

How to Read the Stories of People in the Bible

The Bible is God's story, but it's also the story of women and men who played unique roles in redemption history. Some parts seem rather large, while others seem small, but each one is important.

Here are some principles to keep in mind as you read about the lives of people in the Bible.

1

Biblical narrative is often descriptive rather than prescriptive. Examples are not always positive or meant to be followed.

2

God spoke into culture as it existed. **Our social norms are different than those we encounter in the Bible.** It is important to keep in mind that not all practices found in Scripture (e.g., polygamy and slavery) were a part of God's design for His creation. At the same time, we remember that, though human laws and customs vary over time, eternal truths remain unchanged.

3

God's revelation is gradual. Since we have the complete Old and New Testaments, we benefit from knowledge about certain aspects of God's plan that the women and men we read about in the New Testament did not.

4

The Bible was written by people living in the middle of redemption history. The kingdom of God changed everything—and it continues to do so. During the first century, when the New Testament was being written, those changes were only beginning to be felt by the larger Roman world.

5

Women and men in the Bible are complex and rarely fall into neat categories of “good” and “bad.” Jesus is the only one who is truly good.

6

In the Bible, God worked through broken, sinful people. (He still does!)

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