

READING & UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Intro: Reading: John 16:13

Helpful for 1 Samuel studies.

Many people see OT as irrelevant, perhaps even a different 'God' – who deals in law, sacrificial systems, instant retribution. See OT like a women's hairdressers/men's snooker hall – think they know what goes on – but will never venture in!

Bible is a 'window' and a 'mirror':

Window to look through – context, 'then'
Window to look at: What is the story/narrative
Mirror: What does it mean to me?

Primary Need: The Holy Spirit of Truth (John 16:13)

1. Our Approach to the Text:

Need to ask questions of the text:

Who? (main characters):

Who is in the text etc....

Why? (writer's intention):

Theocentric – God centred – teach us something about God
(character, purposes, demands)
What does it tell us about man? (prone to sin...rebel...'my way'
syndrome)

(easy to skip this – go straight to – 'what does this mean to me?')

Why a genealogy at the end of Ruth? (Ruth 4:18-22)

"We will never go wrong if we focus on God, His actions & His requirements" – Kaiser.

Where? (The Context):

"It's starting to rain" – may have different meanings if:

- a) About to go on a family picnic
- b) In a drought ridden land awaiting rain
- c) Next to bat in the Ashes test
- d) Have just been ribbing Noah for months
- e) Story of Noah (judgement)
- f) Elijah on Mount Carmel (power over nature)

Naomi's boys meeting Moabite girls – significant?

How? (structure):

Is there a pattern to the narrative or text – ie repeated promises, patterns of God's faithfulness, man's faithlessness, God's response to sin et al - Joshua 1 (what is the emphasis?)

What might we deduce from Yahweh's repeated exhortation that He would be with Joshua?

What? (content):

Observe the text: Jonah 1:1-2

What does it tell us about God – what does it assume?

- a) Every nation is accountable to Him (not just Israel) – He is a 'world class' deity
- b) Every servant owes obedience to Him (even though Jonah did not get it)

1 Sam 1:1-2 – Hannah, Judges 13:2 – Manoah, Gen 11:30 – Sarai

Familiar? Barrenness...vintage Yahweh....working in hopelessness

Ask 'So What?' – How does this apply to me? To Today?

Ruth 1 – leaving God's place of provision during a famine?

1 Sam 1:1-2 – Hannah – the Lord working in individual lives for His purposes.

2. Quirks and Observations:

My bike – behaves strangely – if didn't know – could get stuck (reserve tap!)

Relicence (reserve):

Not 'mills and boon' – writer may be fairly factual – wanting us to *think* about story or line: '..then the Lord shut him in' (Gen 7:16) – what picture does this give?

Passages that don't mention God – Gen 37, Esther! – WHAT is God doing? Think about it....not always spoon-fed.

Hindsight:

We have it – don't read as if the biblical characters had:

Job: didn't know context of ch1:6-12, or 2:1-7f – he goes through the whole struggle in the dark!

Application: we need to know that in our trials – there is often much we do not know – a heavenly agenda.

Hannah – 1 Sam 1 – grief in early verses – we know end of the chapter

Selectivity:

Gaps in scripture – Moses in desert (Ex 2:23 – the 'backside of the desert') – in between obvious activity from Yahweh – there can be a lot of nappies to change, tasks to do, floors to clean, Abraham (Gen 16:16, 17:1) – 13 year gap – of knowing nothing!

Plenty of time to doubt Yahweh!

Jonah 4:11 – unanswered question from the Lord – why does the writer do this? Is it a question for us? Does he want us to answer it for our own situation?

Humour/Sarcasm:

1 Sam 5 (Dagon) – has to be picked up – some ‘god’! But what’s the serious point? Yahweh achieves alone what His people could not – He alone is the One, omnipotent God – He doesn’t need us, but He wants us.

1 Kings 18:27 –Elijah’s taunts on Mount Carmel – hidden truth of the futility of other ‘gods’.

‘only for a while’ (Ruth 1:1) – sin takes you farther than you would want to (Ruth 1:4).

Use of names: Ruth (House of PRAISE – Judah, House of BREAD – Bethlehem) – running from God’s provision (lack of trust)

Imagination:

What was the game like? (big explanation!)

Writers do this – with no video (only verbeo) – they emphasise (then again) God’s power, greatness (see Josh 11:1-5 – impressive summary of opponents – could have used fewer words – ‘a big army’ – not as impressive – but also emphasises greatness of God’s victory).

Surprise:

Gideon (send men home) – Judges 7:1-9

Jonah (1:1-5 – his reaction – not only disobedient – but calm with it – asleep! What happened to ‘turmoil’ outside of Yahweh’s will?)

Or Josh 24:19 – the obvious thing at an evangelistic rally is to accept those who ‘come forward’! Surprise! YAHWEH does not want their attention but their earnestness!

Emphasis (repetition):

No computers to **bold font** or underline!

Psalms for sure (Psalm 1) – parallelism.

When Yahweh tells you three times He will deliver you – you believe him! (See Joshua 1).

1 Sam 3 – God’s quiet work, repeated work ‘and the boy ministered’.

Concentrated: in 1 or 2 sentences:

‘and each one did as they saw fit’ (Judges 21:25)

1 Sam 4:1 ‘the Word of the Lord came to the whole of Israel..’
(what does the Geography emphasise?)

Kings is good at this – whole lives summed up with: ‘..and (name) did evil in the eyes of the Lord’.

Ruth 1 – thick and fast – famine, a move, death...opening 5 verses – 10 years! One’s life can fall apart in 5 verses! Prosperity not guaranteed!

Tension:

Nehemiah’s request to the Persian King (Neh 2:1-8).

Dialogue between David & Goliath (1 Sam 17:38=47).

3.Theology:

Covenant – look for His promises (repeated...I will....Gen 12, 15, 17)

Redemption – buying back His people from their plight....constantly pursuing

Pattern – God’s promises, people promise to follow, people disobey, God’s judgement, people’s repentance, God’s forgiveness...obedience theme –Deuteronomy....Joshua 1:7....

God’s Omnipotence & Sovereignty – triumph over adversity (significant nativities – Moses, Samuel, Jesus...)

God’s consistent judgement on Sin (Saul – 1 Sam 13, Jonah, Genesis 3)

God’s big project – redemption of the planet – Jonah (Nineveh), Abraham, Naaman, Ruth...

Nasties – “there are no non-theological passages in scripture” – Esther, 2 Sam 6 (Holy Terror – Uzzah) – we like emotion when worshipping –how about Holy fear?