

Literary Bible Study

A literary approach to reading the Bible opens our eyes to see how each individual passage of Scripture functions within the context of the story of the Bible as a whole to teach us about our Savior, Jesus Christ.

1

Begin with Prayer.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help illumine the passage to your heart.

Focus on the Passage

2

Familiarize yourself with the passage.

Read the full passage to yourself. On your first read, focus on learning the basic details of the passage. Pay attention to the setting, characters, objects, and action. Your goal should be to become familiar with the main order of events that the passage is describing.

Setting:

When does the passage take place?

Where does the passage take place?

Characters & Objects:

Who are the main figures in the passage?

What objects are described in the passage?

Action:

What happens in the passage?

3

Look for literary devices.

Take note of any structural or literary devices that the narrator uses within the passage. Ask yourself why the narrator is using these devices and consider how they help convey meaning within the passage itself.

Passage Structure:

Does the passage belong to the genre of comedy, tragedy, lyric, or epic? Is there an overarching structure that organizes the passage?

Passage Meaning:

Identify the major themes, symbols, and imagery of the passage.

Figures of Speech:

Look for similes, metaphors, repetition of key words or phrases, personification, etc...



Focus on the Big Picture

4 Examine the context for the passage.

No passage of Scripture is meant to be read in isolation. Identify how the passage functions first, within the immediate context of its surrounding chapters and its biblical book, and second, within the broader context of the Bible as a whole.

How does the passage function within the context of the surrounding chapters?

Consider whether the surrounding chapters serve as a frame to the passage. Do they revolve around a similar topic or theme? Do they contain parallel scenes that are meant to function in comparison or contrast to the passage?

How does the passage function within the context of the biblical book in which it is found?

Consider the structure of the biblical book in which the passage is found and the major themes the narrator is seeking to convey throughout the book. Are those themes reflected in the passage and how does that influence the passage's meaning? Conversely, how do the themes, symbols, and imagery of the passage contribute to the larger message of the biblical book?

How does the passage function within the context of the Bible as a whole?

Consider the passage in light of the broader context of the Old and New Testament. First, ask yourself whether the passage draws on any major themes, symbols, or imagery that recurs throughout the Bible. Next, consider whether the passage functions as a *type scene* (*a parallel to another story*) by asking yourself if the story of one of the characters or objects recalls the story of another biblical figure in Scripture or of Christ himself. If so, read the corresponding story and take note of the parallels and contrasts between the two passages. How do they help interpret one another?

Focus on Christ

5 Determine what the passage is teaching you about Christ.

If a character in the passage functions as a *type of* (*parallel figure to*) Christ, carefully examine the similarities between the two figures. Next, consider the differences, focusing especially on all the ways in which **Christ is better** than the other figure. Notice how, whenever a character is sinful, Christ remains perfect, but additionally, whenever a character proves to be great, Christ is always greater.

If the passage does not contain a character that functions as a *type of* (*parallel figure to*) Christ, focus on the moral lesson of the passage. Ask yourself if you can remember a story in the life of Christ that illustrates that moral principle. In addition to the passage at hand, what does the story of Christ teach you about how to reflect that moral principle in your own life?