

# Interpreting Literary Genre

## ***Historical Narrative***

Describes events in a matter-of-fact style with little or no didactic commentary.

Historical Narrative should NEVER be used to teach doctrine.

Historical Narrative SHOULD be used to illustrate Biblical principles (1 Cor 10:11).

## ***Fables***

Fables are stories using animals, plants, or other inanimate objects to teach a moral truth in a satirical manner.

1. Understand the contemporary setting which caused the speaker to use a fable.
2. Is the fable trying to teach one, or many points.
3. See what influence the fable had on the hearers.
4. Determine why the point of the fable is important and what bearing it has on us.

## ***Parable***

An extended simile used to illustrate a single divine truth.

Interpretive rules:

1. Identify the earthly details of the parable. Remember that the parable refers to common, everyday events and objects as opposed to rare and obscure events.
2. Identify important and unimportant elements of the parable. Not all elements of the parable contribute to its interpretation and meaning. Sometimes details are inserted to lend color to its setting.
3. Identify the spiritual attitude and mind-set of the original hearers.
4. Identify the reason for the parable. The parables regarding the kingdom of God in Matthew 13 are meant to show the interim form of the kingdom of God.
5. Identify the main point of the parable.
6. If details or symbols in the parable are explained by the parable, seek no other definitions.
7. Identify the impact of the parable on the hearers.

## ***Prophecy***

Approximately 25% of the Bible is of this literary genre. Prophetic genre is characterized by symbology which is used to predict future events.

Interpretive rules:

1. Determine the historical background of the events which precipitated the prophecy.
2. Analyze the prophecy for clues as to the definition of the symbols. When the prophecy lacks sufficient information to define the symbol, compare the use of the symbol elsewhere in Scripture to determine its meaning.
3. Determine the audience of the prophecy. Is it directed to them, or is it directed to them about someone else?
4. Determine if the prophecy has been fulfilled historically.
5. Determine the literal and figurative elements of the prophecy.
6. Look at the Christological content of the prophecy and determine its fulfillment in Christ.

Special problems:

Double fulfillment - a prophecy may contain a short-term prediction, fulfilled in the short term, that pictures an event far into the future. Example - Daniel 11.

Telescopic prophecies - a prophecy that appears to be a single prophecy but is in fact two, separated by many thousands of years. Example - Isaiah 61:1-2.

### ***Didactic***

Didactic genre consists of passages which are used to define fundamental doctrinal teaching in a systematic way. Prime examples are Paul's epistles and the general epistles.

### ***Proverbs***

Proverbs are pithy statements which are true as a whole but may be violated in individual cases.

Proverbs teach general truth, but are not blanket promises.