

Interpretation II: Getting Clear on Genre Implications

How to Study the Bible Like a Pro – Week 3

Introduction

- Key question
 - How should you interpret a parable different than a passage from the Book of Acts or a passage from an epistle or a psalm?
 - If you answered, “I have no clue,” don’t worry, you’re normal.
 - What’s important to understand at this point is that you just can’t pick up your Bible and assume that you can interpret all of it the same way from Genesis to the Book of the Revelation—because you can’t (if you want to be a responsible interpreter).
- Definition – a genre (which comes from the French word for “_____”) refers to the type (i.e. kind) of literature of a specific literary piece
 - Even though you might not use the word “genre” all the time, you do use the concept all the time. For example, you might say, “That’s an action/adventure movie” or “That’s a romantic comedy” or “That’s a thriller.” Or you might say, “That’s chick lit” or “That’s a text book” or “That’s poetry” or “That’s satire,” or “That’s a tragedy.”
 - There is no such thing as a _____ text
- To interpret anything in light of the author’s intent, you always want to figure out what the genre of that text is.
 - For example, if I were to say, “It is red, white and blue,” what does that mean?
 - If I were writing a historical narrative about the founding of our country, what would you assume I meant by that phrase?
 - If I were writing a poem, what would you assume I meant by that phrase?
 - If I were writing a riddle, what would you assume I meant by that phrase?
 - The same phrase, in different genres, often has very different meanings.
- Last week you learned the most important general principles about responsible Biblical interpretation. This week, you’re going to learn several specific guidelines and rules that will help you be a better interpreter based on the genre of the text you’re reading.
- Book recommendation: “How to Read the Bible For All It’s Worth” by Fee and Stuart
- A few quick reminders
 1. Interpretation = what the text _____ (to the original audience)
 2. Application = what the text means today (for you or others)
 3. Job #1 is always to interpret the text in its original context. Job #2 is to apply the principle of the text to today
 4. The goal in accurate interpretation isn’t to be a certain knower but a _____ interpreter.
 5. Don’t forget the hermeneutical spiral (i.e. be humble)
 6. Four steps to studying the Bible like a pro (ORIA)
 - Observation (“What do I see?”)
 - Research (“What could this mean?”)
 - Interpretation (“What did it mean?”)
 - Application (“What does this mean for me?”)
 7. The Bible is an _____ document, not a systematic theology

8. Since all Scripture is God-breathed, part of your job (and mine) is to figure out how to stitch verses together to develop a theology about the issues raised in those verses.
9. _____ reigns as king in interpretation

I. New Testament Genres

1. Gospels

- a. They're memoirs of Jesus, written by his followers (i.e. not autobiographies written by Jesus Christ himself)
- b. This means that there are _____ historical contexts to consider. The first, when Jesus spoke (27-30 A.D.) and the second, when the author of the text wrote (mid 50's - 90 A.D.)
- c. To interpret correctly, you need to remember to whom each gospel was written ("the who always determines the what")
 - i. Matthew - to Jews
 - ii. Mark - to Romans
 - iii. Luke - to Gentiles/Greeks
 - iv. John - to second generation believers and pre-believers
- d. Jesus spoke in Aramaic and yet each of the gospels is written in Greek
- e. Key principles
 - i. Think progressively - where does this text fit in the progress of this gospel record? Remember when you're interpreting the gospels, all of Jesus' teachings are pre-cross/pre-resurrection.
 - ii. Review the other gospels for _____ stories. What's similar? What's different? Why?
 - "When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery." Mark 10:10-12
 - "Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." Matthew 19:8-9
 - iii. Remember, a historical narrative is not _____ unless there's a general command connected to it. Just because Jesus or the disciples or someone else did something doesn't mean all believers should do that thing.
 - iv. Think "pericopes" (which are individual stories Jesus told) vs. paragraphs or chapters
 - v. Interpret Jesus' statements literally according to the literary form he's using (e.g. metaphor, proverb, hyperbole, parable, etc.)

2. Parables

- a. A parable is a story with a _____ (i.e. don't get lost in the details). Therefore, you want to focus on, "What's the point?"

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'"

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:1-8

b. Parables major on metaphors and similes

i. Similes (use the word "like")

"He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." Mt. 13:31-32

ii. Metaphors

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" Mt. 3:7

c. They're designed to evoke a response. So ask, "What's the intended response?"

d. Note the _____ between similar parables written by different authors. Why differ? Remember, Jesus didn't just teach these parables once, he taught them often and in different contexts to different audiences.

e. Look for the _____ in the story

"The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. "These who were hired last worked only one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day." Mt. 20:9-12

3. Epistles

a. Remember, epistles are _____ documents not systematic theologies

b. Since they're written to the church (post-resurrection) they're the most directly applicable texts to us today

c. Because they're occasional documents you'll want to _____ the historical situation in order to interpret them correctly

d. Distinguish between what's cultural and what _____ culture

i. *"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error." Rom. 1:24-27*

ii. *"But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head – it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head." 1 Cor. 11:5-6*

- e. Remember a text can never mean what it never could have meant

“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.”
1 Cor. 13:8-10

- f. Think in _____
 - g. Study the culture of the times (especially, Greco-Roman culture)
4. The Book of the Revelation
- a. Revelation is a combination of ____ types of literature: apocalyptic, prophecy and epistle
 - b. Apocalyptic is primarily concerned with judgment and salvation
 - c. Apocalyptic uses cryptic and symbolic imagery and language, along with dreams and visions to convey nuggets of truth
 - d. Principles
 - i. Get to know the historical situation around 90 A.D. (church and state in conflict)
 - ii. Use _____ and other biblical tools to help you understand the symbols
 - iii. Like parables, focus on the main point of the dream or vision (not the little details)
 - iv. Don't try to work out a chronological order to the book of the Revelation (it goes through cycles). Apocalyptic literature isn't interested in chronology.

II. Old Testament Genres

1. Old Testament Narrative
- a. A narrative text is a reflection on a true event (not a made up story) told for a purpose (e.g. to show God at work among his people)
 - b. Narratives are _____ in what they tell so they frequently don't tell us everything we want to know (i.e. they couldn't anticipate questions people would ask three thousand years later).
 - c. Because narratives are selective, you should attempt to discern the intent of the author (why did they include what they did and why did they not include what they didn't)
 - d. Narratives are stories so you can use the same kind of analysis that you would with a book or novel. Who are the main characters? What's the plot? What's emphasized? What's missing? What's the setting? Etc.
 - e. The amount of text given to an event is not _____ to the amount of time those events took place in (e.g. Exodus 1 = 400 years, Exodus 2 = 40 years, Exodus 3 = one day)
 - f. They rarely teach directly. The lessons are found in the narratives themselves (i.e. they _____ truth vs. directly teach it)
 - a. For example, the story about David and Bathsheba doesn't say outright, "Don't commit adultery." Instead, it shows it.
 - g. Remember, narrative stories aren't meant to be normative.
 - h. Narratives record what happened, not necessarily what _____ have happened
 - i. Stick to the clear meaning of the text (i.e. don't look for something more unless there's a clue in the text to look deeper)
2. Old Testament Law
- a. The OT Law is found in the final four books of the Pentateuch (penta = five, the books of Moses) beginning in Exodus 20 (the 10 Commandments) and ends with the book of Deuteronomy (deutero = second, nomos = law; the second law)
 - b. The OT Law was a _____ between God and Israel. If Israel obeyed they were blessed, if they disobeyed they were cursed.
 - c. The Old Testament Law was given to the nation of Israel. It is not the same as the new covenant. So, unless a law is _____ in the NT, in general, it isn't binding (though we can obviously learn a lot through studying it)
 - d. Some OT stipulations have clearly not been renewed (i.e. the OT rituals or civil laws)

- e. Discern which kind of law you're reading
 - i. _____ laws (i.e. don't lie) – These generally transcend testaments
 - ii. Civil laws (i.e. capital punishment) – These generally don't unless restated
 - iii. Ceremonial (i.e. sacrifices) – These generally don't unless restated

"About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Acts 10:9-15

3. Psalms and Biblical Poetry

- a. Psalms weren't written spontaneously – they were _____
- b. They were designed to be worship aids and were therefore designed to connect with the _____ first, more than the head
- c. While they contain doctrinal truths they weren't necessarily designed to convey doctrine
- d. They were written musically (i.e. as songs)
- e. Principles
 - i. Psalms come in _____ major forms (Lament, Thanksgiving, Praise, Wisdom, Royal, History, and Trust)
 - ii. Interpret literally according to the literary form being used
 - iii. Poetry is written in _____ (two lines reflect a statement)
 - 1. Synonymous parallelism
*"Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;" Ps. 95:6*
 - 2. Explanatory (or synthetic) parallelism
*"Tremble and do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent." Ps. 4:4*
 - 3. Antithetical parallelism
*"The heart of the wise inclines to the right,
but the heart of the fool to the left." Eccl. 10:2*

4. Wisdom Literature/Proverbs

- a. Proverbs are _____ statements about wisdom (the application of knowledge) designed to help us make godly/wise decisions about life.
- b. Proverbs are _____ truths, not iron clad promises

*"Start children off on the way they should go,
and even when they are old they will not turn from it." Prov. 22:6 NIV*

*"Train up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it." Prov. 22:6 NASB*

- c. Their wording is designed for memory not theological correctness
- d. Be aware of personification (for example, talking about wisdom being a woman)
- e. As always, look for the _____ before you attempt to apply the proverb to a specific situation
- f. Most parables are written in parallelism and should be interpreted as such

*"He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself,
And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself.*

*Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you,
Reprove a wise man and he will love you.*

*Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser,
Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning.” Prov. 9:7-9*

5. Prophecy

- a. In general, prophecy is more about “_____ -telling” than foretelling (i.e. it’s more about looking back at God’s word and applying it to that context than predicting an event in the future)
- b. The key to unlocking prophecy is remembering the covenantal idea of _____ and _____ (i.e. prophets tend to be covenantal enforcers)
 - i. Blessing – Deut. 28:1-14

“If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country ...”

- ii. Cursing – Deut. 28:15ff

“However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country ...”

- iii. Remember the _____ context to interpret prophetic material correctly (1000 B.C. = United Kingdom, 922 B.C. = Divided Kingdom, 722 B.C. = Israel/Northern Kingdom defeated by the Assyrians, 605-586 B.C. = Judah/Southern Kingdom defeated by the Babylonians, 539 B.C. = Persians defeated the Babylonians)
 - i. Pre-exilic (i.e. Jonah, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Amos, Zephaniah, Habakkuk etc.)
 - ii. Exilic (i.e. Ezekiel, Daniel)
 - iii. Post-exilic (i.e. Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)
- d. Prophecy is characterized by a lot of symbolic imagery (i.e. use commentaries to help)
- e. As with any other Biblical text, start with their time frame, interpret the text as it was originally intended and then discern the _____ you can pull across time to apply to your life

*“Seek good, not evil,
that you may live.
Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you,
just as you say he is.*

*Hate evil, love good;
maintain justice in the courts.
Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy
on the remnant of Joseph.” Amos 5:14-15*

Making It Real

1. Match the book of the Bible with the genre

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| • Philippians | • Prophecy |
| • Ecclesiastes | • Gospel |
| • Leviticus | • Old Testament Narrative |
| • Luke | • Epistle |
| • Isaiah | • Wisdom/Proverbs |
| • 1 Samuel | • Old Testament Law |

2. What should you look for in similar /parallel stories in different books of the Bible?

3. What differences are there between interpreting a gospel passage versus an epistle passage?

4. What should you NOT do when interpreting a parable?

5. What implications does being an occasional document have on how you interpret a text?

6. Go back to the chapter you began studying in week one (the one you started using ORIA with). Based on what you learned today, would you make any changes to what you were thinking the text meant?

7. Which of the principles of interpretation that we covered in this session do you think will be most helpful for you in interpreting your Bible more like a pro moving forward?

8. Which principles do you think you'll struggle the most with? Why?

9. With whom will you share what you learned from this session in the next 48-72 hours?
Who: _____ When: _____