

Interpretive Principles for Biblical Genres

(Note: this is just a rough guide)

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Narrative (**OT Stories, Gospels, Acts**)

- All narratives are selective and incomplete.
- Narratives record what happened – not what should have happened.
- Narratives don't teach doctrine. They sometimes illustrate a doctrine taught elsewhere.
- God is the hero of all biblical narratives.
- Don't allegorize narratives

Law

- Find the principle behind the law.
- Discover its theological significance: what does it reveal about God, His ways, His character?
- In application, remember the Law is not binding on the New Testament believer (Law is revelatory, not regulatory).

Psalms

- Take each Psalm as a whole unit of thought.
- Determine Psalm's type and structure.
- Discover historical occasion/function of psalm.
- Attend to imagery and parallelism.
- Be aware of messianic implications (if any).

Proverbs

- Proverbs are not promises.
- Proverbs teach probable truth, not absolute truth (Probable outcome, not guaranteed outcome).
- Proverbs are expressions of basic truths of life.
- Immediate context & history is not as relevant.
- Find all the proverbs on any given principle.

Prophecy

- Remember, it's forth-telling, not fore-telling.
- Isolate the individual oracles.
- Discern the historical purpose/context.
- Strive to understand the major points (rather than all the symbolic details).
- Identify the subgenre (prayer, narrative, parable, etc.).
- Thinking vertically should take priority over thinking horizontally (discover the unique emphasis of the gospel in which the passage occurs rather than comparing the parallel passage in a different gospel).
- No chronology is implied unless it is explicitly stated.

Parable

- Discern where the parable fits on the allegorical continuum (Avoid over-allegorizing).
- Determine parable's purpose (clarify its main teaching points).
- Understand historical and cultural features.
- Remember: parables are not history.

Epistle

- Research historical background (occasion, recipients, location, etc.).
- Epistles are occasional documents (they are engaging in task theology).
- Read the whole epistle in one sitting.
- Identify the section the passage is in (greeting, thanksgiving, body, moral exhortation, closing).
- Think in terms of paragraphs.
- Find meaning in context before applying to today.

Apocalyptic

- Curb your expectations.
- Let pictures be pictures.
- Make sure meaning relates to context, purpose, flow of the argument, etc. of the whole book.
- Don't be intimidated. Do be humble.

Further Information

Fee, Gordon D.; Stuart, Douglas. How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Fourth Edition (p. 21). (Function). Kindle Edition.

Sproul, R. C.. Can I Trust the Bible? (Crucial Questions Series Book 2) (Function). Kindle Edition.

Stott, Dr. John R.W.. Understanding the Bible (p. 215). (Function). Kindle Edition.

ESV Study Bible - Reading the Bible for Personal Application

Reading Plans

<https://www.navigators.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/navigators-book-at-a-time-Bible-reading-plan.pdf>

<https://www.navigators.org/resource/Bible-reading-plans/>

<https://www.Bible.com/reading-plans-collection/11477>

<https://www.Bible.com/search/plans?query=ligonier>

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/series/esvorg-reading-plans/>

<https://www.esv.org/plans>

Memorization

<https://www.navigators.org/resource/how-to-memorize-scripture/>

<https://www.fighterverses.com/verse-index>

Never Read a Bible Verse

<https://www.str.org/w/three-excuses-for-not-reading-your-Bible>

<https://www.str.org/neverreadaBibleverse> (video and free book download)