

LITERARY FORMS AND INTERPRETATION

SESSION ONE: DEFINITION OF GENRE AND DO THEY EXIST?

- I. Definition of Genre
 - a. Genre is from a French word that means “kind”
 - b. Genre is synonymous with literary forms.
- II. Does Genres exist?
 - a. The “Transcendental” Argument for the existence of literary genre
 - i. Genre does exist because genre is used by God when He wrote the Bible.¹
 - ii. Genre can be so obvious that many people are not conscious of it when they are reading.
 1. A trip to the library
 - a. Literatures are arranged according to its kind (genre).
 - i. Children’s story
 - ii. Government documents
 - iii. Biographies
 - iv. Action thrillers
 - v. Romance novels
 - vi. Math text books
 - vii. Journal on literary forms
 - b. Some of the genre might overlap, but that does not mean that there are not kinds of literature!
 - iii. The impossibility of the contrary: There is no such thing as a ‘genre-less’ literature
 1. Objection: A groceries’ list is an example of a genre-less literature.
 2. ANSWER: Yet, the groceries list is a genre itself, that of a groceries list!

SESSION TWO: THE IMPORTANCE OF GENRE IN INTERPRETATION

- I. Interpretation does require more than words and grammar
 - a. Read Hebrews 1:1. God has spoken through various ways.
 - b. Sometimes meaning is determined by the context at the level of literary forms and not just the words and grammar by themselves.
 - i. Example #1: “It is hot.”
 1. Grammatically, one knows that:
 - a. “It”= Pronoun; Subject
 - b. “Is”= verb
 - c. Hot= Adjective
 2. However, just knowing the grammar is not enough; identifying the literary genre would help determine its meaning.

¹ After all, the various genre is the topic of this course.

- a. If the sentence is found in the weather section of the newspaper, it is talking about temperature.
 - b. If the sentence is found in the fashion section of the newspaper, then it is talking about aesthetics.
 - c. If the sentence is found in the world report section of the newspaper, it might mean the circumstance is getting tense.
 - ii. Example #2: Does the Bible teach that a wife is a garden?
 - 1. Song of Songs 4:15.
 - a. Does a wife have flowing water from Lebanon?
 - b. Does she bare pomegranates, henna and nard (v. 14)?
 - c. Knowing where this passage comes from and its literary genre would make the reader aware that there is poetry going on here rather than a wife being a literal garden where one has to maintain by buying fertilizer.
- II. An illustration of the importance of knowing literary forms²
 - a. Think of understanding the various literary forms as filling your tool belt with various kinds of tool. When you arrive at different texts with different literary forms, an understanding of the text's literary form would help you in getting out its meaning faithfully and accurately.

APPENDIX SESSION TWO: INTER-RELATIONSHIP OF GENRE IN INTERPRETATION

- I. Introduction
 - a. You have probably heard the saying "Let Scripture interpret Scripture".
 - b. Throughout this series on hermeneutics and Genre course, one can see the inter-relationship of Genre. This inter-relationship of genres is important in interpretation.
 - c. One more fully appreciate the principle of "Let Scripture interpret Scripture" in seeing how one particular genre of Scripture can shed interpretative light of another genre of Scripture.
 - d. This appendix summarizes how each genre can be further illuminated by another genre of Scripture. (NOTE: This outline is not exhaustive)
 - e. This outline might be helpful as a guide to the hermeneutics of proper cross-referencing.
- II. Interpretative insights of a Biblical passage in light of similar genre
 - a. Find if there are other places that are similar in Genre and see if there is new information provided to get a more fuller pictures.
 - Example: Looking at the four Gospels to get a picture of one incident.
 - b. Pay attention to progressive revelation: Are their more information provided in later revelation of the same Genre?
 - Example: Book of Revelation gives more details of prophecies than Isaiah, Daniel, etc.

² This illustration comes from the book, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*.

- III. Interpretative insights of a Biblical passage in light of other genre
- a. Old Testament Narrative
 - i. Proverbs: Are there any particular wise proverb that address the particular slice of reality of this text?
 - ii. New Testament Narrative/Gospels: Has Jesus and the early church authoritatively preach on this text, revealing insights within the text or further details?
 - iii. Epistles:
 - 1. Similar to New Testament Narrative, does the Epistles offer any insights into the text or further details?
 - 2. The Epistles are especially helpful in giving theological interpretation of Old Testament Narratives.
 - b. Old Testament Historical Narrative
 - i. What applies for Narrative above (insights from Proverbs, New Testament Narrative/Gospels and Epistles) applies here as well.
 - ii. Narrative: Are their any Covenants and promises described previously in Old Testament narratives that illuminate what is going on in this particular text?
 - iii. Laws: This provides the biblical standard of norms to make a moral judgment of the event in the Historical Narrative.
 - iv. Lament and Praise Poetry: Does the Psalms provide further insight of the difficulties or celebration of the events in the Historical narrative?
 - v. Announcement of judgment and oracle of salvation: Are there any prophetic books that occur simultaneously with the events going on?
 - c. Old Testament Laws
 - i. Narrative & Historical Narrative:
 - 1. Provides the historical and situational circumstances that the Laws are prescribed to.
 - 2. Also, are their any Covenants and promises described previously in Old Testament narratives that illuminate what is going on in this particular text?
 - 3. Are their examples of laws illustrated?
 - ii. Praise and announcement of judgment: Are their any given perspectives of the Law of God provided in these genres?
 - iii. New Testament Narrative/Gospels and Epistles: Does these genres reveal any Old Testament Laws are no longer applicable for today?
 - d. Lament and Praise
 - i. Narrative & Historical Narrative:
 - 1. Provides the historical and situational circumstances that the Lament or Praises Psalms are prescribed to.
 - 2. Also, are there any Covenants and promises described previously in Old Testament narratives that illuminate what is going on in this particular text?

- ii. New Testament Narrative/Gospel and Epistles: Did the New Testament further expounded on these texts?
- e. Proverbs
 - i. Laws: Since Proverbs is by nature “slice of reality”, it is also important that any imperative is seen within the boundary of the Law.
 - ii. Epistles: Again, since Proverbs is by nature “slice of reality”, it is also important that any imperative within Proverbs be viewed within the boundary of the commands and prohibition of the New Testament.
 - iii. New Testament Narrative/Gospel and Epistles: Did the New Testament further expounded on these texts?
- f. Other Hebrew Wisdom
 - i. Narrative & Historical Narrative: Provides the historical background.
 - ii. Law, Proverbs and the Epistles: Especially in the “Counter-Wisdom” literatures, it is important to interpret things in light of the theological and moral boundaries of Scripture.
- g. Announcement of Judgment
 - i. Narrative & Historical Narrative:
 1. Can provide the historical background of when the text was written.
 2. Also, are there any Covenants and promises of curses described previously in Old Testament narratives and historical narratives that illuminate what is going on in this particular text?
 - ii. Law: What are God’s command and prohibition that God is not pleased with, that result in this announcement of judgment?
 - iii. Oracle of Salvation and Apocalyptic: In light of the doom and gloom of Announcement of Judgment, is there any hope to be found in the Oracle of Salvation or the Apocalyptic Genre?
- h. Oracle of Salvation
 - i. Narrative & Historical Narrative:
 1. Can provide the historical background of when the text was written.
 2. Also, are there any Covenants and promises of blessings described previously in Old Testament narratives and historical narratives that illuminate what is going on in this particular text?
 - ii. Announcement of Judgment: Oracle of Salvation is seen as good news in light of the announcement of judgment.
 - iii. Apocalyptic: Are there further expansion and details of hope to be found in Apocalyptic genre that can illuminate the oracle of Salvation?
- i. Apocalyptic
 - i. Narrative & Historical Narrative:

1. Can provide the historical background of when the text was written.
2. Also, are there any Covenants and promises of blessings and curses described previously in Old Testament narratives and historical narratives that are being described as being fulfilled in this particular text?
- ii. New Testament Narrative/Gospel and Epistles: Did the New Testament further expounded on these texts?
- j. New Testament Narrative/Gospel
 - i. Narrative & Historical Narrative:
 1. Are there any Covenants and promises of blessings and curses described previously in Old Testament narratives and historical narratives that are being described as being fulfilled in this particular text?
 - ii. Law: Are there certain behavior and manners that needs to be understood in light of the Old Testament Law?
 - iii. Lament, Praises, Announcement of Judgment, Apocalyptic: Are there any prophecies that are being fulfilled here?
 - iv. Epistles: Are there further theological explanations of historical realities to be found in the epistles?
 - k. Epistles
 - i. Narrative & Historical Narrative and New Testament Narrative/Gospel:
 1. Are their any illustrations found in the Epistles that comes from these narratives and require previous background familiarity of these narratives?
 2. Are there any Covenants and promises of blessings and curses described previously in Old Testament narratives and historical narratives that are being described as being fulfilled in this particular text?
 - ii. Lament, Praises, Announcement of Judgment, Apocalyptic: Are there any prophecies that are being fulfilled here?
 - l. Parables
 - i. Law: Are there certain behavior and manners that needs to be understood in light of the Old Testament Law?
 - ii. New Testament Narrative/Gospel: Does the rest of the Gospels happen to provide information important to understanding the parable's details?
 - iii. Epistles: In regards to one's interpretation of the Parables, is it within the boundary of theological and moral orthodoxy as expounded in the Epistles?