

## How to Read a Narrative

### Lesson

We, simultaneously, read Biblical narratives on three levels. The content of the **highest level** of our reading is what was in the mind of God before His creation. An awareness of the following scriptures, mixed with faith, should be present in our minds and hearts as we read the Biblical narratives. An understanding of God's purpose for the creation of mankind is vital for our understanding of our second level of reading – the major moves of God.

<b>God's secret wisdom, destined for our glory before time. I Cor. 2:7. He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ. Eph. 1:5</b>	<b>For He chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. Eph. 1:4</b>	<b>A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time. Titus 1:1, 2</b>
<b>The glory you have given me (Jesus) before the creation of the world. John 17:24</b>	<b>But with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. I Pet. 1:19, 20</b>	<b>For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. Roman 8:29</b>
<b>Jesus was with God before the beginning. I John 1:2. Through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. Jo. 1:1-3</b>	<b>God's purpose and grace given in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. II Tim. 1:9</b>	<b>The foregoing was in God's mind before Deity moved in creation. Col. 2:9</b>

The second level for reading a Bible narrative, or story, involves the historical and spiritual move God made in the story. For instance, no move of God had been recorded in the Bible for over four hundred years when an angel appeared to Zechariah (Luke 1:5ff). In this major move God was preparing the forerunner for His Son, Jesus Christ. This move of God was not made to answer

the prayers of this childless couple. This move was made to move heaven and earth forward toward God's purpose in creation.

We cannot understand the full meaning of Elizabeth's conception unless we read this story in context with the highest level. God was preparing this couple so He could send John, the Baptist, as a joy and delight for Zechariah and Elizabeth to be sure, but not for them only. "And many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord." Luke 1:14, 15. God made many major moves recorded for us in the narratives of Luke and Acts. All of these moves were made for the express purpose of "bringing many sons to glory." Heb. 2:10.

When people do not apply the basic principles for reading literature in their Bible study it opens the door for false teachers (II Tim. 2:15). Satan, the antagonist, has a full staff of false religious teachers working daily. They sow the seed for much of the world conflict. We will review the major moves of God in the four Gospels so we can understand Jesus' moves and teachings in Acts.

Of course, the third, or lowest, level for our reading a historical Biblical narrative is the reading of the individual narrative. Luke chose many individual narratives to present the content in these two narratives. In some instances complex narratives are developed to encompass the full move God made through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We must finally read each individual narrative on all three levels at the same reading.

The structures of Luke and Acts have been developed by Luke's placing the individual narratives as he was guided by Jesus via the Holy Spirit. He carefully chose to place these stories in the order we find them to accomplish the intent of his purpose for writing each document. In all Biblical literature we look for structure and content. The content is for us. All content will fall into one of three categories: Theology – Ethic – Practice.

All narratives have three basic parts: \*

1. Characters: Protagonist — Antagonist — Agonist (the other major characters in the story).
2. Plot (what is happening – theme).
3. Plot resolution.

A story would not be a story if anyone of the foregoing parts were missing. Please note how Luke introduced the characters in his Gospel. He introduced the "good guys" in the first three chapters through verse eighteen. The first "bad guy" we are introduced to was Herod the tetrarch (Luke 3:19). He was evil

and he proved it by locking up John, the Baptist in prison. However, Satan is the original antagonist. The word "Satan" means an antagonist. Luke brought the main protagonist, Jesus Christ, together with Satan in the individual narrative in chapter four. The other characters, the agonist, are introduced and identified with either the protagonist or the antagonist. Jesus drew the line between the two sides when He said, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me, scatters." Luke 11:23.

Historical stories are intended to give meaning and direction for a given people in the present time. The Biblical narratives are no different in this regard; however, there is a great difference. The Biblical narratives are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Human history will vary according to who is writing – according to which side of the fence the author stands. History is often re-written for different generations. Biblical historical narratives reveal the situation as it was and is – the good and the bad – the nice and the ugly. The history of God and His interaction with His people has never changed. Most narratives in the Bible presuppose some kind of conflict or tension that needs resolving. This is the plot. The climax of the story is how the plot is resolved. Christians have happily chosen to give our allegiance to Jesus, our Lord.

God's specific plot in Luke's gospel was to recover the "the lost sheep of Israel." Matt. 15:24. He sent His Son to resolve this matter by preaching the kingdom. The key to His "plot resolution" was to evangelize Israel. At the same time Jesus made preparation for His priesthood and kingship.

God's plot in Acts was to evangelize the world with the message of the kingdom of God (Acts 1:8). All power has been given to Jesus to resolve the plot. The antagonist, the devil, "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." I Peter 5:8. Evangelism of lost people is the plot in Luke and Acts. See Luke 15:1-32. The plot could not and cannot be resolved without the evangelism program of Jesus Christ. It is still going forward today through the churches He has built and is building.

\* For detailed information on how to read a narrative see "How to Read the Bible for all its Worth" by Fee and Stuart

### Questions for Discussion

1. Faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). Since this is a truth about each Christian: Why is it important to learn to read a narrative in our Bible?

2. What is the second level for reading a Bible story?
3. What is the importance of keeping the first level of reading in mind while reading about the major moves of God in history?
4. Please write a short paragraph about what was in the mind of God before He created the world and mankind?
5. Who does the word "Deity" relate to in Col. 2:9?
6. Before the angel appeared to Zechariah in the temple, approximately, how many years had passed since God had made a major move that involved the future of mankind?
7. Why did God make His big move with Zechariah and Elizabeth?
8. How might Satan use people who do not apply Biblical interpretation principles to their Bible study?
9. What is an individual narrative?
10. How did Luke obtain the individual narratives He used to develop the Gospel of Luke and Acts?
11. List the three categories in which all Bible content for Christians are found.
12. How does Satan live up to the meaning of His name?
13. In what manner is the presentation of Bible history different from the presentation of secular history?
14. What was God's specific plot in the narrative of Acts?
15. How was God's plot in Acts different from His Luke plot?