





BOOKS: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts

GENRE

There are four books in the Gospels genre—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Gospels cover the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each Gospel account tells the story from a different perspective with two primary purposes: to pass on the story of Jesus and through His story say something important to the original hearers and us. They are books about Jesus and also contain a large collection of His sayings and teachings. Acts is a historical narrative that tells the story of the early church. Acts is helpful in providing further historical context for the letters/epistles of the New Testament.

CONTEXT

- What has happened so far in the narrative? Have there been any major events, characters or themes?

- What has happened just prior to the section you are reading?

OBSERVATION

- What do you learn about the main characters in this section? How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves?

- Is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage?

- Is there a conflict or high point in the passage?

- Do you think there is a main point or theme in this section of the story?

- Do you find anything surprising or confusing in the passage?

MEANING

- Are there any comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments shed light on what is happening?
- Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way? How? What does this person learn?
- What does this passage or particular story tell us about Jesus?
- In the Gospels, what is the writer trying to say to his readers by the way he connects the stories together?
- How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

APPLICATION

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding of who God is and what He is like? In your day to day experience, does what you think about God/Jesus fit with what you have just read?
- Ask yourself: Is this something I really believe? If I really believed this, what difference would it make to my life?
- How does knowing this about God/Jesus affect the way you view yourself, the way you view others and the way you view the world? Is there anything you want to change in your life in view of this?



QUESTIONS TO ASK AS YOU READ THE EPISTLES (LETTERS)

BOOKS: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude

GENRE

The epistles of the New Testament are letters written by the apostles to first-century believers in the church to address issues and to encourage the believers. Because the letters were written to a specific audience for a specific purpose it is important to understand what the letter meant to the original audience before making application for believers today. Although the letters were written to a particular people, in a particular place, and in a particular time, they teach a timeless truth about God, the gospel, and the Christian life. This truth is illustrated through specific situations the original audience is facing, but applies to all believers in every era. Letters often contain a logical argument that addresses the issue at hand and following the flow of this argument is key.

CONTEXT

- What can you learn about the person or situation to which the letter is written?
- What clues are there about the author and his circumstances?
- What was the main point of the previous passage? In the previous passage, what are the themes and connections to the passage you are reading?

OBSERVATION

- Can you identify any major sub-sections or breaks in the text? Are there key connecting words (*for, therefore, but, because*) that indicate the logical flow of the passage?

- What is the main point or points? What supporting points does the author make?
- Do you find anything surprising or confusing in the passage?

MEANING

- How does this text relate to other parts of the book?
- How does the passage relate to Jesus?
- What does this teach you about God, Christ Jesus, or the Holy Spirit?
- How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

APPLICATION

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding of who God is and what He is like? In your day to day experience, does what you think about God/Jesus fit with what you have just read?
- Ask yourself: Is this something I really believe? If I really believed this, what difference would it make to my life?
- How does knowing this about God/Jesus affect the way you view yourself, the way you view others and the way you view the world? Is there anything you want to change in your life in view of this?



BOOKS: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

GENRE

Old Testament narratives cover Genesis through Esther. These are the history of God's people from the beginning of creation through their scattering and exile. Old Testament narratives are not allegories or stories with hidden meanings. They are not meant to teach a moral lesson or doctrine, however, they illustrate a moral or doctrine that is taught explicitly elsewhere in the Bible. They vividly demonstrate God's involvement in the world and illustrate His principles. Narratives record what happened, but not everything that happened or what ought to happen. The people in the narratives are not always examples of what is good and perfect, rather they highlight the ongoing effects of sin in the world from Fall in Genesis 3 and God's unfolding plan of redemption which culminates in Christ Jesus. When reading narratives pay attention to the narrator, scenes, characters, dialogue and plot. Remember—God is always the hero of the narrative!

CONTEXT

- What has happened so far in the narrative? Have there been any major events, characters or themes?

- What has happened just prior to the section you are reading?

OBSERVATION

- What do you learn about the main characters in this section? How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves?

- Is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage?

- Is there a conflict or high point in the passage?

- Do you think there is a main point or theme in this section of the story?
- Do you find anything surprising or confusing in the passage?
- What do you learn about the character of God from this passage?

MEANING

- Are there any comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments shed light on what is happening?
- Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way? How? What does this person learn?
- What does the passage reveal about who Jesus is, and what he came into the world to do?
- How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

APPLICATION

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding of who God is and what He is like? In your day to day experience, does what you think about God/Jesus fit with what you have just read?
- Ask yourself: Is this something I really believe? If I really believed this, what difference would it make to my life?
- How does knowing this about God/Jesus affect the way you view yourself, the way you view others and the way you view the world? Is there anything you want to change in your life in view of this?



BOOKS: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations

GENRE

This type of writing is known for its rich imagery, metaphors, figurative language, and use of short phrases. The books of wisdom (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) are wise sayings and the author's observations of the world around them. They offer insight for living a godly life in a complicated world. Biblical poetry differs from that of the English language. In the English, poetry uses rhythm and rhyme, however, Biblical poetry, written in Hebrew, links the lines of poetry using similar concepts or ideas (parallelism) rather than rhyme and rhythm. The psalms were used for singing and praying to God. They are the response of the Hebrew people to the acts and words of God. The psalms can be divided into two major categories, praise and lament. The psalms are expressions of every human emotion poured out to God in prayer.

CONTEXT

- Are there any clues about the circumstances in which the passage was written?
- What has happened so far?

OBSERVATION

- Are there any repetitions or multiple instances of similar ideas? Do these repetitions make a particular point, or point to the structure of the passage?
- What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they indicate about God or the other people in the text? What might they indicate about modern readers?
- What is the tone of the passage? What emotions is the author arousing?

- What is the main point or points?
- What surprises are there?

MEANING

- Are there any specific instructions given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?
- How does the author motivate the reader/audience, or make his appeal?
- What does the passage teach us about God, and his people, and life in his world?
- Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

APPLICATION

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding of who God is and what He is like? In your day to day experience, does what you think about God/Jesus fit with what you have just read?
- Ask yourself: Is this something I really believe? If I really believed this, what difference would it make to my life?
- How does knowing this about God/Jesus affect the way you view yourself, the way you view others and the way you view the world? Is there anything you want to change in your life in view of this?



BOOKS: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

GENRE

Chronologically in the Old Testament, the books of the prophets fit into the historical accounts of the Old Testament. The prophetic books are primarily short-spoken or preached messages, usually delivered by the prophet to either the nation of Israel or the nation of Judah. They also contain visions from God, short narrative sections, and symbolic acts. Only a small percentage of the prophecy in these books refer to events that are future to us. "Less than 2-percent of Old Testament prophecy is messianic. Less than 5-percent specifically describes the new-covenant age. Less than 1-percent concerns events yet to come in our time."¹ The majority of the prophecy in these books addresses the disobedience of the nation of Israel and/or Judah and their impending judgment. The prophet's basic message was a call to repentance because the Israelites had broken the covenant. There are three basic indictments: idolatry, social injustice, or religious ritualism. If the Israelites refused to repent, then judgment would come, yet there was hope beyond judgment for a future restoration. The prophet-writers use poetry for much of their message which includes the extensive use of figurative language. They use these figures of speech as weapons to drive home their point and God's message to His people. For example, instead of saying "God is mad," the prophet Amos proclaims, "The lion has roared" (Amos 3:8). Prophetic literature is very emotional. There are also narratives, oracles, and visions mixed with these oral message units.

CONTEXT

- Are there any clues about the circumstances in which the prophecy was given or written?
- Are any people or places mentioned that you aren't familiar with? (*Look them up in earlier parts of the book, or refer to a Bible dictionary or commentary.*)
- Are other bits of the Old Testament mentioned or alluded to in the passage? What part do these 'memories' play in the text?

OBSERVATION

- Are there any repetitions or multiple instances of similar ideas? Do these repetitions make a particular point, or point to the structure of the passage?

¹ J. Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hays, *Journey Into God's Word*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

- Paying attention to when the prophet is speaking and when God is speaking, what does the passage tell us about God's plans? What does it tell us about God's character?
- What kind of human behavior, if any, is condemned or rewarded? What response is called for, (if any)?
- What is the main point or points?

MEANING

- Are there any specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?
- Does the text have a sense of expectation about something happening in the future? What is to be expected and when? Does it motivate any action?
- Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

APPLICATION

- How is your own situation similar to or different from those being addressed?
- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding of who God is and what He is like? In your day to day experience, does what you think about God/Jesus fit with what you have just read?
- Ask yourself: Is this something I really believe? If I really believed this, what difference would it make to my life?
- How does knowing this about God/Jesus affect the way you view yourself, the way you view others and the way you view the world? Is there anything you want to change in your life in view of this?



BOOKS: Revelation; Daniel 7-12, portions of Zechariah and other Old Testament prophetic books, parts of the Gospels and epistles (Mark 13 & 2 Thessalonians 2)

GENRE

The word 'apocalyptic' comes from a Greek word meaning, 'to uncover or reveal'. It is seeing the true nature of something as not seen before. It is when God reveals something happening in the world from a biblical perspective. Apocalyptic literature uses bold proclamations delivered in picture form, vivid visions, dramatic symbolic imagery, heavy use of metaphor, and action that leads to final judgment and the new world to come. It is important to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are central to the events described in apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature should always be read in the context of the rest of the Bible, particularly referencing the Old Testament and the historical context of the book you are reading when interpreting images and symbols.

There are some key points to keep in mind as you read the book of Revelation. "Revelation is a prophetic-apocalyptic letter that uses strange images to bring heavenly perspective and hope to a struggling people."² The main message of Revelation is that God is the ultimate victor—He will win! When reading Revelation, try to discover the message to the original readers. Revelation should not be read as a strict chronological map of future events; it is not always literal. When interpreting images and symbols, remember to reference the Old Testament and historical context of Revelation.

CONTEXT

- Are there any clues about the historical circumstances the text is addressing?
- Are other bits of the Old Testament mentioned or alluded to in the passage? What part do these 'memories' play in the text?

OBSERVATION

- What images are used in the passage? What effect do they have?
- What emotions does the passage arouse? (e.g. fear, expectation, awe)?

² J. Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.

- How does the passage seek to reveal what God is like? Where in this passage might we find hope for men and women?
- Is there a crisis in the passage? What is the tension/conflict about, and how does it relate to readers?

MEANING

- Are there any specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?
- Does the text have a sense of expectation about something happening in the future? What is to be expected and when? Does it motivate the hearer/recipient to take any action?
- Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

APPLICATION

- How is your own situation similar to or different from those being addressed?
- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding of who God is and what He is like? In your day to day experience, does what you think about God/Jesus fit with what you have just read?
- How does this passage lead you to trust God and His promises in Jesus?
- How does knowing this about God/Jesus affect the way you view yourself, the way you view others and the way you view the world? Is there anything you want to change in your life in view of this?

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