



# DIVING DEEPER INTO THE BIBLE

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## How to Properly Interpret Bible Genres

Definition: A genre is a category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, characterized by \_\_\_\_\_ in form, style, or subject matter.

### HOW TO INTERPRET PARABLES

Definition: A parable is a made-up story that teaches a \_\_\_\_\_.

Why did Jesus speak in parables? To conceal truths from his adversaries and to reveal truths to his followers (Matt. 13:10-11, 13-15).

Example: The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

How to interpret parables:

- Discover the setting (historical, cultural) of the parable.
- List the main elements of the parable.
- Discover the need that prompted the parable.
- State the central truth of the parable.

### HOW TO INTERPRET THE PSALMS

Definition: The Psalms are the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Jews often containing word pictures that are easy to remember.

The Psalms are uniquely emotive, they express our inner selves to God, they make us sensitive to the emotional struggles of others, and they stimulate our imagination, often giving us suitable words for praising God.

Examples: Psalm 1, 23, 73, 189.

How to interpret the Psalms:

- Divide the poem (psalm) into stanzas. (A stanza is a set of lines that are grouped together in a poem. Hint: Stanzas are usually shown as separate sections).

- Summarize the main idea of each stanza.
- Summarize the main idea of the poem, based on the main ideas of each stanza.

## HOW TO INTERPRET OLD TESTAMENT LAW

Definition: The term "Old Testament Law" is essentially referring to the \_\_\_\_\_ found primarily in four of the 39 Old Testament Books.

Examples: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and a few verses in the New Testament.

How to interpret Old Testament Law:

- Look for absolute truths such as murder, stealing, adultery, and lying are wrong.
- Look for transferable principles such as "do not reap the edges of your field but leave them for the poor (Lev. 19:9). This example gives us a principle for today in that we are to take a portion of our income and give it to the Lord's work which is to include caring for the poor (Matt. 19:21. Luke 14:13; 19:8; John 13:29; 2 Cor. 9:7-9; Gal. 2:8).

## HOW TO INTERPRET THE GOSPELS

Definition: The word 'Gospel' literally means \_\_\_\_\_ and it is mentioned 90+ times in the Bible.

Broadly speaking, the Gospel is the whole of scripture; the grand narrative of God's plan to restore humanity to Himself. Specifically speaking, the Gospels are the good news about Jesus. The story of who He is and what He did.

Examples: The four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each author provides overlapping and new information.

How to interpret the Gospels:

- Read and interpret parallel passages in each of the Gospels."<sup>1</sup>
- Summarize the parallel passages.

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent resource for doing this is Johnston M. Cheney's "The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Combined as One."

## HOW TO INTERPRET HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

Definition: A historical narrative is a story of the \_\_\_\_\_ that gives meaning to \_\_\_\_\_.

Example: The story of Ruth which exemplifies God's loyal love (Heb. *Hesed*).

How to interpret historical narratives:

- Identify the characters that typically consist of a protagonist (the primary person), an antagonist (a person who brings about conflict or tension), and sometimes an agonist (other major characters).
- Describe the plot which is a series of causes and effects that shape the story as a whole.
- Describe the resolution: The conclusion of a story's plot. Also known as the denouement, the resolution is a literary term for the final plot points that occur after a story's climax and falling action. A resolution can be a scene or series of scenes that tie a narrative story together near the end of the story.

## HOW TO INTERPRET THE EPISTLES

Definition: An epistle is a \_\_\_\_\_ usually consisting of an opening, a thanksgiving, the main body, an exhortation, and a closing.

Examples: Romans; I and II Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; I and II Thessalonians; I and II Timothy; Titus; and Philemon.

How to interpret epistles. When reading an epistle ask yourself: (W<sup>5</sup>)

- Who wrote it?
- Where was it written?
- When was it written?
- Who was it written to?
- Why was it written?

## HOW TO INTERPRET APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Definition: Apocalyptic literature is a specific form of \_\_\_\_\_, largely involving symbols and imagery and predicting disaster and destruction.

Apocalyptic literature frequently contains strange descriptions and bizarre imagery: the terrible, iron-toothed beast of Daniel 7, the long-haired locusts with men's faces of Revelation 9, and the four-faced creatures of Ezekiel 1. Apocalyptic literature involves descriptions of the end of the world and typically depicts grandiose, cataclysmic events.

Examples in the Old Testament, include books such as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. The same is true of certain passages in the New Testament, such as 2 Thessalonians 2, Mark 13, and Matthew 24. And, of course, the entire book of Revelation is apocalyptic; in fact, the Greek word *apocalypse* means "revelation."

How to interpret apocalyptic literature:

- Look for similes. A simile is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things using the words "like" or "as." Common similes include the descriptive phrases "cool as a cucumber," "cold as ice," and "sly like a fox." Writers often use similes to introduce concrete images into writing about abstract concepts.
- Look for the main points of a passage.
- Respect various views.
- Consult sound extra-biblical resources for scholarly insights.

#### Where to Get More Information

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