

February 16, 2022

The Literary Context in Biblical Interpretation

What is Literary Context/Why Is It Important?

“Literary context relates to the particular form a passage takes (the *literary genre*) and to the words, sentences, and paragraphs that surround the passage you are studying (the *surrounding context*).” – Duvall and Hays

“Literary genre acts as a kind of covenant of communication, a fixed agreement between author and reader about how to communicate.” – Kevin Vanhoozer

Why is it important to work through the literary context?

The Genres of The Bible

1. *Old/New Testament Historical Narrative*

Stories –

Accounts are “selective presentation[s] of the facts designed to present a theological evaluation of that record – one that will bring about a proper spiritual and ethical response on the part of its readers.” – Kostenberger and Patterson

Reports –

Elements of Historical Narrative Include: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Styles of Narrative: Dialogue, Repetition, Highlighting, Irony, Satire, Misunderstanding, and Symbols

2. *Poetry and Wisdom Literature*

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Practice: Read all three New Testament passages and label them as similar, antithetic, or progressive parallelism.

- Matthew 7:7 _____
- Matthew 7:17 _____
- Matthew 5:7 _____

“All wisdom literature is basically instructional in nature, with the author attempting to impart wise observations on the meaning of life and the proper conduct necessary to enjoy life to the fullest.” – Kostenberger and Patterson

3. *Prophecy*

Four Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel

Twelve Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

4. *Parables*

“A parable is a short narrative that demands a response from the hearer. With regard to genre, parables are true-to-life or realistic stories. They differ from historical narrative in that they are not true stories.” – Kostenberger and Patterson

Varies Forms of Parables

| Similitude | Short Parable | Story Parable/ Example Parable | Allegorical Parable |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Matthew 13:33 | Luke 17:7-10 | Luke 15:11-32 | Mark 12:1-12 |

How can you come to a proper interpretation of Parables?

5. *Epistles*

6. *Apocalyptic Literature*

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How to Identity the Surrounding Context

1. Identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or sections.

How do you divide the book into sections?

2. Summarize the main idea of each section in about a dozen words or less.
3. Explain how your particular passage relates to the surrounding sections.

Dangers of Ignoring the Literary Context

- Ignoring the Surrounding Context

Examples:

Revelation 3:20 – “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

Matthew 18:20 – “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

How have these passages been wrongly used? How should they be used?

- Topical Preaching/Teaching

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Reflection For the Week:

Turn to the Old Testament book of Jonah and do the following:

1. Read the entire book of Jonah and identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or sections.
2. Summarize the main idea of each section in about a dozen words or less.
3. Explain how your particular passage (Jonah 1:13-16 for this exercise) relates to the surrounding context.

Preparation For Next Week:

- Read - <https://georgehuthrie.com/new-blog/2016/7/15/4-simple-steps-for-doing-word-studies>

Resources For Going Further:

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

Kostenberger, Andreas J. and Richard D. Patterson. *Invitation To Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011.

Richards, E. Randolph and Brandon J. O'Brien. *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012.