*Session 14*

*Literary Genres and How to Interpret Them*

Different types of literature take different strategies and “rules” to interpret

Old Testament: narrative, law, wisdom, poetry, prophecy, and apocalyptic

New Testament: narrative, letter, and apocalyptic genre

1. **Narrative**

a story with plot, setting, and characters

1. To interpret narrative, first explore the **context**, what comes before and after. How does your story fit into the larger story? Was there anything that led up to this account? Sometimes stories are part of larger stories (a plot within a plot). All narrative contributes to the grand story of the Bible.
2. Note the **setting** of the story:
3. When? Time
4. Where? Place
5. Who? Determine the Main Characters. These may be animate (living) or inanimate objects; persons, spiritual beings, or nature are the most common characters.
6. Protagonist: the “good guy,” usually the hero of the story.
7. Antagonist: the “bad guy” who fights against the hero.
8. Neutral Characters: these may be in the background and serve only to enhance the plot.

If there is a hero in a biblical narrative, it is most likely to be God. Correct interpretation looks for the ways in which God is identified as the hero and the responses made to God through the narrative. These responses are invitations to the reader to evaluate his or her responses to God.

Whose voice is the loudest and quietest in the story?

What are the character traits of these characters?

What role does God play in the story?

1. What? Determine the type of narrative:
2. Report: a brief, self-contained narration usually in third-person style, about a single event or situation in the past.
3. Heroic Narrative: a series of episodes that focus on the life and exploits of a hero whom people later consider significant to remember.
4. Prophetic Story: recounts the events in the life of a prophet, particularly those that demonstrate virtues worthy of emulation.
5. Comedy: a plot with a happy ending, often with a dramatic reversal.
6. Farewell speech: an address in the first-person voice reportedly given by someone shortly before his or her death.
7. Outline the **Plot**
8. Note the conflict between the characters. What are the factors of this conflict? What causes the conflict? Is it physical, spiritual, a lack of knowledge, causes of nature?
9. Note the resolution of this conflict. How does the conflict end? What or who causes this ending?
10. Look for the **message** of the story

This is often associated with the main characters, especially the hero or subject of the story.

It may be associated with the movement of the plot.

What are the large themes in the story?

1. **Application** comes from contemporary analogies with the themes of the narrative.
2. Do other steps of exegesis common to any passage of Scripture.
3. Consider how this narrative fits into the larger story of Scripture, the salvation story, and its setting within secular history.
4. **Law**

Law is scattered throughout the OT and NT. The second half of the book of Exodus, the book of Leviticus, parts of Numbers, and all of Deuteronomy provide the Law genre of the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for Law is *torah* which is a very positive concept of guidance or life direction. It is more than the English concept of “law” or legal code. Begin to interpret law with the understanding that this is God’s word of direction for his people.

1. **Types of law in the OT**:
2. **Casuistic Law**: case (“if” clause) followed by legal penalty (“then . . .”).
3. **Apodictic Law**: unconditional commands and prohibitions; spoken in second person (“you”); primarily moral and religious in content.

Types:

* 1. **Prohibition**: negative command
  2. **Admonition**: positive command
  3. **Participle law**: uses Hebrew participle (“anyone who . . .”) with capital crimes.
  4. **Law of retaliation**: equal penalty for equal injury (known as *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye), used for premeditated crimes involving bodily harm.

1. **Types of legal collections**:
   1. **Series**: small number of laws phrased in a similar style.
   2. **Topical groups**: especially used for casuistic laws.
2. **Legal Instruction Genres**
3. **Priestly Instruction**: for priests; shows professional matters for rituals. When interpreting, determine the context and content to make sure it addresses priests.
4. **Ritual**: for lay people; describes proper performance of rituals.
5. **Important Principles for Interpreting OT Law**
6. **Remember the Israelite concept of “law”**: as a guide for how to live; instructional rather than judicial.
7. **Consider the covenant context of the law**: The law served as the stipulations of the covenant treaty. This is how the people were to respond to God as the sovereign King. The law should be interpreted relationally. Law is the response to relationship. Obedience is the response to grace. Law governed how to stay in relationship with God. Therefore, the ethical (actions in relationships) is emphasized over the legal.
8. **Five distinct types of OT law**:
9. **Criminal Law**: offenses against God and community, given with penalty.
10. **Civil Law**: private disputes between citizens; mostly casuistic.
11. **Family Law**: the judicial role of the Israelite family.
12. **Cultic Law**: Israel’s specific religious practices.
13. **Charitable Law**: humanitarian legislation, protecting the weak and vulnerable.
14. **Principles in interpreting OT laws**:
15. Behind the OT law there are timeless ethical, moral and theological principles.
16. Discover the timeless truth beneath the cultural husk. To do this, you must study ancient Israelite culture.
17. All of the OT applies to Christian, but none of it applies apart from its fulfilment in Christ. Seek to discover how Jesus fulfils OT law.
18. Some laws retain validity for Christians.
19. Sometimes the NT makes the OT law stricter.
20. Some laws no longer have literal validity because of NT teachings.
21. Laws that are no longer literally valid still teach important timeless truths.
22. **Principles of Interpretation**:
23. The collection or series in which an individual law appears serves as its literary context. Look at surrounding laws for interpretative clues.
24. Understand the original meaning of laws in light of their cultural background.
25. Determine if and how the NT applies the law.
26. Use the above to help determine if laws should be taken literally or by the timeless principle behind them.
27. **Interpreting Deuteronomy**
28. View Deuteronomy as covenant.
29. Read it with the background of the corrupting influence of Canaanite religion.
30. Approach it as a book of passionate exhortations rather than abstract, technical legal instruction.
31. Allow the literary type of each section to determine the interpretative approach.
32. **Poetry**

A significant part of the OT is in the form of poetry. Other genres use poetry, such as law, prophecy, and wisdom. Hebrew poetry is characterized by a brief two-part sentence in which the second part responds in some way to the first part. The second phrase may reassert the statement of the first part, it may strengthen the first phrase, or it may offer a contrast. The term most often used to describe this relationship between the two phrases is “parallelism.” Words (or phrases/clauses in translations) are related to other words in Hebrew poetry.

The Basic Process of Interpretation

1. **Preliminaries**
2. Read through the passage several times.
3. Listen to the poem and attempt to enter into the mindset of the poem. Make a mental note of how the poem speaks to your heart.
4. **Historical-critical concerns**
   * + 1. Determine the historical setting of the poem if you can (when it was said, by whom, for what occasion or situation).
       2. If you are reading a psalm, use Form Criticism to determine its use, setting, or function (worship, lament, thanksgiving, royal). A lot of your interpretation will depend on what type of poem it is.
5. **Poetical Features**
6. Determine the limits of the passage.
7. If you can, translate the passage from the biblical language or use a literal English translation.
8. Note natural divisions in the text (strophe or lines, stanzas, refrains). Many modern translations will show this by indentation.
9. Make an outline of the poem, especially looking for major shifts in attitude or demeanor. If you know the type of poem (see above), then you can look for the various components of the poem (lament, praise, thanksgiving). Otherwise, you can look for literary patterns.
10. Determine images or figures of speech and comparisons like similes (use “like” or “as”), metaphors (comparison using images), or personification (things are given human qualities). What is the intent of these images? What part of the image is valid for interpretation? The tenor is the original subject (“I”) and the vehicle is the comparison image (“the Good Shepherd”). The overlap is the idea shared between the object and its comparison (Jesus has certain qualities of a good shepherd). Remember that poetry often speaks to the emotions or heart.

Overlap

Tenor

Vehicle

1. Explore any images or words that are culturally based in the ancient world.
2. Determine less-prominent features of the poem, including:

Key words

Parallelism

Word pairs (words that often go together, like night and day)

Obvious word plays

What do these features suggest to you about the meaning or implication of this poem?

1. **Interpret the Poem**
2. For Ancient Israel:
3. How does the poem speak about God?
4. Does the poem refer to themes spoken of elsewhere in the Old Testament?
5. Enter into the original situation. How would the readers feel about this poem?
6. Transfer the imagery or feelings into modern concepts.
7. Look for the timelessness in the psalm and find your message there.
8. For the Church: Does the New Testament speak to or answer any of the issues raised in the poem? Do not read the NT back into the psalm, but the psalm into the NT.
9. For Us Today: Rehearse the message in your own life.
10. **Wisdom**

Old Testament wisdom was more than a literary genre. It was an approach to life, a way of perceiving reality that found literary expression in Job, many Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. The wisdom genre continued in the apocryphal books of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) and the Wisdom of Solomon. Many interpreters consider the New Testament book of James to be a Christian expression of the Wisdom genre.

Wisdom literature focuses on practical virtue and the way to live well. It tends not to emphasize covenant and salvation history themes. Interpret wisdom as “probable truth,” what works most of the time but can be overruled by more direct revelation.

There are two key themes in wisdom literature:

1) Creation theology that observes what works or fails to work in daily life in creation.

2) Retribution theology that suggests wise and righteous living will be rewarded by God with prosperity and earthly success.

Be aware of unstated theological presuppositions with wisdom, such as covenant or salvation history.

1. **Proverbs**
2. Defined: “Concise, memorable statements of truth”; given in indicative mood (description).
3. Types
4. Descriptive proverb: a simple observation about life without consideration of exceptions or applications.
5. Prescriptive proverb: states truth with a specific aim to influence human behavior.
6. Comparison emphasizes the superiority of certain character traits or personal conduct over others.
7. Antithetical proverb: most common comparison, usually contrasting wise and foolish.
8. Interpretive key:
   1. Isolate the two traits or types being compared
   2. Decide which opposites the proverb praises and why.
9. Principles of Interpretation
   * 1. Proverbs teach probable truth not absolute truth. The truth may not apply in all cases.
     2. Balance the understanding in the proverb with other proverbs in the Bible and other scriptural truths.
     3. Interpret the proverb in its ancient context first. Do not interpret a proverb by modern concepts of success and failure.
     4. Consider the effects of a fallen world.
10. **Instruction**
11. Defined: exhortation; given in the imperative mood (command); contains: prohibition followed by motive clause; may be longer in length.
12. Wisdom speech: personification of wisdom giving a message in public
13. Principles of Interpretation
14. These are serious demands for absolute obedience and not tentative suggestions.
15. Note the passion in wisdom speeches to see the seriousness and urgency of the advice
16. Capture the form and content of the instruction by asking what the shouting woman urges us to do.
17. **Example Story and Reflection**
18. Example Story: narration of a personal experience or other illustration from which speaker distils an important truth to pass on. Formula: “I saw and considered . . .” or “I passed by . . .”; concluded with moral to be learned.
19. Reflection: personal musings and conclusions about a truth, citing first-hand observations, example stories, and lengthy thought. Formal features:
20. Opening formula (“I saw and considered . . .” or “I passed by . . .”).
21. Quotation of proverbs, rhetorical questions, or citation of example stories.
22. Concluding moral.
23. Principles of Interpretation
24. Determine how the components support the concluding moral
25. Pay attention to the concluding morals because they express the main point.
26. Application should flow from the concluding moral.
27. **Disputation Speeches**
28. Defined: speaker seeks to persuade the audience of some truth; especially common in Job;
29. May contain other literary forms:
30. Complaint: show speakers frame of reference
31. Hymn or hymnic elements: lengthy descriptions of what the Lord does on an on-going basis.
32. Avowal of innocence: individual attempts to show his innocence.
33. Principles of Interpretation (Job)
34. Determine what truth(s) dominates each speaker's persuasions
35. Since Job is righteous, pay attention to his self-defense and how his opponents' views often are diametrically opposite from God’s.
36. Determine why author uses other literary types and what they contribute.
37. Keep in mind Job’s innocence as an interpretative clue to the book and the goal of his vindication.
38. The reader must decide if Job is innocent and what is the cause of his suffering. The ultimate root of some human suffering lies in the mysterious, hidden plans of God for his people.
39. The end of the story with Job’s vindication helps interpret the rest of the story.
40. **Prophecy**

Old Testament prophecy is rooted in history. In fact, prophecy is a theological interpretation of history. The prophets looked to the future to deal with the present. They often reflected on the past to note the failures of people or the grace of God. The prophets had a two-part message: hope for those who repent and obey and doom for those who remain in their sin. Discovering the historical context is critical for correctly understanding and interpreting prophecy. This includes discovering where in the history of Israel or Judah the message of the prophet took place and what political, military, economic, and social issues were at stake at that time.

**Hermeneutical Principle #1**: *Determine the clarity of the text*. The clearer the text, the more certain the interpretation can be.

**Hermeneutical Principle #2:** *Carefully analyze the structure (grammar, parallelism), key words, and images of the oracle.* Use standard tools of exegesis to understand the text of the prophecy.

**Hermeneutical Principle #3**: *Determine the contexts of the prophetic oracle*. Prophets spoke to their time (forthtelling). A prophet’s message was given in such a way that the original audience could understand some aspect of it. Seek to understand as much as possible about the following contexts:

* Historical (political) context
* Theological context
* Social context

**Hermeneutical Principle #4**: *Put the prophecy in its prophetic context*. Prophets of the same era shared linguistic and conceptual similarities.

**Hermeneutical Principle #5**: *Look for the covenantal context of the proph*ecy. The prophets called people back to previous covenants and looked for fulfillment in the new covenant.

**Hermeneutical Principle #6**: *Realize that the fulfillment of some prophecy is veiled and cannot be known before their fulfillment*. "Unintelligible before, unmistakable after" (1 Peter 1:10-12).

**Hermeneutical Principle #7**: *Use other scripture to interpret the prophecy*. Look especially for the explanation or interpretation within the prophetic book itself. Many dreams or visions are followed by an explanation.

**Hermeneutical Principle #8:** *Read the longer prophetic books in sections*.

**Hermeneutical Principle #9:** *Look for the fulfillment of the prophecy in Israel’s experience or in the NT*.

**Hermeneutical Principle #10:** *Seek to understand the main point of the prophecy rather than the symbolic details*. Seek to understand the purpose of the prophecy.

**Hermeneutical Principle #11:** *Find analogous situations to the ones the prophecy addresses*.

**Hermeneutical Principle #12**: *Always welcome the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.*

1. **Gospel**

The four Gospels are a unique genre that can be roughly considered as *theological* *biographies* of Jesus. (The capital word “Gospel” refers to one of the first four books of the NT; the lower “gospel” refers to the message about Jesus also called the “good news”.) They are stories of Jesus that point to who Jesus is and the Good News that He brought. One-third of the Gospels are devoted to the last week of Jesus’ life, which shows that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the key ideas in the Gospels. The Gospels show many similarities, but each is unique. Gospel interpretation needs to keep track of the way the specific Gospel account “preaches the gospel.” The key questions are:

* In what way does the book and the passage proclaim the good news either about Jesus or the good news that Jesus preached?
* What theological truth does the book and the passage proclaim?
* What response does it call for from disciples of Jesus?

1. **Reading Horizontally and Vertically**

In technical terms, this is called “redaction criticism” (see Lesson Six).

1. **Horizontally**: Compare how the different Gospel writers treat the same account. Use a Gospel Synopsis to note similarities and differences (omissions, additions, change of words, word order) between the Gospels. A gospel parallel can be found on line here: <http://www.gospelparallels.com>). How has the writer adapted the traditional material? What seems to be the author’s unique perspective or interpretation of the gospel based on the differences?
2. **Vertically**: Look at the context and flow of thought within a particular Gospel. How does the passage fit into the overall section and Gospel? Use the steps outlined in Sessions Twelve. Caution: Context can tell us a lot about the message of a passage, but it can also be over interpreted.
3. **Key theological issues** to keep in mind when interpreting the Gospels:
4. **The Kingdom of God**: The Kingdom was one of the central themes of Jesus’ preaching. The kingdom began with Jesus and will reach completion when He returns. How does the passage speak about the coming Kingdom?
5. **The Ethics of Jesus**: The exegetical problem is, how literal do we take Jesus’ commands? Can they be literally fulfilled in this fallen world?
6. **Discipleship**: What does the passage say about following Jesus?
7. **Forms** within the Gospels
8. **Parables**
9. Typical Exegetical Details (these are the same for all Scripture):
   1. Word studies
   2. Textual problems
   3. Syntax or sentence structure
10. Historical and Cultural Details
    1. What from Jesus’ culture and time sheds light on the parable?
    2. What in the parable is true to life and what is fictional?
11. Literary Structure (especially for longer parables that are stories)
    1. What is the plot?
    2. Who are the main characters?
    3. What are the movements, transitions, changes in tone (mood, feeling, surprised shift in attitude)?
12. Context in the Gospel
    1. How does the parable fit into the broad outline of that particular Gospel?
    2. What comes directly before and after the parable?
    3. What is the meaning of the parable by itself and how does context alter or confirm this meaning?
13. Context in the ministry and message of Jesus
    1. At what point in his ministry did Jesus give this parable?
    2. Who is the primary audience?
    3. Could Jesus have any other audience in mind?
    4. What does this parable tell about Jesus and the Kingdom?
14. Primary message of the parable
    1. What does it tell about Jesus?
    2. What is the main theme?
    3. Are there other themes via the main characters?
15. Message for Today
    1. How does the message apply to the church?
    2. How does the parable impact you personally?
    3. How might you teach or preach on this parable?
16. **Miracle Stories**
    * 1. Narrative questions:
         1. Who are the characters?
         2. What is the conflict (illness, demons, ignorance, etc.)?
         3. Where in the story is the conflict resolved?
         4. How is the conflict resolved?
      2. Questions of meaning:
         1. What does the story say about Jesus (Christology)?
         2. What does the story say about salvation (salvation-history)?
         3. What does the story say about discipleship?
17. **Pronouncement Stories**: These are short, self-contained narratives that function primarily to introduce a key climactic saying (or pronouncement) of Jesus; they are usually proverbial in nature; they often led to controversy with Jewish opposition.
18. **Other Various Forms**

Each form will require a specific methodology, but all include the basic steps to exegesis developed in this course: wisdom, prophecy, law, metaphor, paradox, similitude, etc.

1. **Considering the Situations of Life** (the technical word comes from German: *Sitz im Leben*): There are four levels of application of Jesus’ teachings:
2. The context within the **story** Jesus told (such as a parable).
3. The context of the setting in which **Jesus** told the story during his ministry (crowds, disciples).
4. The context of the **audience** to whom the Gospel is written (early church).
5. The context of the **modern reader** (church today).

The message should be consistent through each of these levels although the application may be different but related or analogous.

1. **Acts**

Luke and Acts are two volumes of a single work. Acts is the story of the spread of Christianity across the Greco-Roman world of the first century. Acts is theological history that records the story of the Spirit working through the church to bring the gospel to the world. Acts has different genres but is mostly historical narrative.

1. As always, use the **basic steps of** **exegesis** for any passage.
2. Word Study
3. Grammatical analysis
4. Semantic and structural analysis
5. **Historical Questions**
   1. Who are the main characters?
   2. Are there people, places, names, events, or ideas that need to be looked up in a Bible dictionary or a map?
   3. Consider the ways of how ancient history and stories were told.
   4. Consider ancient customs (the cultural context).
6. **Literary Context**
7. Consider Luke’s overall purpose in writing (Luke 1:1; Acts 1:1). How does the passage fit into Luke-Acts as an entire work? A book survey will be helpful here.
8. Use narrative criticism to analyze the
   * 1. Main characters
     2. Plot Structure
     3. Conflict and resolution
9. Does the passage relate information found elsewhere in the NT (such as Paul’s epistles)?
10. **Theological Context**
11. How does the passage reflect upon key themes in Acts (Pentecost, Holy Spirit, proclamation of the gospel, growth of the church, mission to the world)?
12. How does the passage reflect upon the *kerygma* (the proclaimed message) of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?
13. Identify timeless prescriptions from time bound descriptions.
14. What models for the church are consistently applied throughout Acts and which ones are specific to a situation?
15. Look for positive (to be imitated) and negative (to be avoided) examples in the characters of the story.
16. Look for repeated patterns and themes.
17. **Epistles**

NT letters serve as authoritative substitutes for the personal presence of their authors. They were written to address specific situations or problems in the communities that received the letters. They are most concerned with applying theology in practical ways to real-life situations. They are one part of a two-part conversation. They were also meant to be read out loud repeatedly in local congregations. NT letters offer a window into the struggles and victories of the early church. Letter writing was highly developed in the first century and followed certain patterns. Letters followed many of the forms of ancient speeches.

1. Follow all the **standard exegetical steps** used for any part of the Bible.
2. **Historical Analysis**
3. Determine the author and when the author wrote the letter.
4. Determine the occasion for writing (historical context) if possible (see a NT Introduction); the historical situation of the writing.
5. Determine the audience and what can be known about them.
6. Note the letter **structure**. If possible, follow the categories of ancient letter writing. New Testament letters tend to follow the standard Greco-Roman letter format as follows:
   * + - * Salutation – Beginning with the author’s name, followed by reference to the audience, and a greeting
         * A thanksgiving or prayer
         * The Body of the letter
         * Closing conventions such as travel plans, blessings, prayer reports, greetings, and hints of continuation of the correspondence and/or relationship
7. Analyze the **types of ancient rhetoric** (may be mixed in an epistle):
8. **Judicial**: seeks to convince an audience of the rightness or wrongness of a past action.
9. **Deliberative**: tries to persuade or dissuade certain individuals concerning the expediency of a future action.
10. **Epideictic**: uses praise or blame to urge people to affirm a point of view or set of values in the present.
11. Look for **Forms** in the Epistles
12. **Creeds or Hymns**: material used by the early church and borrowed by the writer.
13. **Domestic Codes**: instruction for individuals in a relationship of authority or submission, especially in a household.
14. **Slogans**: quotes from another, usually an opponent, that are refuted in the letter; usually short and concisely worded.
15. **Vice and Virtue Lists**: lists of qualities or actions that typify morality or immorality from a Christian perspective.
16. **Literary Analysis**
    1. Note keywords or repeated phrases
    2. Especially helpful with epistles is to doing phrasing or some type of grammatical and structural analysis.
    3. Note carefully the context of the flow of argument in the section of the epistle.
17. **Cultural Analysis**
18. Separate universal principles from context-bound or culturally limited applications.
19. Explore the dynamic or assumed relationships between author and readers, and between readers and other readers using sociological models of honor/shame, patron/client, or other models relevant to the first-century context (see Lesson Six).
20. Be careful about “mirror reading”: attempting to determine the views of the audience or opponents by examining the negative or dualistic comments of the writer.
21. **Apocalyptic**

“apocalyptic” = revelation (*apokalypsis*). Apocalyptic is generally characterized as literature that has visions of the end of the present evil age, judgment, and

1. Revelation contains three types of genre:
   1. Epistle (especially chapters 2-3)
      1. Look for the historical situation.
      2. Look for the purpose of the letter.
      3. Interpret the letter in its first-century context, how the original hearers would have heard it.
   2. Prophecy
      1. Foretelling (future)
      2. Forthtelling (concerned with the present)
      3. Four major approaches to interpreting Revelation (technical words used by scholars):
2. Preterist: all events are past
3. Futurist: all events are future
4. Historicist: fulfilled throughout church history
5. Idealist: symbolic presentation of the timeless struggle between good and evil.
   * 1. A combination of these approaches is probably most likely.
     2. “The prophecies predict literal events, though the descriptions do not portray the events literally.”
   1. Apocalyptic
      1. A type of literature that includes:
6. Narrative framework to describe the apocalypse (told as a story)
7. Visions were the most common way revelations are made known. Their content varies: history, geography, cosmology, astronomy, eschatology.
8. Often interpreted by intermediary (angel, guide)
9. Heavenly journeys
10. Visions/mystery must be interpreted
11. Human figure/visionary is often a hero of the past
    * 1. Differences between Revelations and typical apocalypses (from Leon Morris):

Revelation . . .

1. Regular refers to the book as prophecy.
2. Typically contains prophetic warnings and calls for repentance.
3. Lacks pseudonymity (using a false name as the author).
4. Has an optimistic worldview.
5. Does not retrace past history in the guise of prophecy.
6. Has realized eschatology.
7. Has little interpretation by angels.
8. Shows the belief that the Messiah has already come and made atonement.
9. Some hermeneutical presuppositions to keep in mind:
10. Do careful exegesis following standard rules (the known aspect).
11. Be open to how God is working in history today (the mystery aspect).
12. General Rules of Interpretation
13. Consider the symbolic nature of apocalyptic literature. Sometimes we cannot determine the meaning of the symbolic language.
14. Interpret the symbols as much as possible by how the author and readers would have understood them in the first century. Look for clues of the meaning of these symbols within the text itself.
15. Explore how Revelations uses OT texts and imagery and how the author expands or interprets these images.
16. Be aware of the biases of the commentaries you use.
17. Look for the obvious message first.
18. Look for the big themes in Revelation (persecution, holiness, assurance, etc.).
19. See visions as whole pieces and do not press all the details allegorically.
20. Do not be afraid of the ambiguous. Do not try to interpret every aspect of Revelation.
21. Distinguish the temporal (bound in time in this age) from the eschatological (at the end of time).
22. Seek the enduring theological truths the author was affirming.
23. Do not claim authoritative interpretation of obscure symbols. Be cautious about anyone who claims to know the meaning of these symbols.

**Big Ideas**

1. Literary genre refers to the type of literature a passage or books is. The major types in the Bible are narrative, law, wisdom, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic, gospel, Acts (historical narrative), and letter.
2. Certain questions and methods must be used for certain genre. This will help us not misunderstand the thoughts of the author.
3. Determine the type of genre a passage or book is.
4. Then follow specific rules of exegesis for this genre in order to arrive at the message.