

First Free Church

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

101

An introduction to biblical hermeneutics

CHALLENGE of INTERPRETATION

“I love basketball more than my wife.”

How should this be
interpreted?

THE LOCATION of INSPIRATION?

GOD

The source of all truth. By his Spirit, he inspired prophets, poets, ancient biographers, and apostles.

BIBLICAL AUTHORS

These human authors, living in a particular time and place and within a particular cultural context, use the language, cultural, and writing customs of their day to communicate God's revelation to an original, intended audience.

AUDIENCE

Those reading and hearing the words of the Bible, should seek not to impose their perspective on to the text, but to **humbly** seek to get as close to the location of divine inspiration as possible.

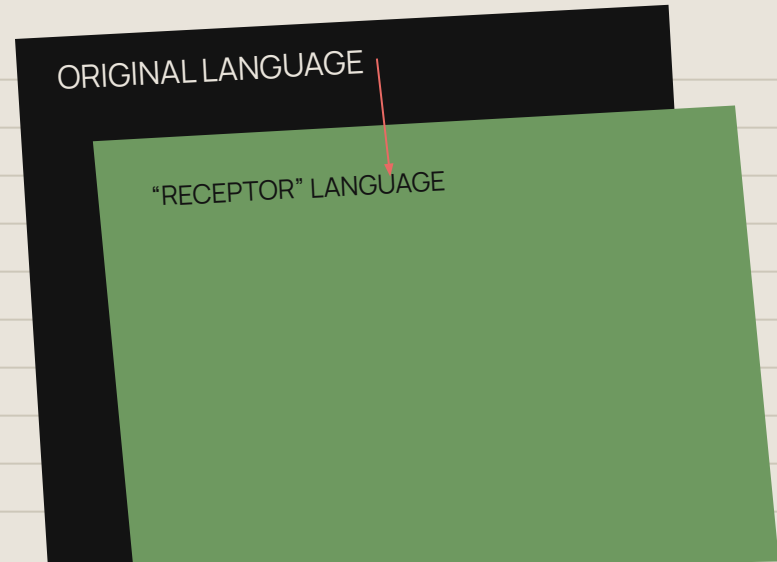




FOR US, BUT NOT TO US.

PICKING A GOOD TRANSLATION

“The Word of God given in human words of history.” - Gordon Fee



PICKING A GOOD TRANSLATION

Formal Equivalence (literal)			Functional Equivalence (dynamic)				Free	
1. KJV	NASB	RSV	NIV ¹	NAB	GNB	JB	NEB	LB
2. NKJV	HCSB	NRSV	NIV ²	NJB	REB	NLT		The Message
		ESV						

NRSV: “[God] said, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘A basket of summer [*qy* _§] fruit.’ Then the LORD said to me, ‘The end [*q* _§] has come upon my people Israel.’”

Translations that move toward functional equivalence try to work with the wordplay, even when doing so may alter the meaning somewhat:

NIV: “ ‘What do you see, Amos,’ [God] asked. ‘A basket of ripe [*qy* _§] fruit,’ I answered. Then the LORD said to me, ‘The time is ripe [*q* _§] for my people Israel.’”

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES IN GENRE

EPISTLES (LETTERS)

Epistles are "occasional" documents, meaning they were written for a specific occasion, usually to address a problem or a specific question in a local church.

Examples: Romans, Ephesians, etc

LAW

Found primarily in the Pentateuch, these are covenant stipulations. They function as the legal requirements of the "contract" between God and Israel.

Examples: Leviticus, Numbers

NARRATIVE

The most common genre.

There is a distinction between Hebrew Narrative, "history books" and Biographies like the Gospels or narrative in the book of Acts.

Examples: Genesis, 1 & 2 Samuel, etc

POETRY

Rather than "rhyming sounds," biblical poetry "rhymes thoughts."

Examples: Psalms, Genesis 49, Exodus 15

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES IN GENRE

WISDOM

Epistles are "occasional" documents, meaning they were written for a specific occasion, usually to address a problem or a specific question in a local church.

Examples: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes

APOCALYPTIC

A special kind of "sister genre" to the prophets.
Highly symbolic language and imagery intended to describe "ultimate reality", cosmic spiritual struggle, and the effect of that struggle on the affairs of humanity. It looks forward to a final victory.
Examples: Revelation, Daniel 7-12

PROPHECY

Prophets were primarily "covenant enforcement mediators."

They weren't just "fortune tellers" looking into the distant future; they were "forth-tellers" bringing God's message to the present.

Examples: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos

BIOGRAPHY

A narrative portrait designed to reveal the unchanging character of a subject through their key words and deeds.
Different focus than modern history books.

Example: The Gospels

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES IN GENRE

BIOGRAPHY | Greco-Roman *Bios* (plural *Bioi*)

Usual Conventions:

1. Character Revelation:

- **The Definition:** The genre's goal is to show who the person **is** by highlighting anecdotes where their true nature shines through.
- **The Result:** This is why we have stories of Jesus at age 12 in the Temple (Luke) or performing his first miracle (John)—they serve to show that he was *always* this way.

2. The "Weight" of the Death

In ancient *Bioi*, the manner of a person's death was considered the ultimate "proof" of their life's message.

- **The Definition:** A biblical biography is a "Passion Narrative with a long introduction."
- **The Result:** This explains why the Gospels spend nearly a third of their pages on a single week (Holy Week). In a modern biography, this would be seen as a pacing error; in a biblical genre sense, it is the climax that defines the whole work.

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES IN GENRE

BIOGRAPHY | Greco-Roman *Bios* (plural *Bioi*)

Usual Conventions:

3. Topical Over Chronological

Ancient biographers were not obsessed with a strict timeline. They grouped stories by **themes** or **topics** to make a point about the subject's virtues.

- **The Definition:** It is an arrangement of "pericopes" (self-contained stories) designed for moral instruction.
- **The Result:** This is why Jesus might "cleanse the Temple" at the start of his ministry in John, but at the end in the other Gospels. The author is moving the story to fit the "biographical portrait" they are painting.

4. *Kerygma* or "Core Announcement"

While a Roman biography of Caesar might be written for political propaganda, a Gospel is written as **Proclamation** (*Kerygma*).

The primary goal is not informational or psychological insight into the main character, it is didactic and proclamational.

Table discussion:

-Psalm 114:4: "The mountains leaped like rams, the hills like lambs."

Mountains do not leap like rams, therefore the Bible is not true and cannot be trusted.

Table discussion:

In Matthew 8:28–34, Jesus heals two demon-possessed men in the region of the Gadarenes.

However, in Mark 5:1–20 and Luke 8:26–39, they only mention one man (the one famously named Legion).

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Basic Reading Tips for Common Genres

BASIC READING TIPS FOR EACH GENRE

EPISTLES

- **Read "Paragraphs," not "Verses":** Epistles are logically driven. If you stop at a single verse, you might miss the "Because" or "Therefore" that gives it meaning. Always read the whole paragraph.
- **Think "Occasional":** Every letter was written to solve a specific problem. Ask: *"What was going wrong in this church that made the author say this?"* *
- **Trace the Argument:** Try to outline the author's logic. If Paul says "A," then "B," how does he get to "C"?

Table discussion:

Read 1 Corinthians 1 at your table.

Then Discuss:

What's the occasion for this letter?

What's Paul's primary argument in this chapter?

BASIC READING TIPS FOR EACH GENRE

OT Narrative

- **Find the Hero (It's God):** Narrative isn't meant to give you "moral heroes." Don't ask "How can I be like David?" Ask "**What is this story saying about God's faithfulness?**"
- **Don't Always Expect a "Moral":** Unlike Aesop's Fables, biblical stories rarely end with a direct lesson. The deeper theological truth is woven into the plot; you have to see where the story ends to understand the point.

Table discussion:

Read Judges 2:10-19 at your table.

Then Discuss:

What clues does this introduction give to how we should read the stories of the Judges like Samson?