

# Preaching from *Judges*

Solent Gospel Partnership  
November 2013

# The Nature of Narrative

- About 40% of the OT is narrative
- Issues of literary genre
- Issues of familiarity with genre

# The Nature of Narrative

It is impossible for those

who have once been enlightened,  
who have tasted the heavenly gift,  
who have shared in the Holy Spirit,  
who have tasted

the goodness of the word of God  
and the powers of the coming age  
and who have fallen away,  
to be brought back to repentance.

To their loss they are

crucifying the Son of God all over again  
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# The Nature of Narrative

- Our emphasis is on informing people of what the text says and then “to urge our listeners to respond to the “how-tos” of spiritual life seen in the text.”

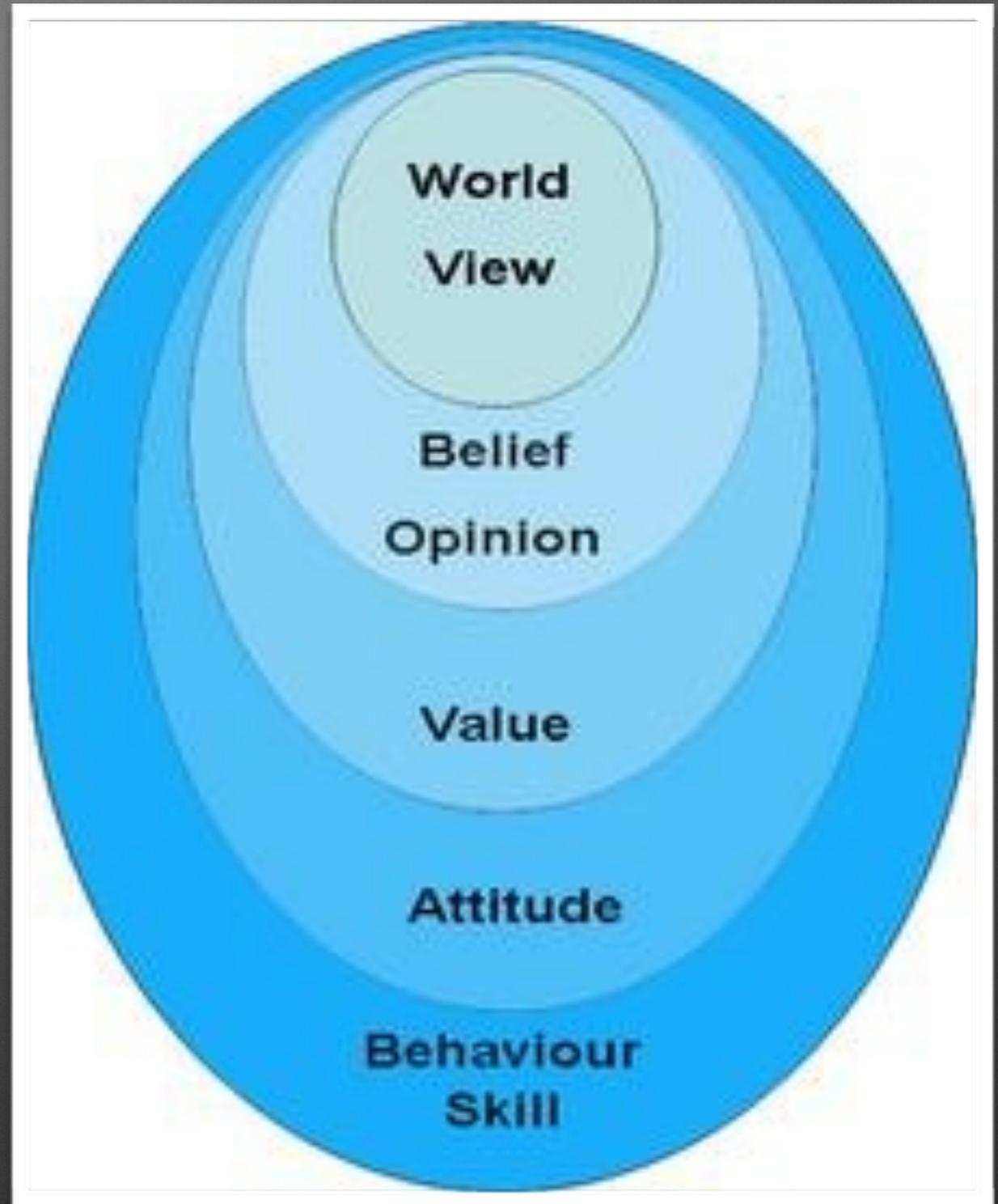
# The Nature of Narrative

- Narrative conveys world views rather than propositional truth

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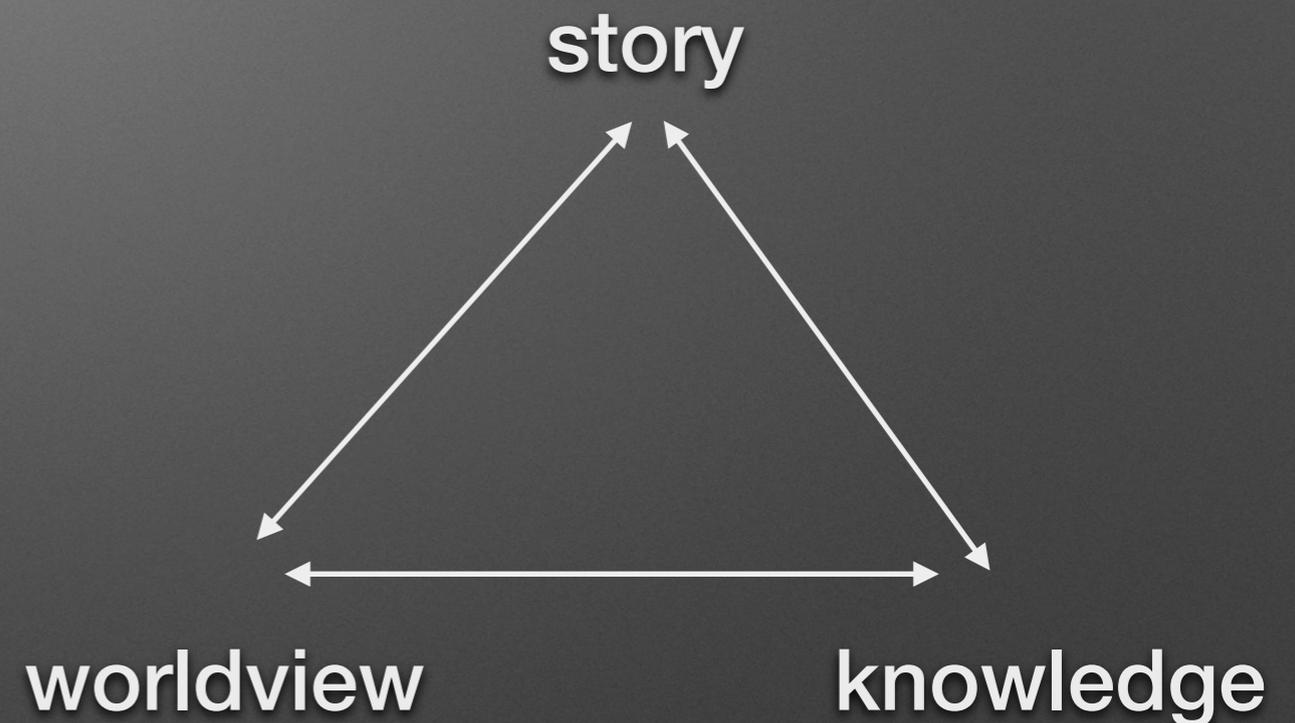
- Narrative has the power to transform because it tackles not just **knowledge** - *what* we know - but also **world view** - the context *within which* we know.

# The Nature of Narrative



# The Nature of Narrative

- [Narratives] cannot therefore be translated into ‘propositional truth’ without reducing the complex but powerful triangle of story, knowledge and worldview to something with far less public relevance or meaningfulness or indeed transformative power.



- Moritz T, 2000, “Reflecting on N. T. Wright’s Tools for the Task” in Bartholomew, C, Green C & Möller K, *Renewing Biblical Interpretation Volume 1*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 185

# The Nature of Narrative

- Faithfulness to the text
- Faithfulness to the original intention, or purpose, of the author

# The Nature of Narrative

- Aims at eliciting the same response from our listeners as the author was aiming for in the original story

# The Nature of Narrative

- What is said *in* the story is quite distinct from what is said *through* the story
  - Tate WR, 2008, *Biblical Interpretation An Integrated Approach*, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 106

# The Nature of Narrative

- Biblical narrators rarely make specific moral comments upon the acts of their protagonists

# The Nature of Narrative

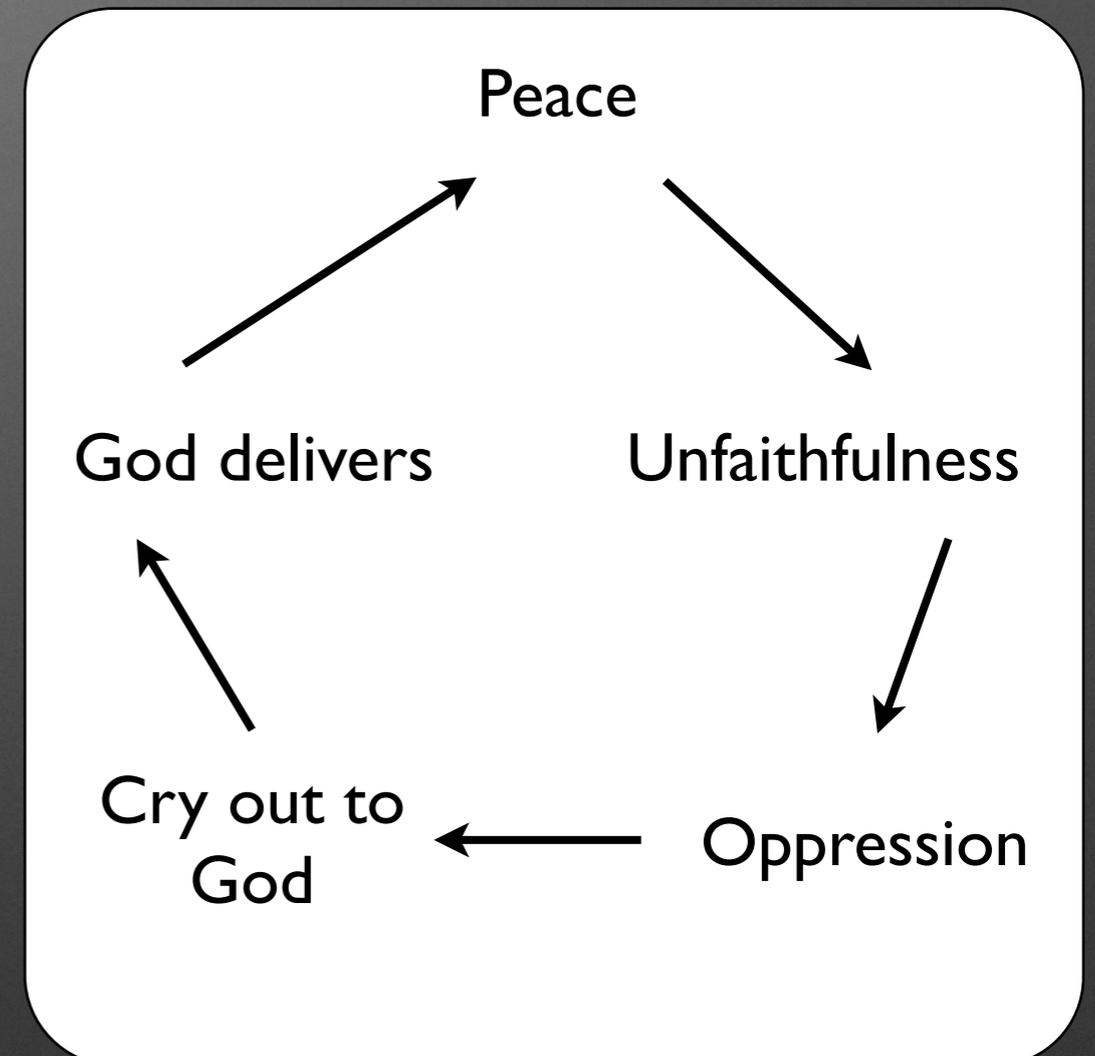
- “The biblical narrator does not raise a literary eyebrow” when the Levite uses his concubine to defend himself, or when he then defiles her a second time after she has been returned to him dead.
- Bach A, 1999, “Rereading the Body Politic: Women and Violence in Judges 21” in Brenner A (Ed), *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 146-47

# Repetition

- Individual words or sounds
  - Gen 2:25, 'naked' and 3:1, 'crafty'
- Abimelech
  - kills 69 men on one stone
  - is killed by one woman and one stone

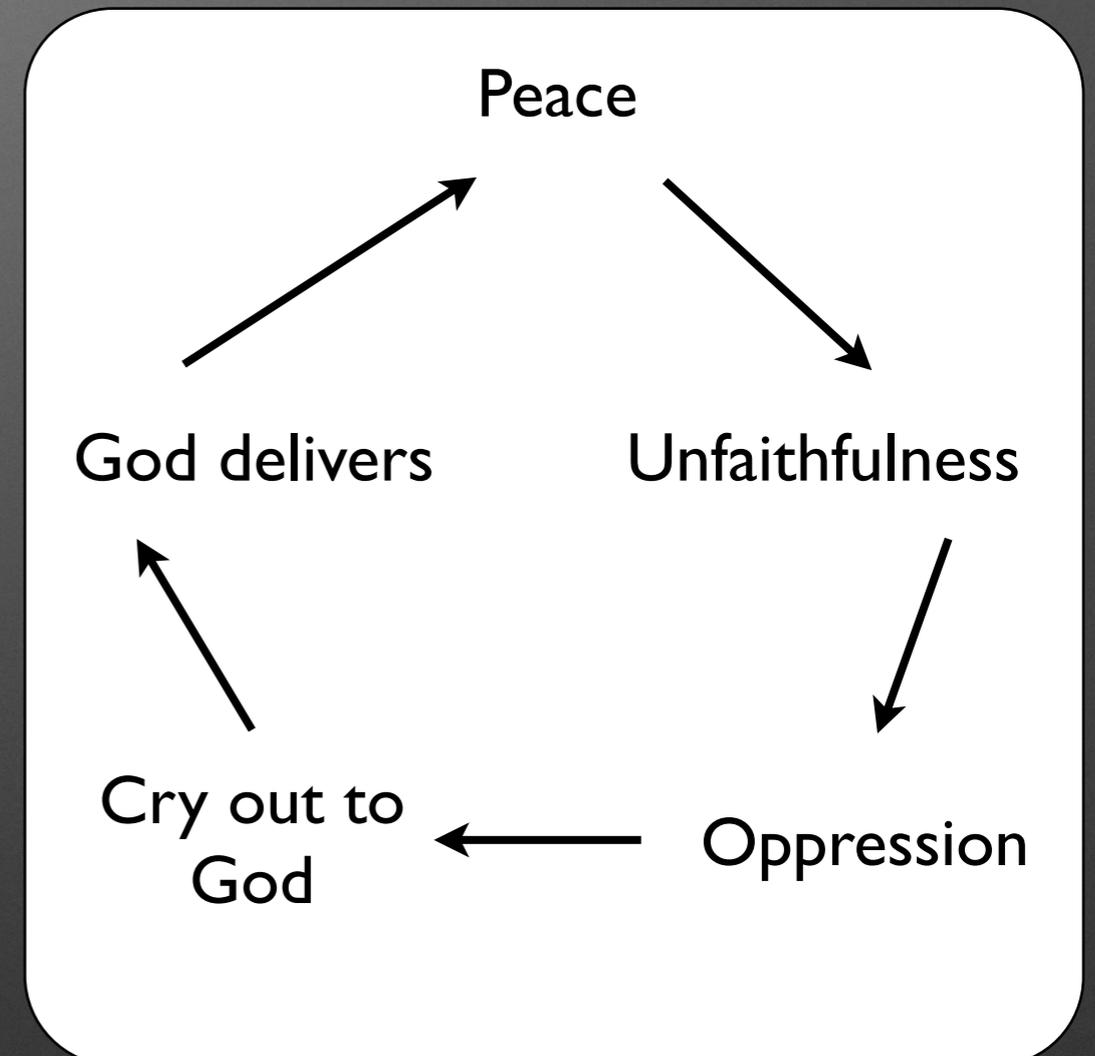
# Repetition

- The cyclical nature of the book
- The canaanisation of Israel



# Repetition

- This is more a spiral than a circle where each section leads to a lower spiritual and moral state, not just of Israel but of the judges themselves.



# Repetition

- The land had peace
  - Judges 3:11, 30, 5:31, 8:28
- In those days Israel had no king
  - Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19,1 21:25

# Plot

- Works on a number of different levels, or layers
- It is the driving force of a story
- Sermons on narratives need to retain something of this 'shape'

# Plot

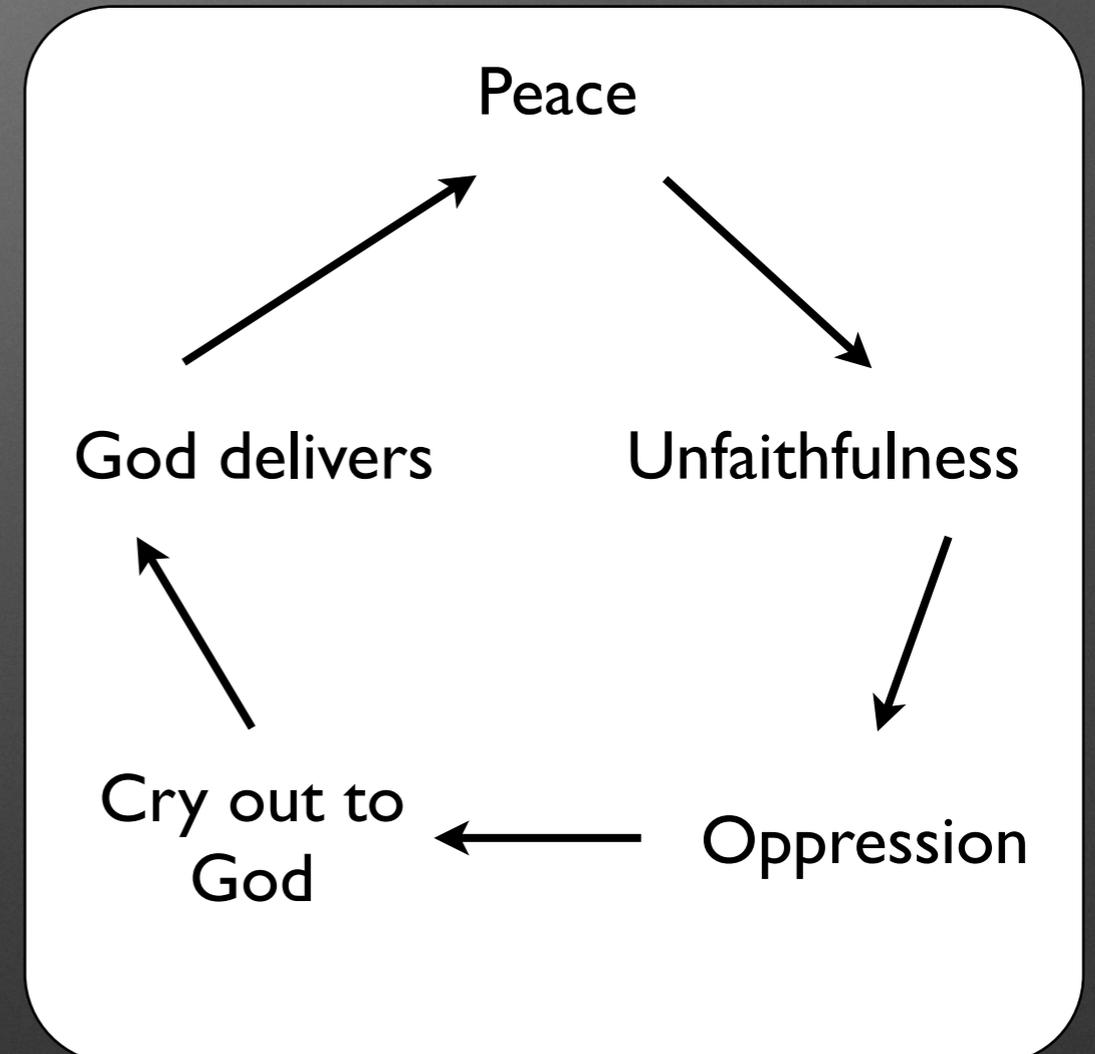
- Narratives are not theses supported by logically subordinate arguments leading to practical implications. Any sermon based on a narrative which is structured in this manner has failed to engage with the literary essence of the story.
- Turner LA, 2010, “”Preaching Narrative: Plot” in Kent GJR, Kissling PJ & Turner LA (Eds) *‘He Began with Moses...’ Preaching the Old Testament Today*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 21

# Plot

- Initial Situation
- Complication
- Transforming Action
- Dénouement
- Final Situation

# Plot

- Initial Situation - Unfaithfulness of the Israelites
- Complication - Specific oppression
- Transforming Action - Yahweh responds to the people's cry
- Dénouement - Yahweh rescues his people through the chosen judge
- Final Situation - The land has peace



# Plot

- **Initial Situation** - The continuing conquest of Canaan
- **Complication** - The apostasy of Israel
- **Transforming Action** - Yahweh responds to the people's cry
- **Dénouement** - Yahweh rescues his people through the chosen judges
- **Final Situation** - The need for a King

# Plot

- How might you map the plot of the story of Jephthah?

# Plot

Initial Situation	1-3	Intro to Jephthah and his situation
Complication	4-28	War with Ammonites
		the approach to Jephthah
		the messages to the Ammonites
Transforming Action	29-33a	Spirit comes on Jephthah
		Jephthah's vow
Dénouement	33b	Victory
Further Complication	34-39	Sacrifice of daughter
Final Situation	40	annual lament

# Plot

Initial Situation	29	Battle against the Ammonites
Complication	30-31	Vow
Transforming Action	34-35	Jephthah's daughter comes out of the house
Dénouement	36-39a	Jephthah fulfils his vow
Final Situation	39b-40	Commemoration of Jephthah's daughter

# Plot

- Final Situations can be 'open' situations, not necessarily 'closed'.
- The end of Judges is an 'open' Final Situation

# Plot

- Looking for *Pivotal Points*
  - 11:4-6 - *The Gileadites turn to Jephthah*
  - 11:27 - *May Yahweh, the Judge, decide*
  - 11:30 - *The vow*
  - 11:34 - *Daughter comes out to meet him*

# Character

- Narrative is not just about *plot* - what happens, it is also about *character*–
  - *why someone acts the way they act*

# Character

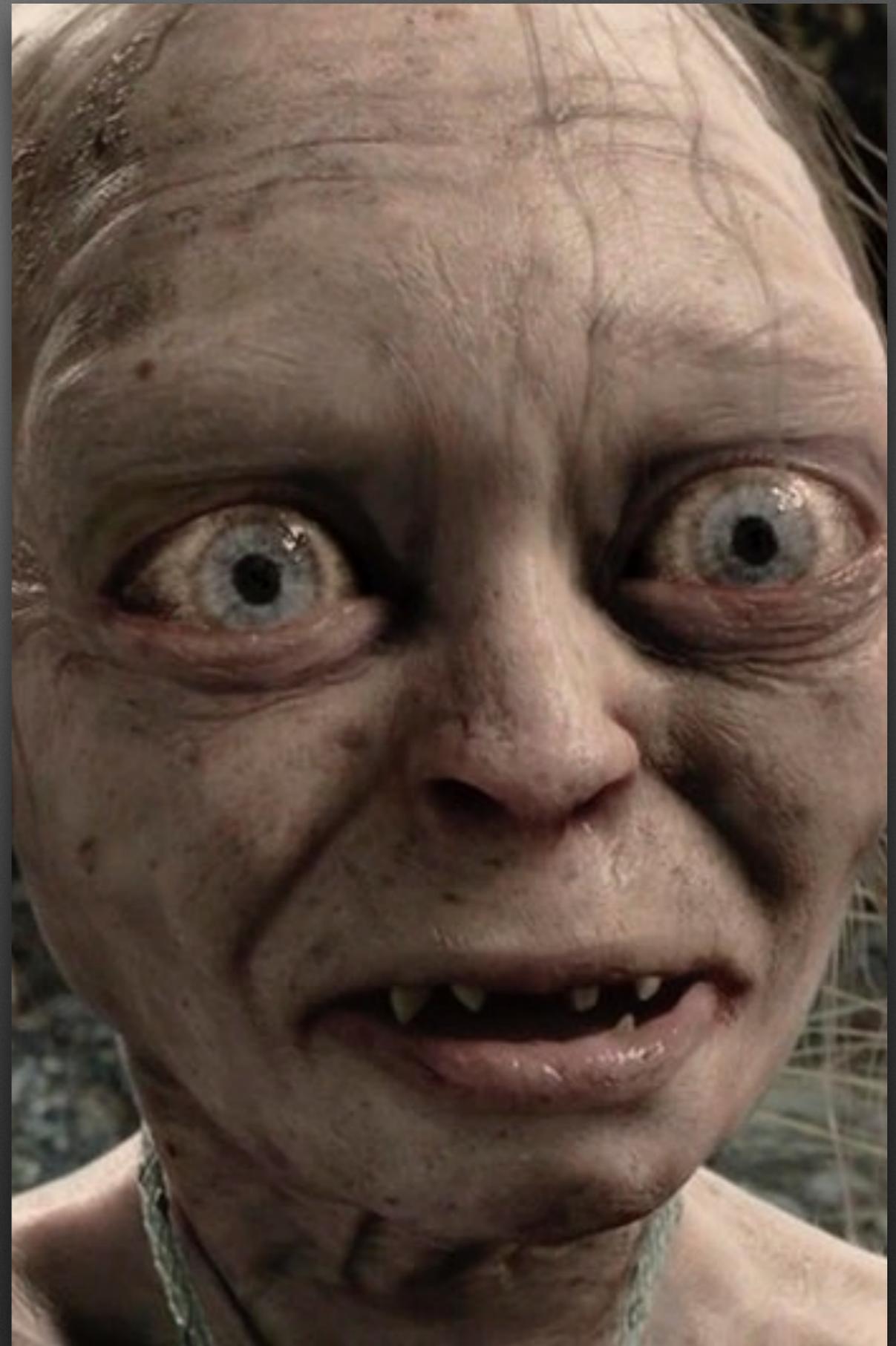
- Reading human characters heroically
- Oversimplification of the narrative portrayal
- Reading characters as moral models
- Psychologising of characters

# Character

- The danger of reducing Gideon to the status of a hero
  - the putting out of the fleece (Judges 6:36-40)
  - the ephod becomes a stumbling block (Judges 8:22-7)

# Character

The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter



# Character

- A final concern is our tendency to miss the point of OT narratives and the depiction of characters within them. OT depictions of human characters are generally not given to vilify Israel's enemies or to heroise her ancestors... [They] refuse to hide the weaknesses, failings, sins and foibles of its human characters because their character and example is not the focal point. In fact their weaknesses point to the remarkable fact that the Lord chooses to use them anyway.

- Kissling PJ, 2010, "Preaching Narrative: Characters" in Kent GJR, Kissling PJ & Turner LA (Eds) *'He Began with Moses...'* *Preaching the Old Testament Today*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 34-35

# Character

- God is the only truly reliable character in OT narrative!

# Character

- Searching for 'markers' of character
  - Close reading of the text

# Character

	CHARACTER POINT	THOUGHTS
:1	Mighty warrior	Usually a positive description
	Son of a prostitute	Parentage raises issues of morality - not something we are comfortable with, but a 'clue' we are expected to pick up on.
:2	Driven away from family	The outcast - links back to another outcast in the book, perhaps: Abimelech
:3	Leader of outlaws	His companions are 'empty' men
:9	Ambitious	"if <i>Yahweh</i> gives them over to me, I will be your head" - There was no king in Israel...
:11f	Knowledge of Israel's history	Is his biblical knowledge genuine? Perhaps, but how does this tie in with later actions?
:27	<i>Yahweh</i> , the Judge	Mentions God, but sense something else is happening—using God, as he does earlier for his own ends. Manipulation...
:29	Spirit of <i>Yahweh</i> comes on him	What are we to make of this? Does this mean that God approves of all he does?
:30	Vow	Manipulation, naivety or ruthlessness, pagan influence—the canonisation of Israel
:35	Cannot break vow	Lack of knowledge of God's Word (but see above), or unwillingness to lose face?

# Character

- An ambitious and ruthless man who is ready to manipulate God and people for his own ends and who, despite seemingly good knowledge of God's dealings with his people and his word(?), uses pagan ideas of how to manipulate God for his own ends and is then unwilling to lose face, even when that means the sacrifice of his only child.

# Biblical Context

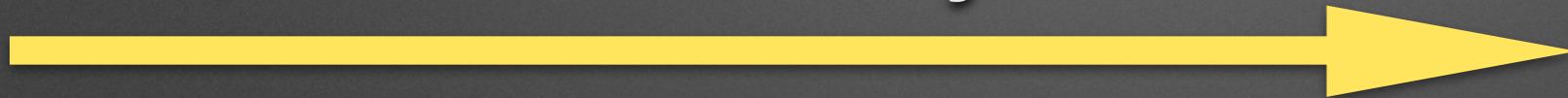
- Our preaching needs to place the individual story within the overarching biblical story

# Biblical Context

Biblical Story



OT Story



Judges



Jephthah



Post-Golgotha



# Biblical Context



# Some Themes

- God is sovereign
- God cannot be manipulated
- God protects Israel because of the coming Messiah
- God uses even fallen people

# Preaching Narrative

- All preaching is transformational
- Narrative
  - Heart as well as head
  - Confronting world views

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