

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
June 7, 2015
“Interpreting the Genres in Scripture, pt. 2”

Memory Verse:

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” 2 Tim. 2:15

This week we’ll be continuing our study of different genres of literature that are used in the Bible, and how we can recognize, interpret and understand them more fully and clearly.

Proverbs

Proverbs are short, sometimes poetically worded, statements of wisdom or advice that generally hold true. As we have studied before, they are not intended to be 100% accurate in all cases, but as statements that guide toward wise behavior and avoid the results of foolishness. Proverbs are present in many cultures (not the book of the Bible, but the short wisdom statements) and many from other cultures agree with or are taken from the Bible. But just because a saying is wise does not make it inspired of God. We don’t put Ben Franklin in the Bible just because he said, *“There are no gains without pains,”* even though that’s considered a wise proverb.

We know that the book of Proverbs in the Bible is inspired and therefore trustworthy because it is mostly written by King Solomon, son of David, to whom God himself gave the gift of wisdom greater than any other man’s. Even though Solomon went astray during his life, the wisdom he received from God is evident in the works that Solomon wrote (most of Proverbs, some Psalms, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes.)

According to Grant Osborne, a theologian and scholar we have quoted before, “We dare not read more into the proverbial statement than is there. By their very nature they are generalized statements, intended to give advice rather than to establish rigid codes by which God works.” In other words, when we read Proverbs 22:6 (“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it”) we should not take this as an absolute, fail-proof promise. If a person turns away from God, it is by their own free will and choice, no matter how well their parents taught them. This is God’s plan and design. Ultimately, we can’t make that decision for anyone, but God, in His grace, has given parents the opportunity to influence their children through teaching their children and demonstrating a loving and godly way of living for them.

However, some proverbs have no exceptions because they deal with God’s character and nature. “For example, in Proverbs 11:1, we read, ‘The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.’ Because God is righteous, he always abhors cheating in business without exception.” Or in Proverbs 6:16-19, we get a list of things that God despises:

“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”

“God does not sometimes hate these things and at other times not hate these things. As a completely holy God, these are things he always hates.” (Quotes from Plummer). While we can use proverbs to get a general understanding of men and their wise and foolish ways, they always reveal God to be Constant, Wise and Worthy, without exception.

Poetry

Almost no book of the Bible is composed entirely of poetry, but almost every book of the Bible has some poetic forms in it. Because poetry is so often used alongside the other genres we've studied, (for example, in the Historical Narrative of 2 Samuel 1:17-27, the lament of David over Saul and Jonathan is recorded.) we need to learn to recognize poetic form so that we don't mistakenly misinterpret the text.

As we talked about last week, words and writing can often be exaggerated for effect. They can make us laugh, cry, stop and think about things we'd normally not consider. They can make us feel differently as well. Words can stir up feelings of anger, regret, sorrow, joy and worship. Poetry is used in this way. When words are put together due to the way they sound (rhyme and rhythm) it makes the more memorable than our everyday words. Poetry is meant to move us mentally, emotionally and spiritually, not give us a grocery list or tell us how to build a house. So when we hear "Old Testament poetic descriptions of battle, cosmic imagery is sometimes used in a figurative way. Stars fall from the sky, the moon is darkened, and the sun is blotted out (Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10; 3:15)." In these cases, we can be sure that this was poetry intended to convey the horror and turmoil of the wars that occurred during those times, even though the sun, moon and stars continue to shine.

Some basic components of poetry and figurative language are listed below. When you see them in scripture, be aware that you are probably reading a poetic description of some person or event or topic.

1. Metaphor - a person or thing is described as being something else.

Example: Amos 4:1 "Hear this word you cows of Bashan, you women who oppress the poor..." Amos is calling these sinfully luxurious women cows because they are only interested in what people can do for them and how much they can eat and drink. True they don't have horns or hooves, but Amos is saying that the greed and lack of concern for the needy make them like dumb, fat animals.

2. Simile - (SIM-uh-lee) – similar to a metaphor, on the person or thing is described as being "LIKE" something else

Example: Psalm 1:3, "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." This very clearly tells us the "He," the righteous man, is like a well-planted, watered tree: prosperous, fruitful and healthy!

3. Personification - a phrase that gives inanimate objects the properties of people

Example: Why gaze in envy, O rugged mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the LORD himself will dwell forever? (Ps. 68:16)

4. Anthropomorphism - (anthropo – means having to do with "mankind", morph – means to change or configure) this figure of speech means to present God as having human characteristics. This is used very frequently whenever we talk about God's eye or his hands or his heart, or even in the fact that we call him "Him". God is a spirit and he doesn't have a body or body parts, but God has decided that the closest way we can identify with him is often to refer to himself as a man, doing human things: Holding us, protecting us, laughing, singing over us, and chastising us. These are all things that human beings do, literally, and God identifies with us because he is our Father (another anthropomorphism) and our Creator.

Example: 2 Chronicles 16:9, "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."

Psalms

The Psalms are full of poetry and figurative language, as any song usually is. However, there are many different types of songs just like there are many ways to worship God. There are 150 psalms but they can all be divided into different subcategories (subgenres) or types of psalm. Some of these can be recognized as types of songs we might create today.

1. Lament Psalms – “About one-third of the book of Psalms is composed of lament psalms. In a lament, an individual or a group cries out to God in distress. In light of how much current Christian worship music ignores the difficulties of life, it is instructive to see the prominence Psalms gives to speaking honestly about one’s troubles to God.” (Plummer) (Psalms 3; 9; 12; 13; 17; 42; 60;74; 94; 139).
2. Praise Psalms – “These psalms are characterized by the prominent motif of praising God (Ps. 106; 111–113; 146; 150). God is praised as Creator (Ps. 104), Savior of Israel (Ps. 149), and Sovereign over history (Ps. 103).”
3. Thanksgiving Psalms – “As indicated by the title, these songs thank God for answering the request of the worshipper(s). The psalms are written for individuals (Ps. 18; 32; 40; 92) or groups (Ps. 65; 75; 107; 136).
4. Celebration Psalms – “These psalms ‘celebrate God’s covenant relationship with the king and the nation.’ Two subsets of the group are (a) royal psalms and (b) songs of Zion. Royal psalms (Ps. 2; 24; 93; 101; 110) celebrate the king of Israel as God’s representative ruler and, on the other hand, the representative of the nation before God... Songs of Zion (Ps. 46; 76; 87; 125) thunder with praise for God’s choice of Jerusalem (also called “Zion”) as the location of his temple, pilgrimage festivals, and chosen king.”
5. Wisdom Psalms – “A hybrid of song and wisdom literature, wisdom psalms deal with topics such as the divine source and nature of true wisdom (Ps. 1; 19; 119) and questions about injustices experienced or witnessed in this life (Ps. 73). Wisdom psalms recast the themes of wisdom literature as songs of worship.
6. Penitential Psalms – “Penitential psalms, whether individual or corporate, give voice to the psalmist’s repentance. Probably the best-known penitential psalm is Psalm 51, which records David’s repentance over his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (also see Ps. 6; 32; 38; 102; 130; 143).”
7. Imprecatory Psalms – “These are the “cursing psalms,” of which the best known is Psalm 137 (also see Ps. 35; 60; 70; 109; 140). In such psalms, the speaker calls on God to enact his divine justice against the psalmist’s enemies. Often the plea is accompanied by a recounting of the psalmist’s innocence. Christians sometimes have trouble squaring such psalms with the biblical injunctions to forgive one’s enemies (Matt. 5:43–48; Rom. 12:14, 17). Nevertheless, in both the Old and New Testaments, the authors of Scripture point to God’s ultimate intervention against evildoers as a source of comfort (Ps. 73:17–20; Rom. 12:19; 2 Thess. 1:6–8). In calling out for God’s intervention, the worshipper releases his emotions and relies upon the only Judge who knows all hearts, words, and actions (Ps. 44:21; Acts 1:24).”

So What?

- Practice identifying the type or genre of the portions of Scripture you read during the upcoming week.
- Review the genres covered last week.
- Read and meditate on the Bible this week. Give special attention to the memory verse.