking time to understand the context of a story. Examples? David and Goliath

3. **Doctrinal**
 - a. Stories exist to prove a point or illustrate an abstract doctrine, a "proof text"

4. **Literal-Flat.**
 - a. This is what happened. So there. But Christ is not declared or revealed unless explicit mention of His name or work is made.

5. **Redemptive-Historical.**
 - a. This approach combines the best of all the above, while avoiding its pitfalls
 - b. This approach sees Christ's work everywhere, but is bound to the confines and categories of the story under discussion. Symbolism exists, but only where the Bible tells us so.
 - c. This approach honors the REASON for the Bible, and the meaning of History, as found in Genesis 3:15; John 20:30-31.
 - d. History matters. Christians have no business skipping past history to get to "the good stuff" of what this means for my life today. We only know what it means today when we know what it meant originally! 1 Corinthians 15:13-15
 - e. Jesus used this approach
 - i. with the men on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:27,44)
 - ii. Abraham saw Jesus' day and rejoiced (John 8:56)

 - f. The Redemptive-History continues today, not with new revelation, but with constant faith as we await the Consummation at the End Times. Even our worship is not to an earthly Zion, but sitting in the pew is truly sitting in the heavenly Jerusalem with the angels! Heb. 12:18-24

 - g. Using a Redemptive-Historical Approach, which was developed and defended by the REFORMATION especially, will help you to truly understand and appreciate the Stories of the Bible. For example, Genesis 15 and the cutting of a covenant.

Let's Read some Stories!!

Joshua 6. Who fought the battle?
 What is the significance of Rahab's scarlet rope?
 What do the walls of Jericho represent?

A bit more on a definition of Redemptive-Historical Preaching and Bible Reading.

The Scriptures are a story. The story is true. It takes place in history. It is the story of redemption. That is to say, the Bible presents itself in redemptive-historical terms. It is the story of God's great and mighty acts. Those mighty deeds point toward and have their fulfillment in Christ.

The following is from the author of a Sunday School curriculum which RCUS ministers read and used as the foundation for our RCUS curriculum. (He is, of course, not responsible for the format or discussion questions in our curriculum, since he has passed on to glory many years ago now) S. G. DeGraaf says the following,

"As a result of sin, there is no revelation of grace other than in the Mediator. This is made clear throughout the Scriptures-not only in the New Testament but also in the Old. Scripture is a unity. The Old Testament is the book of the Christ who is to come, while the New Testament tells us of the Christ who has come.

"The entire Scripture is God's revelation of Himself as the Redeemer. The redemption in the Mediator is revealed to us in every story. But this is not to say that the whole sweep of redemption is visible in every story. We believe in the progress of revelation. This progress is a development in which nothing new is added. In principle, the whole of redemption is revealed in the mother-promise (Gen. 3:15). Therefore, the seed of redemption is present in every story in the Old Testament. Our job is to use the light of the New Testament to uncover it. There is no veil covering our eyes when we read the Old Testament (See II Cor. 3:14-16), for the testimony of Jesus is also the Spirit of Old Testament prophecy (Rev. 19:10).

"The Mediator was operative throughout the Old Testament era. His work did not begin at the start of the New Testament. He already penetrated Old Testament history, moving among the people and shadows in order to reveal Himself. Everything is full of Him, and history has become one great miracle through His Spirit" (S. G. DeGraaf, Promise and Deliverance (Paideia Press, St. Catherines, Ontario, 1977), Vol. I, pp. 21-22).