

## How to Study the Bible 3: The Bible As Literature

There are three things we must understand about the literature of the Bible:

A. The Bible is \_\_\_\_\_ literature with eternal relevance.

1. Every book of the Bible is shaped by the language, time, and culture in which it was originally written.
  2. We must first determine the historical meaning of the text before we can determine its application for us today.
- We must ask:
    - What did these words mean to the people who wrote them?
    - What did they think about God?
    - How did they understand themselves?

B. God's Word speaks to all mankind in every culture in every time in history.

1. The Scriptures are about \_\_\_\_\_, and because they are about Him, and not us, they are relevant for all mankind in every culture in every time in history.

***John 5.39** You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness **about me**,*

***Luke 24.44** everything written **about me** in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."*

2. We can misuse the Bible in all sorts of man-centered ways that serve our own interests.

***2 Tim 4.2–4** **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. **3** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but **having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions**, **4** and will turn away from **listening to the truth** and wander off into myths.*

- Before you can understand what the Bible means, you must first understand what the Bible \_\_\_\_\_.

C. There are different \_\_\_\_\_ of literature in the Bible.

- You must understand the differences between the different kinds of literature in the Bible, and you must learn to read them differently.

A. Exposition (explanation)

- A carefully reasoned argument or explanation of a truth.
- Usually moves from point to point to point in a logical way.
- The meaning is easy to understand and apply.
- The key to understanding these books properly is to pay attention to the structure and the use of important words.
- The first division of the book is DOCTRINAL teaching
- The second division is practical APPLICATION of the doctrinal part.

• Books:

○ Paul's letters:

- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 & 2 Thessalonians
- 1 & 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon

○ General letters:

- Hebrews
- James
- 1 & 2 Peter
- 1, 2, & 3 John
- Jude

B. Historical stories

Questions to ask:

- What is the plot?
- Who are the main people the story?
- What problems do the people have to deal with?
- What does the story teach us about God?

- **Books**
  - **Old Testament**
    - **Genesis**
    - **Exodus,**
    - **Numbers**
    - **Joshua**
    - **Judges**
    - **Ruth**
    - **1 & 2 Samuel**
    - **1 & 2 Kings**
    - **1 & 2 Chronicles**
    - **Ezra**
    - **Nehemiah**
    - **Esther**
  - **New Testament**
    - **Matthew**
    - **Mark**
    - **Luke**
    - **John**
    - **Acts**

### **C. Parables**

- **A short, simple story that illustrates a great truth or teaches a lesson about right and wrong.**
- **Examples:**
  - **The sower and the seed**
  - **The pearl of great price**
  - **The prodigal son**
  - **The good Samaritan**

### **D. Poetry**

- **Words intended to be spoken or sung.**
- **Uses images and symbols**
- **Uses many parallel expressions**
- **Easily stirs the emotions and imaginations**

**Psa 23.1**    *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

**Psa 18.2**    *The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,  
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,*

*my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

**Eccl 3.2–3** *a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
3 a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;*

- **Books:**

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon
- Lamentations

- **Hebrew poetry uses a lot of parallel statements.**

**Psa 32.1–2** *Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,  
whose sin is covered.  
2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,  
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

**Psa 103.15** *As for man, his days are like grass;  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;*

**Psa 40.4** *Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust,  
who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie!*

**Questions to ask:**

- **What is the main theme of the psalm or poem?**
- **What emotions does it express?**
- **What does it say about God?**
- **What images does it use to express ideas?**

**E. Proverbs**

- **Short statements of a moral truth.**
- **Expresses general principles**
- **Uses many parallel statements**
- **Uses many comparisons (notice the words “like” and “as”)**

**Prov 15.27** *Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household,  
but he who hates bribes will live.*

**Prov 20.3** *It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife,  
but every fool will be quarreling.*

## F. Prophecy

- The hardest type of literature to understand and apply correctly.
- Uses many warnings of coming judgment from God.
- Called people to repent and obey the Lord.
- Often predicts the future.
  
- **Books:**
  - **Old Testament**
    - **Isaiah**
    - **Jeremiah**
    - **Ezekiel**
    - **Daniel**
    - **Hosea**
    - **Joel**
    - **Amos**
    - **Obadiah**
    - **Jonah**
    - **Micah**
    - **Nahum**
    - **Habakkuk**
    - **Zephaniah**
    - **Haggai**
    - **Zechariah**
    - **Malachi**
  - **New Testament**
    - **Revelation**

### Questions to ask:

- What is the main problem the prophet is addressing?
- What symbols does he use to describe it?
- What is the response of the people?
- What happens after this prophet delivers his message?
- What does the prophet's message tell you about God?