



Reading the Bible for all  
it's Worth



# Reading the Bible for all its Worth

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## INTRODUCTION

When we speak of reading the Bible for all its worth, we are talking about the field of hermeneutics. *Hermeneutics* comes from a compound Greek word *hermeneuo*, which means to interpret. In the broadest sense, hermeneutics is the field of theological study that deals with the interpretation of Scripture.

In the field of hermeneutics, many different methods of interpretation exist. Below is a summary of some methods of interpretation.

The Allegorical Method suggests that the text's literal meaning is either not the true meaning, or it is not the only legitimate meaning. The elements of each passage have a corresponding spiritual reality, which is the *actual* or *ultimate* meaning of the passage. This method is unsatisfactory because there is no objective standard to which the interpreter must bow; the final authority ceases to be the Scriptures and becomes the interpreter. Whose allegorical symbols are correct? This question leads to establishing a hierarchical church authority that effectively replaces Scripture as the true locus of authority.

The Literalistic Method – suggests that every word must be taken absolutely literally including figures of speech and symbolism. Historical background is considered unnecessary and ignored. Any deviation from this rule is regarded as sacrilegious. This method is unacceptable because it makes Scripture unintelligible, contradictory, and unliveable (i.e., Lk. 14:26; Eph. 6:2). Also, subscribers to this method use it selectively.

The Naturalistic Method – suggests that the naturalistic world-view (i.e., the universe is a closed system of cause and effect) is the standard by which Scripture must be interpreted. Scripture becomes intelligible only as ancient man's attempt to explain nature. It presupposes that miracles are to be rejected as primitive explanations or myths. This method is unacceptable because it elevates an unproven worldview to a position of the final and highest authority.



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Devotional Interpretation – focuses almost exclusively upon those things that are personally applicable and edifying. It tends to ignore context, historical background, and other important interpretive principles. This is an unacceptable method of interpretation because it can easily lead to uncontrolled and inaccurate allegorizing. While the goals of this approach are commendable, a critical analysis of the text must precede the devotional question.

Ideological Interpretation – approaches the Bible by looking for material relevant to one's ideology. Ideological interpreters usually claim they are correcting oversights from earlier years by focusing on their area of interest. Most ideological readers also entertain a reader-centric hermeneutic. They are skeptical about ever knowing what the author intended to say, and focus instead on how the text affects the modern reader. Some of the categories of ideological hermeneutics are:

- Feminist Theology – seeks to study women in the Bible, and to demonstrate that the more enlightened speakers in Scripture were anti-patriarchy. In general, their studies are intended to explode the myth of patriarchy and to uncover cruelty to women.
- Marxist or Liberation Theology – seeks to show that the true intent of God in the Bible is to teach that poor and oppressed classes should be liberated from their oppression by the love of God. This approach tends to interpret redemptive language regarding economics and political power. They see class struggle in much of the conflict in the Bible.
- Deconstruction – Postmodern readers see the *metanarrative* (an overarching story that provides the basis of everything) of the Bible, not as teaching liberation, but as a tool used for exploitation. The authors of Scripture sought to legitimize the status quo of society by teaching people to obey their authorities. They also sought to justify aggrandizement of the state of Israel and the subjugation of neighboring peoples.

This method is unacceptable because this system holds that objectivity is never possible because the text was never objective in the first place. The first act of interpretation was the author's decision about what to



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include and what to exclude in his text. Additionally, the uncertainty of language means that modern readers might as well supply their own interpretation because we will never know what the “true” interpretation should be. For one to consider something as a “true” or “real” interpretation is naive because it fails to take into account the arbitrary nature of language and the social forces that distort people’s (both readers and author’s) view of the world.

Grammatical-historical Method – is the most valid method of interpretation. It involves four guiding principles of interpretation:

1. *Interpret the Bible literally:*

- Scripture should be understood in its literal, normal and plain sense. This is called *sensus literalis*, which is the Latin for “the literal sense.”
- While the Bible does contain figures of speech and symbols, even they were intended to convey literal truth.
- The Bible should be interpreted in its literal sense unless one or more conditions exist which indicate a figurative or symbolic interpretation.

2. *Consider the historical context of Scripture:*

- This means that we interpret a passage in its historical context.
- We ask what the text meant to the people to whom it was first written. This is called the *authorial intent*.
- This way we can develop a proper contextual understanding of the original intent of Scripture.

3. *Understand the Bible grammatically:*

- This means that we seek to understand the basic grammatical structure of the original text.
- To whom do the nouns refer? What is the tense of the main verb?
- When you ask simple questions like these the meaning of the text immediately become clearer.



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## 4. Consider the whole of Scripture:

- This is also called *analogia scriptura*, a Latin phrase which means the “analogy of Scripture” and refers to the fact that Scripture will not contradict itself.
- Included in this concept is:
  - Scripture must be interpreted in light of Scripture.
  - Scripture must never be set against Scripture.
  - Scripture must be studied in light of what appears to be primary and plain.

## PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

Associated with the Grammatical-Historical method of hermeneutics are certain principles that guide our search for a passage’s meaning.

- 1) **The Bible is to be read like any other book** – This rule is simply the application of the principle of *sensus literalis*. In other words, in the Bible, a verb is a verb, and a noun is a noun, just as in any other book.
- 2) **Historical narratives are to be interpreted by the didactic.**
  - The term didactic comes from the Greek word which means to teach or instruct.
  - Essentially this rule says that we must not take doctrine from historical narrative. We can only take doctrine from didactic or instructive passages.
  - The purpose of the historical narrative is to communicate events and stories. There is no desire in this as to the veracity of the rightness or wrongness of the characters in the story; the only concern is the facts of the story.
  - In the Gospels, we have many occasions where didactic is given alongside the historical narrative.
- 3) **The implicit is to be interpreted by the explicit** – Another way to say this is that we must allow the obvious teaching of Scripture to instruct us as to the proper understanding of the obscure passages of Scripture.



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- 4) **Determine carefully the meaning of words.**
  - Words mean things...if we, therefore, have the wrong definition of a word, we will undoubtedly have the wrong interpretation of a passage of Scripture.
  - Many words have more than one meaning and must be defined in the context of usage by the author.
  
- 5) **Note the presence of parallelisms in the Bible** – In ancient Near Eastern languages this is a very common and relatively easy to recognize this literary device (more will be said about parallelisms later).
  
- 6) **Note the difference between proverb and law** – A common mistake in biblical interpretation and application is to give a proverbial saying the weight and force of a moral absolute. Proverbs are catchy little couplets designed to express practical truisms. They reflect principles of wisdom for godly living. They do not reflect moral laws that are to be applied absolutely in every conceivable life situation.
  
- 7) **Scripture has only one meaning and should be interpreted literally unless a figurative interpretation is required by one of the following conditions:**
  - When it involves impossibility or an absurdity (Rev. 1:16; cf. Eph. 6:17).
  - When it involves a contradiction or inconsistency (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Mal. 3:6; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; cf. Gen. 6:6; 18:22-33).
  - When it involves an immoral conclusion (Mt. 6:14-15; cf. Eph. 1:7; Titus 3:5).
  - When it is otherwise implied by the context of the passage (Rev. 1:12-16; 9:1-11- note the appearance of the word “*like*” which introduces a simile).
  - When it is clearly stated to be figurative or allegorical (Gal. 4:21-31; especially vs. 24).



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- When it is more appropriate to be figurative for the reason of sheer common sense (2 Chr. 16:9; Ps. 34:15; 36:7; cf. Jn. 4:24).
- 8) **Interpret words in harmony with their meaning in the time of the author** – What is its use by the author in the passage and in other passages by the same author? What is its relation to its immediate context? What is its current use at the time of writing? What is its root meaning?
  - 9) **A word used more than once in the same context will have the same meaning each time it is used in that context.**
    - See John 3:16-20 - “world”
    - See 1 Peter 1:2, 20 - “foreknowledge”
  - 10) **Interpret the words of the prophets in their usual, literal and historical sense, unless the context and manner in which they are fulfilled clearly indicates they have symbolic meaning** – Most prophecies are written to address an immediate problem faced by God’s people. While many have symbolic meaning in their fulfillment, we should always see them in light of their literal understanding.
  - 11) **Though God’s revelation is progressive both Old and New Testaments are essential parts of this revelation and form a unit that must not be taken separately.**
  - 12) **You must understand the Bible grammatically before you can understand it theologically.**
  - 13) **Scripture will never contradict itself** – If an apparent contradiction appears, we can know that it is not real, and it should launch us into further study to seek understanding of the truth. This principle is based on the inerrancy and infallibility of God’s Word. As we approach Bible study, we must believe in the veracity of God’s revelation.



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## 14) Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

- Interpret John 15:7 in light of 1 John 5:14 and James 4:3
- Interpret Isaiah 53:5 in light of 1 Peter 2:24
- Interpret Genesis 12-1-3 in light of Galatians 3:7-29

## PROCEDURES IN BIBLE STUDY

What follows is a summary of the six steps involved in Bible study (exegesis). *Exegesis* comes from the Greek word which means “to draw out of.” The follows steps are designed to help the Bible student discover the author’s intended meaning as well as making appropriate application of the text to contemporary life. The procedures in Bible study are:

1. **Observe** exactly what the author is saying. This is the most important step in Bible study and must come first. The more careful and thorough your observations, the more meaningful will be your interpretation, the fairer will be your evaluations, and the richer will be your applications. Remember, you cannot interpret what you have not first observed.
2. **Interpret** objectively what the author has written. After you have observed what the author is saying, you must determine what meaning he intended by what he said. You are to try to discover the thoughts, attitudes, emotions, and purpose of the author. For more details on observation and interpretation, ask about the “How to Study the Bible” manual.
3. **Summarize** the key ideas in a passage. While summarization is listed as Step 3, it is a process that should be done in connection with observation and interpretation. Try to summarize the facts you observe and then the meaning of the facts.
4. **Evaluate** fairly what the author has written. Do not evaluate until you have a clear concept of what the author has written. Thus, the evaluation must come after observation and interpretation.



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5. **Apply** personally the message revealed. While application is listed fifth in the process, this does not mean that it is fifth in importance. Application is the fruit that will come forth through the other processes. Application is a growing process, not superimposed in a superficial way, but must be consistent with the author's intended meaning in the text.
6. **Actualize** your convictions. Someone once said, "*Don't just study the Bible, do something.*" In other words, be doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves (Jas. 1:22).

## INTRODUCTION TO IDENTIFYING BIBLICAL GENRES

*Genre* is a term used by literary critics to refer to literary species or forms. Content, structure (or form), and style are taken into account when identifying a genre. Although we are familiar with many genres we encounter in our everyday lives, certain books of the Bible are written in genres that are foreign to us. And even familiar genres sometimes include assumptions that we might not expect. One way to identify the genre of a biblical book is to read it and note significant literary details such as subject matter, basic structure, style, and authorial comments that cue us as to how it should be understood.

Do not be intimidated by genre studies. We discern genre every day of our life. When you get a letter from a family member, a direct mailing from a political campaign, or a bill from the power company, you immediately notice and discern the distinct characteristics of each and read them in the context of their genre. You adjust your expectations and your attention to detail based on the literary genre of each piece. So it is when we read Scripture. When we understand the genre of a particular passage of Scripture, we read it with purpose and meaning. We look for certain details that would not be as important in a different kind of genre. The result is clarity, understanding, and impact.

Before we dig into the study of biblical genres, let's see where we are in our ability to recognize genres. Read the passages below and place the letter corresponding to the type of genre you think it represents:



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Bible Passages		Biblical Genres
Isaiah 38:1-3		a) Narrative b) Prophecy c) Poetry d) Parable e) Didactic
Acts 21:10-11		
Luke 16:19-31		
Matthew 13:47-50		
Proverbs 19:5		
Matthew 6:19-24		
Romans 5:12-14		

Over the course of this class, we will learn about how to identify biblical genres by their external and internal characteristics, after which, we will discover some ways to gain a proper understanding of the text by interpreting it within its appropriate generic categorization.

## **BIBLICAL NARRATIVE**

Narratives recount factual events in story format. In the Old and New Testaments, we find extensive narratives in Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.

Biblical narratives contain both history and theology communicated through story format. Our task is to decipher the meaning of the *theological intent* in any biblical narrative, not to reconstruct the original event. Reconstruction of the original event is nearly impossible because the author's purpose drives his selection of details to include in the account. In the Apostle John's account of Christ, he states that much of what Christ did were not written in his gospel (Jn. 20:30-31; 21:25). The purpose of all Scripture (historical narratives included) is to make people wise, leading to a saving knowledge of Christ (2 Tim. 3:15).

Biblical narratives present some unique interpretive challenges, such as:

- Biblical narratives are ancient history and must be understood as such. The genre is challenging because they are ancient historical accounts, and the authors approach quotations, numbers, sequence, and time differently than modern historical conventions.



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- The author's purpose is elusive, not usually stated in the narrative – Mk. 14:51-52; Jn. 21:11.
- Many details in biblical narratives are not presented as normative – Acts 5:12-16.
- The author does not intend to present all persons or actions as moral lessons – Lk. 2:7 (is not a biblical mandate to put our children in a crib).
- The author groups facts together, and then comments on those facts in a narrative to communicate a theological truth – Mk. 5:1-20 (one must do more than reiterate the facts of the story, but instead, one must ask “why” the facts were included and how do they contribute to the author's intent).

Identifying biblical narratives are easy because they clearly tell a story about an event or events that took place. Some books in the Bible are clearly historical books. Other books, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, though mostly prophetic, do contain sections of narrative (Isa. 36-39; Jer. 52).

Below are several keys to interpreting biblical narratives:

- Understand the context – although context is important for understanding any genre, it is especially important when trying to grasp the meaning of a biblical narrative. For example, when reading John's account of feeding the 5,000, one must understand the historical context of the first century as well as the context of John's purpose for recording the event (Jn. 20:30-31).
- Notice the presence of any editorial comments – sometimes the author will give editorial comments as to the meaning of the event. One such case is found in Mark 7:19. Mark notes that Jesus' comment about food and purity should be understood as declaring, “*all foods clean.*” Another example is found in John's account of Jesus declaring that if they destroyed the temple, He would rebuild it in three days. John offers his editorial comment to clarify what Jesus meant, “*But He was speaking of the temple of His body*” (Jn. 2:21).
- Watch for thematic statements – sometimes the author will begin his account with a theme that helps us understand the remainder of his narrative. One example would be Acts 1:8. In the



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remainder of the book of Acts, Luke follows this outline as he traces the outward expansion of the churches geographic venues (e.g., Acts 2:14-42; 8:1-25, 26-40; 10:1-48; 11:19-21; 13:1-3; 28:28-31).

- Pay attention to repetition – biblical authors did not have the luxury of bold script or graphics, so when they wanted to emphasize something they often used repetition. Israel's cycle of sin and deliverance is emphasized by repetition in the book of Judges (Jdg. 2:14; 3:8-9, 12, 15; 4:2, 4-24; 6:1, 11-25; 10:7-9; 11:1-33). Mark also employs repetition to emphasize the response to Jesus' teaching and miracles (Mk. 1:27-28, 45; 2:12; 3:7-12; 4:1).
- Note the proportion of a story devoted to various details – often an author gives more space to what is most important, as in Mark 5:1-20 where Mark devotes 20% of the narrative to describing the hopeless plight of the demon-possessed man. Such an emphasis highlights Jesus' authority over demons and the power He had over demons with just a word.
- Pay attention to what is said in the narrative – one of the ways a narrator reveals why he is telling the story is through the words the characters say to each other. Jesus' stilling the storm is a case in point. After Jesus calmed the waves, Mark notes that the disciples were saying to one another, "*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?*" (Mk. 4:41).

## **BIBLICAL EPISTLES**

In contrast to narratives, the epistles in Scripture mainly comprise of didactic literature.<sup>1</sup> This literature offers propositions with a strong instructional purpose and a prosaic format. Epistolary literature refers to the New Testament books from Romans through Jude. The epistles generally include two kinds of material:

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<sup>1</sup> *Didactic* – from the Gk. word διδάσκω (*didasko*) meaning to teach, to instruct, or to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting.



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- Expository discourse – expounds certain truths or doctrines, often with logical support for those propositions.
- Hortatory discourse – includes exhortations to follow certain courses of action or to develop certain characteristics in light of the propositional truths presented in the expository discourse.

When interpreting the propositions and exhortations in the epistles, one must consider the normal principles of hermeneutics.<sup>2</sup>

## **BIBLICAL PARABLES**

The word *parable* comes from a compound Greek word that means “to cast alongside.” Parables are short, simple stories designed to communicate a spiritual truth or a moral lesson by using examples or making comparisons from everyday life. The most fundamental of all components of a parable is that there must be a comparison. About one-third of Jesus’ teaching is in parables. The most notable topic of the parables is the kingdom of God.

Below are some guidelines for interpreting parables:

- Determine the main point of the parable – this means that we must determine the reason the parable was uttered. Some helpful questions to ask are:
  - Who are the main characters?
  - What occurs at the end?
  - What occurs in direct discourse (i.e., quotation marks)?
  - Who/what gets the most space?
- Recognize stock imagery in the parables – if we were to pick up a newspaper and saw a cartoon with a donkey and an elephant talking to each other, we would have no difficulty understanding that the article associated with the cartoon would be political in nature. In the same way, certain imagery during Jesus’ day enjoyed instant recognition and meaning (i.e., a sower, vineyard, tares and wheat).

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed approach to principles of interpretation, contact Pastor Bud for the “How to Study the Bible” material.



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- Do not press all the details for meaning – not all details in a parable are significant. Rather, many details simply make the story interesting, memorable, or true to life for the hearers. Usually, the central figure in the parable generally conveys the one main point of comparison. Consider Luke 15; in each of the parables, the point of the parables is not in the sheep, coin, or son. Rather, the main point is the joy expressed at the return of that which was lost.

## **BIBLICAL PROPHECY**

Literally speaking, a *prophet* is one who speaks before people.

*Prophecy* is any message conveyed by one proclaiming a revelation from God to His people. A prophet's message may be characterized along two functions:

- Proclamation – The prophet was primarily a person of the Word of God. As such, they proclaimed or told forth the very words of God. The primary function of a prophet was to declare. Moses' first and foremost function was that of a proclaimer of God's mind to Pharaoh and the Israelites.
- Prediction – Prophets spoke to their situation also by means of warnings and encouragements concerning the future. In addition to their proclamation, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel also predicted the impending fall of Israel because of their rebellion against God.

The following are some guidelines for interpreting prophecy:

- Use the same hermeneutic method that you would use when interpreting other portions of Scripture.
  - When you come to prophetic literature in Scripture, you do not abandon your hermeneutical approach.
  - The presence of symbols does not mean that allegorical interpretation is necessary. Understanding symbolic language is part of the grammatical-historical-literal method of interpreting Scripture.
- Determine if the prophecy you are looking at has already been fulfilled or not. Although many of the Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled, many have still yet to be fulfilled.



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- Look for explanations of prophetic symbols within the text. For example:
  - Dan. 2:32, *“the head of that statue was made of fine gold”* to Nebuchadnezzar in vs. 38, *“you are the head of gold.”*
  - Rev. 1:20, *“the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”*
  - Rev. 5:8, *“...each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”*
- Recognize the occasional presence of partial fulfillments of prophecy and near/far fulfillments. Sometimes, prophecy points to a near partial fulfillment in anticipation of a far future and complete fulfillment. Often there is an undetermined gap between the near and the far. For example:
  - Isa. 9:6-7 – vs. 6a is fulfilled by Jesus’ birth but vv. 6b-7 will not be fulfilled until the second coming of Christ.
  - Zch. 9:9-10 – vs. 9 was fulfilled at Jesus’ triumphal entry (Mt. 21:5), but vs. 10 will be fulfilled sometime in the future.
  - In Mt. 16:28 Jesus said, *“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”* The prophecy was partially fulfilled six days later at the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-3).
  - Acts 2:16-21 – vv. 16-18 were fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost and then vv. 19-21 indicate something that was not fulfilled on that day but will be in the future culmination of the Last Days.
- While symbols in prophecy point to other realities, it appears that numbers in prophetic books can be taken literally. For example, numbers in the book of Revelation such as 7 stars, 7 lampstands, 7 churches, 7 seals, 144,000 Israelites, 1260 days and 1,000 years probably can be taken at face value.



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- Recognize the unconditional covenants in Scripture. These are promises God gives to do something without any contingencies. When there are no conditions placed on such a covenant, one should assume that a literal fulfillment of the covenant will come true with the people to whom the covenant was made.
- Realize that the bulk of New Testament prophecy is still awaiting future fulfillment (Mt. 24-25; 1 Thess. 4; 2 Thess. 2; Revelation 6-22).
- Approach biblical prophecy with balance and avoid extremes. Do not become preoccupied with reading current events into biblical prophecy. Although some historical events such as the reestablishment of Israel into her land in 1948 appears to have great prophetic significance, it is not healthy to interpret every earthquake, plane crash, and terrorist attack as being a fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

## **BIBLICAL POETRY**

Poetry can be identified both by metrics or rhythm and by parallelism of grammar and language. Unlike English poems, Hebrew poetry is characterized by repeated syllables, parallel lines, and the repetition of similar sounds (consonants, vowels, diphthongs). There are two main reasons for using poetry: (1) it makes the author's words more memorable, and (2) for affective reasons because poetry expresses and evokes strong emotions.

As with many ancient Near Eastern languages, parallelism is a very common and relatively easy to recognize literary device used in poetry. The following are descriptions of the three most common types of parallelisms:

- Synonymous Parallelism – occurs when different lines or parts of a passage present the same thought in a slightly altered manner of expression. Sometimes, a second, clearer line can elucidate an obscure first line. (Psalm 2:2-4; 52:8; 84:2-3; Proverbs 19:5).



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- Antithetic Parallelism – occurs when the two parts are set in contrast to each other asserting an opposing truth. They may say the same thing but say it by way of negation. A significant indication of an antithetic parallelism is the use of the conjunction “*but*.” (Proverbs 10:4; 13:1).
- Synthetic Parallelism – is a bit more complex than the other forms. Here the first part of the parallel creates a sense of expectation that is completed by the second part. There is a development of thought sometimes advancing in a progressive, “staircase” movement to a conclusion in a third line (Psalm 1:3; 92:9).

## Classification of Psalms

This section will help you understand the Psalms by organizing them into subgroupings based on common characteristics. Below are brief descriptions of seven of the most common types of Psalms:

- Lament Psalms – these are the most widespread subgenre of psalms. About one-third of the Psalter is composed of these types of psalms. Lament Psalms focus on laments expressing deep sorrow, grief, or regret over their tribulations as a nation. They express human struggles while asking for God’s blessing or intervention (e.g., Ps. 3; 9; 12; 13; 17; 42; 60; 74; 139).
- Praise Psalms – these are characterized by the prominent motif of praising God (e.g., Ps. 103; 104; 106; 11-113; 146; 149; 150). The basic structure of these psalms include:
  - Address to God
  - Call to oneself and/or others to join in worship
  - Enumeration of reasons to praise God
  - Blessings or a repetition of the initial call to worship
- Thanksgiving Psalms – as indicated by the title, these songs thank God for answering the request of the worshiper(s). They are written for individuals (Ps. 18; 32; 40; 92) or groups (Ps. 65; 75; 107; 136). The normal components of thanksgiving psalms are:
  - Invitation to others to thank or praise God



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- Recounting the psalmist's need for divine intervention
  - Praise to God for his great salvation
  - The "*temple language*" of sacrifice, festive processions, pilgrimages, music, dancing, or incense
  - Blessing pronounced over worshipers
- Celebration Psalms – these celebrate God's covenant relationship with the king and the nation. The two subsets are:
    - Royal psalms that celebrate the king of Israel as God's representative ruler (Ps. 2; 24; 93; 101; 110).
    - Songs of Zion are psalms that praise God for his choice of Jerusalem as the location of His temple, and celebrate God's chosen king (Ps. 46; 76; 87; 125).
  - Wisdom Psalms – these deal with topics such as the divine source and nature of true wisdom (Ps. 1; 19; 119) and questions about injustices experienced and witnessed in this life (Ps. 73).
  - Penitential Psalms – whether individual or corporate, these give voice to the psalmist's repentance. Probably the best known of these psalms is Psalm 51, but there are others (Ps. 6; 32; 38; 102; 130; 143).
  - Imprecatory Psalms – these are "*cursing psalms*," of which the best known is Psalm 137. In the imprecatory psalms, the speaker calls on God to enact his divine justice against the psalmist's enemies. The plea is often accompanied by a recounting of the psalmist's innocence (Ps. 35; 60; 70; 109; 140).

By noting the structure of parallelisms and the classifications of the Psalms, the author's intent will be clearer.

## **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

We read the Bible. No one masters new information or techniques without spending time practicing. Therefore, I urge you to read Scripture on a regular basis. Read Scripture personally and privately. It is not enough only to read Scripture on the weekends at church or for doing a Bible study. You must set aside time, during which your only



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focus is to read. Below are some things that may help you to read intentionally.

- *Learn who wrote the book* – knowing the author is important because your goal is to understand his intent. A letter written by Malachi will be vastly different from a book written by John, and that difference will help you position the book in a proper context.
- *Learn to whom the book was written* – writers are concerned about their audience. By knowing the audience and the author, it is easier to follow the author's train of thought throughout the book.
- *Discover the book's literary genre* – poetry carries a different impact than narrative or epistle. By properly identifying the genre, you can see the passage in its proper literary context. The Bible is much clearer and easier to read when you know the type of literature you are reading.
- *Consider how the characteristics of the text impact how you should think about what you are reading* – one important example is the level of personal application each text requires. If you are reading a narrative, the detailed aspects of the story are not as important as the overall point of the story. However, when the author of an epistle gives a command, the details matter. By knowing the genre, you are aware of what to look for and how closely to look for certain things.

It is my prayer that the material in this course will provide you with tools to equip you as a discoverer of biblical truth. I am available to answer questions or assist you in any way I am able as you grow in your excitement for discovering the Word, as well as your participation in reading the Bible for all it's worth. Please don't hesitate to contact me at:

- The church office: 206.243.2600
- Via email: [bud.diener@bpcburien.org](mailto:bud.diener@bpcburien.org)

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