

How to Study the Bible

Unit 5: Genre – Lesson 1: Importance

Course Goal: To equip the believer to “Rightly divide the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

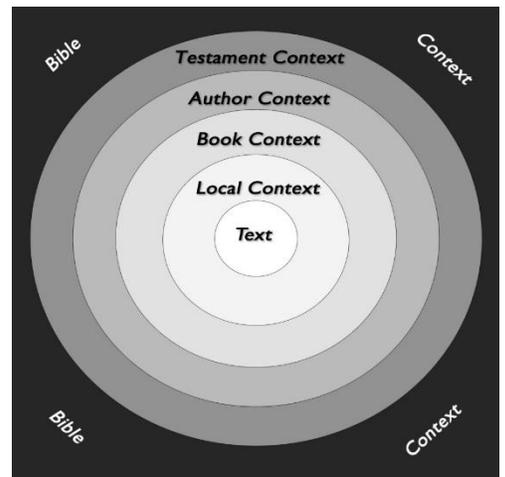
At the conclusion of this lesson, the believer should be able to:

- Define the term “genre” and identify contemporary examples
- Recall the different types of biblical genre
- Explain how genre is important in exegesis and Bible study

A Brief Review:

1. So far, we have discussed various tools in our hermeneutics tool box

- a. Bibliology: the doctrines of Scripture (general rules, guidelines, and parameters)
- b. Observation: the biblical context →
- c. Setting: the extra-biblical context (geographical, historical, religious, political, etc.)
- d. Grammar: word studies (translations, interpretations, concordance, lexicons, etc.)
- e. Theological context: topic studies (the passage should conform to a systematic theology)



What is “Genre”?

“Because the Bible was written by so many different authors facing so many different slices of life, it is written in a lot of different literary styles. We read each book best when we understand the perspective of the author.”¹

“Good communicators use a variety of literary devices for illustration, clarification, emphasis, and maintenance of audience interest. Biblical writers and speakers also use such devices... [and in some instances] the author does not intend his words to be taken literally.”²

“...it is important to understand the *genre*, or the type of literature under discussion. Study of the genre will enable us to better understand the *claim* being made by the text in question, whether it is claiming to be a literal historical account or something else.”³

“In fact, of course, the variety of language in Scripture is rich indeed. Its grammatical moods include not only indicative [objective fact] and imperative [command or request], but also significant interrogatives (Genesis 3:9; John 21:15; Romans 6:1; etc.) and exclamations (Romans 6:2; etc.) ...The literary genres, too, are varied: historical narrative, law, prophecy, poetry, proverb, romance, letter, and apocalypse.”⁴

¹ Smith, Carol, *The Everyday Guide to the Bible: A Friendly and Informative Guide to the Old and New Testaments* (Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2002), 72-73.

² Virkler, H. and Ayayo, K., *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 1981), 148.

³ Frame, John M., *The Doctrine of the Word of God: A Theology of Lordship, Volume 4* (Phillipsburg, NJ, P&R Publishing, 2010) 196-197 (emphasis original).

⁴ Frame, 359.

Why is genre important in Exegesis and Bible study?

“The Bible is a work of literature. Literature comes in different genres, or categories based on style, and each is read and appreciated differently from another. For example, to confuse a work of science fiction with a medical textbook would cause many problems—they must be understood differently... Therefore, accurate exegesis and interpretation takes into consideration the purpose and style of a given book or passage of Scripture. In addition, some verses are meant figuratively, and proper discernment of these is enhanced by an understanding of genre. An inability to identify genre can lead to serious misunderstanding of Scripture.”⁵

“On October 30, 1938, it was reported that cities across the USA erupted in panic over a dramatic broadcast of H.G. Wells *War of the Worlds*. Although the broadcast was introduced as a drama, it was conducted as a series of news bulletins without commercial interruption. Some who tuned in late to the broadcast reportedly thought an actual invasion from Mars was taking place! This event is an excellent example of how crucial it is to know what genre we are reading, or in this case listening, to...

Since genre is so important in determining meaning, this fact cannot be overlooked when interpreting Scripture. Along this line, one of the mistakes commonly made in biblical word studies is to use a concordance or lexicon and look up every meaning of a word and then apply all of those meanings to a particular passage. This method is as incorrect as thinking that a roofer is talking about [the steepness of a roof], a musical note, and the throwing of a baseball, all at the same time, when he uses the word ‘pitch.’”⁶



Class Exercise

1. Newspapers are generally trusted as sources of verified fact. Which portions of a newspaper should you not consider as literal fact?

2. Match the following Bible books and passages with the appropriate biblical genre from Frame's list above:

- a. 1 and 2 Chronicles: _____
- b. Psalm 139: _____
- c. The Revelation of Jesus Christ: _____

Homework:

1. Frame's list above is only one scholar's viewpoint. Find one or two other lists of biblical genres, and note the sources.

⁵ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-genres.html>, accessed 28 Feb 2018.

⁶ McCracken, Randy, "Why Genre is Important in Bible Study", October 15, 2015,

<http://www.biblestudywithrandy.com/2015/10/why-genre-is-important-in-bible-study/>, accessed 28 Feb 2018.