

How to Interpret the Scripture, Part 2

Introduction:

Three: Structure, Genre, and Rhetorical Devices convey meaning, establish reader expectations, and mark the development of the argument; therefore, the interpreter must discover the function of these formal elements.

Genre: A distinctive type or category of literature composition, i.e., science fiction, mystery, poetry, historical novel, detective novel, etc.

Biblical Types:

- a. Poetry: How does this establish reader expectations?
- b. Law: Pentateuch, sermon on the mount (interpretation of the law by Jesus), and code (10 commandments) or covenant.
- c. Wisdom: Proverbs, Ecc, Job. Simple or complex. Proverbs are pithy and discreet—simple. Job is a didactic or teaching story—complex.
- d. History:
 - i. Account—Acts
 - ii. Novella—Jonah
 - iii. Genealogy
 - iv. Gospel—kind of by itself because of unique features such as parables.
- e. Prophecy: Major and minor prophets, Revelations
- f. Epistle, specifically, letters. Standard structure, used by most Greco-Roman writers.
- g. Homily: An informal exposition about scripture, a moral discourse. James and Hebrews.

Structure: The framework of the text.

There is a distinct structure with different types of genres.

Example: Wisdom literature has distinct structure. Job is a good example.

Job 1 and 2 set the scenes, to prepare the reader for the content. Job 3-42:6 is an epic poem—even on the page it is laid out like a poem. This is helpful because it signals to us that we are reading it differently. We read poetry differently than we read an instructional manual. Job 42:7-17 is the epilogue; it wraps up the story and brings a conclusion.

Rhetorical Devices: Something in literature designed to make the writing more effective. We are mainly talking about **Figures of Speech**.

Figure of Speech is an expression in which words are used not to convey a literal meaning but to add freshness and vividness.

Figures of Speech:

- h. Simile: Explicit “like”, “as” or “as if” comparisons between two things. Examples: He is as big as a barn. That came like a bolt out of the blue. As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another (Pr 27:17).
- i. Parable: has its own category, but it is essentially an extended simile. The parable of the sower and the seed from Luke 8 is a great example: what is the seed? What is the seed on rocky ground? What are the weeds that choke?
- j. Metaphor: and implied comparison, speaking of one thing as if were actually another. The early bird gets the worm. Ps 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.” Galatians 5:9, “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough”.
- k. Allegory: an extended metaphor. The Song of Solomon is a good example.
- l. Anthropomorphism: human quality attributed to abstractions, inanimate objects, animals, or God. Isaiah 55:12.
- m. Euphemism: substitution of an inoffensive idiom for an offensive statement. Passed away, outplacement. 1 Samuel 24:3
- n. Type: providential portrayal that prefigures a corresponding reality. Ex: Joseph was a type of Christ.
- o. Symbol: A material object substituted for an invisible or yet unseen truth or reality. 1 Cor 10:4.
- p. Irony: Saying one thing but meaning the opposite: Philemon 11
- q. Hyperbole: exaggerated terms for the use of emphasis. Galatians 5:11-12, Matt 5: 27-30
- r. Erotesis: a rhetorical question implying strong affirmation of denial. Romans 6:1,15, 7:7,13.
- s. Idiom: A phrase that has figurative meaning.

Genre, Structure and Rhetorical Devices:

- t. Convey Meaning: understanding figures of speech help you gain meaning.
- u. Establish Expectations: as an example, if I read a poem in scripture, I am going to expect rhetorical devices to be used: metaphor, simile, anthropomorphism, and the like.
- v. Mark the development of the argument—not so clear-cut—but as an example, the structure of an epistle reveals the meaning of parts of the epistle.

Four: All texts were written within a specific historical and cultural milieu (social environment). Therefore, the interpreter must discover how the original circumstances and cultural environment augment and limit the meaning of the text.

Peace Child example:

Examples: Isaiah 1:18.

Luke 5:1-11:

Phil 2:14-18.

E. Conclusion

Recommended Resources:

The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking how you read the Bible, Scot McKnight. How to read the Bible, not just to puzzle it together into some systematic theology but to see it as a Story

The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, J.D. Douglas. Articles on the places, people, significant terms and concepts and institutions found in the OT and NT.

New Testament History, F.F. Bruce. A useful survey of the period. Good summaries of the religious and political setting.

Bible Manners and Customs, G.M. Mackie. An older work on various cultural elements.

Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament, William Sanford Lasor and David Allan Hubbard. An evangelical introduction which gives solid attention to the argument and genre of the text.

New Testament Survey, Tenney, Merrill. Good historical treatment from a respected NT scholar.

The New Testament in Its Literary Environment, David E. Aune. Examines the literary techniques that were common during the development of the NT and how these techniques influenced Scripture.