

Bible Study Help Sheet

Good questions to ask when studying a passage of Scripture:

1. What stands out in this passage?
2. What words, phrases, and ideas were repeated?
3. How is this passage structured/organized; what is the flow-of-thought (any progressions, sections, climaxes, etc...)?
4. How does this passage relate with /contribute to the overall theme of the book?
5. What is significant about [each observation]....
 - the repeated words and ideas?
 - how the passage is structured?
 - the connections & tie-ins with preceding chapters?
6. How does this passage relate to Christ?
 - How does it directly or indirectly point to Christ?
 - How does it show my need for a Savior?
 - How does it show God's character who would provide a Savior for sinners?
 - How does it flow or result from Christ & His work?
7. How should a right understanding of these truths affect my life right now?

Key literary relations to observe:*

1. **Repetition** – the reiteration of same words, phrases, or clauses (Eccl 1 'All is vanity'; Book of Lev 'holy')
2. **Continuity** – the repeated use of similar words, phrases, or clauses (Ps 145:3 'Great is the Lord & worthy of praise')
3. **Continuation** – the extended treatment of a particular aspect; the carrying through to its completion of an idea or series of events. Related to continuity, but involves *extension* rather than recurrence. (Gen 13-14 & 18-19 Abr & Lot)
4. **Comparison** (like, so also, in the same way) – the association of like things (2Tim 2:3-4 'Timothy ~ soldier')
5. **Contrast** (but, however, on the contrary) – the association of opposites (Eph 2:1-10 'dead in sins vs. alive in Christ')
6. **Interchange** – the exchanging or alternation of certain elements (often employed to strengthen contrasts or comparisons) (1 Sam 1-4 Hannah & son Samuel vs. Eli & his sons; Lk 1-2 birth of Jesus and John the Baptist)
7. **Climax** – the arrangement of material so as to progress from the lesser to the greater and ultimately the greatest (Book of Ex: climax at Ex 40:34-35 when Lord's glory fills tabernacle; the Gospels climax with resurrection of Christ)
8. **Cruciality** – the utilization of the principle of the pivot. The subject matter is arranged so that it turns around or upon some one factor. (2 Sam 11-12 David's sin with Bathsheba changes the direction of history recorded in the book)
9. **Instrumentation** (so that, in order that) – the setting forth of the means to an end as well as the end itself. Involves the factor of purpose. Note the means is not necessarily less significant than the end. (Jn 20:30-31 Signs recorded in the book are a means to an end—belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, in order to have eternal life.)
10. **Causation & Substantiation** (so, for, because, since, if...then, therefore) – the progression from cause to effect & from effect to cause (Ex of *causation*: Rom 1:18-32 men suppressed the truth → God gave them over to their sin; Ex of *substantiation*: Rom 8:18-30 hope of glory in midst of suffering ← we have the firstfruits of the Spirit & God has promised to glorify those He has called & justified in Christ)
11. **Particularization & Generalization** – the movement from the general to the particular, and from the particular to the general (Ex of *particularization*: Matt 6:1-18 Don't do righteous acts to be seen → giving alms, prayer, fasting; Ex of *generalization*: Jas 2 Showing favoritism between the rich & poor → faith without deeds is dead)
12. **Explanation or Analysis** – the presentation of an idea or event followed by its interpretation. (Mk 4 Jesus speaks parables → explanation of the parables & why he speaks in parables given to the disciples)
13. **Preparation or Introduction** – the inclusion of the background or setting for events or ideas. Thereby the reader is prepared to understand that which follows. (Gen 2:4-25 provides situation in which events of Gen 3 occur)
14. **Summarization** – the employment of an abridgement or synopsis either preceding or following a unit of material. (Joshua 12 gives a list of kings that Joshua & the Israelites defeated in the land of Canaan)
15. **Interrogation** – the employment of a question or problem followed by its answer (Rom 6-7 "Shall we sin, that grace may increase? May it never be..."; Matt 16:8-11 Barrage of rhetorical questions from Jesus to disciples)
16. **Harmony** – the effecting of unity by means of agreement. Included in this concept is the *law of consistency*. Illustrations of this law: harmony b/w the disease & its remedy and the promise & its fulfillment. (Rom 1:18-3:20 "All have sinned; no one can be declared righteous by observing the law" → consistent with what follows in Rom 3:21ff "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known...comes through faith...")

General literary forms:*/**

1. **Discursive and Logical Literature** – Discourse is a logical and extended discussion of a subject. This form also includes writings which present ideas in argumentative form. To interpret it correctly, one must pay careful attention to its logical development, as this type of literature appeals primarily to the intellect. (Ex: *NT epistles—like Romans, longer sermons of Jesus*)
2. **Prose Narrative** – Most prose narrative is simply a story or a biographical sketch. When a Biblical author uses this form, he selectively describes scenes and events from biblical history that are theologically significant. As this type appeals primarily to the imagination, it is important to use the imagination to rightly interpret it. Also, key repeated details provide clues in understanding character and plot development. Other details are included to complete the “color” of the story. Therefore, it is important to make the distinction between that which is essential and that which is ornamental to the author’s main point. (Ex: *Genesis, portions of Exodus, Numbers, & Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1&2 Samuel, Nehemiah, the Gospels, Acts*)
3. **Poetry** – Poetry is emotional in nature. Biblical poetry extensively uses figurative language and different types of parallelism (synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic). Remembering that a poet uses flexible language and that he expresses feelings rather than rigid logical concepts is necessary to correctly interpret poetry. (Ex: *Psalms, Song of Songs*)
4. **Proverbs** – Wise sayings. Proverbs give practical principles for living. It is important that they not be confused with commands or promises. (Ex: *Proverbs, parts of Ecclesiastes*)
5. **Drama and Dramatic Prose** – The dramatic form involves primarily the personification, particularization, and vivid description of events or ideas for the sake of their moving effect. This form is closely related to the poetic expression of truth. To interpret this form rightly, one must determine whether a writer is speaking in terms of actual history or whether he is using the dramatic approach to make more striking a truth he is conveying. In the latter case, it is not safe to assume that what the prophet declares is intended to be literally factual. (Ex: *Some OT prophetic books—like Isaiah, portions of Jeremiah, Lamentations, Hosea, Joel*)
6. **Parabolic Literature** – A parable explains a spiritual truth by means of a story or analogy. It is an extended simile or metaphor. Some parables are explained in detail for us; most are not. Especially in the latter case, one must be careful to not press every detail too far. Instead one must focus on the main spiritual truth being communicated. (Ex: *Jesus’ parables in Matt 13, Mark 4, Luke 15*)
7. **Apocalyptic Literature** – The term “apocalypse” means “uncovering” or “revelation.” Apocalyptic literature is often characterized by the heavy use of symbolism and descriptions of visions which are predictive in nature. While it does foretell the future, its purpose is not to give us all the details. Rather, its purpose is to paint a picture and elicit a response in the present. (Ex: *Revelation, portions of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah*)

* Adapted from Robert Traina’s book, *Methodical Bible Study*

**Adapted from Jack Kuhatschek’s pamphlet, *How to Study the Bible*