

How To Study The Bible (#16)

The Bible As Story

Rule: “look upon biblical stories as an invitation to share an experience, as vividly and concretely as possible, with the characters in the story.” 34

Rule: “pay close attention to every detail of setting that a storyteller puts into a story, and if setting has an important role, analyze how it contributes to the story.” 37

Rule: “use every relevant detail in a story to get to know the characters as fully as possible.” 40

How characters are portrayed: 37

1. They can be portrayed by direct description. 37
2. They can be portrayed by the responses of other characters. 38
3. They can be portrayed by that character’s own words and thoughts. 38
4. Their self portrayals can be a means by which our own character is revealed. 38
5. Their actions can demonstrate their character. 38

Types of plots: 40

1. Plot can be related through physical conflict 40
2. Plot can be related to character conflict 41
3. Plot can be related to moral, spiritual, conflict 41

Rule: “identify the exact nature of the plot conflicts in the story, noting how they develop and are finally resolved.” 41

Rule: “In reading or discussing biblical stories, analyze exactly how the narrative generates interest, curiosity, or suspense.” 43

Rule: “Pay attention to what happens to the protagonist in the story.” 43

Rule: Look upon the protagonists experiment in living as a comment about a significant aspect of human life and values. 44

Rule: Determine where a story begins and ends. 45

Rule: Learn how to chart the progress of the story 47

The test motif and stories:

1. The hero can be tested physically, or with reference to his courage. 50
2. The hero can be tested with regard to his resourcefulness or cleverness. 50

3. The hero can be tested with regard to his mental, or psychological, abilities. 50
4. The hero can be tested with reference to his moral or spiritual abilities. 51

Stories and choice:

1. Stories often focus on choices that characters within the story make. 51
2. The right choice, is often what the story is all about. 51

Rule: “Identify the exact nature of the tests that protagonist undergo or the choices they make observing how the story is structured around these tests or choices and noting how leading themes of the story are related to testing and choice.” 52

Stories and change: 53

1. Stories address change in fortune or situation
2. Stories address change in character
3. Stories address a combination of these two changes

Rule: “pay attention to the changes that occur between the beginning and end of the story, noting carefully precise ways in which characters change the causes of those transformations.” 54

Stories and foils: 54

1. A foil sets off, or heightens what is most important in a story by means of contrasts or parallels
2. The most common foil is the protagonist, But it can be an event or a series of actions
3. Foils of character occur frequently
4. Events can function as foils
5. Parallel accounts or plots can function as foils

Stories and irony: 55

1. Irony occurs when the reader knows something that a character in the story does not know
2. The Gospels, for example, record things about the life of Christ after the fact. As we read through the accounts we are aware that the writer did not know what we now know at the time these events were happening.
3. Irony is front and center in the book of Job. Job’s friends voice positions that have no application to Job’s life, and the extended means by which that is presented, as the irony.
4. Irony sometimes localized, as in the case of Joseph’s brothers selling me into slavery based upon his fanciful dreams and the jealousy that they had his result.

5. Dramatic irony is one of the most effective ways of pulling the reader into a story. We feel the tension and are hooked.

Poetic Justice: 56

1. poetic justice is an account in which good characters are rewarded and bad ones are not
2. Poetic justice is one of the conventions of storytelling. It is a way to end a story with a note of finality. It is the storyteller's way of clarifying how he feels morally and emotionally about the characters and events that have been recorded

Rule: "be alert for the presence of foils, dramatic irony, and poetic justice" narrative, both for what they added to your response to the story and what they contribute to the meaning." 57

We should look for typical stories to address three great issues: 58

1. Reality: what really exists?
2. Morality: What constitutes good and bad behavior?
3. Values: what really matters, and what matters most?

How do we know what stories mean? 59

1. Because the writer often states ideas indirectly, stories must be interpreted.
2. Writers do two things: they present an experience, a story, and they offer an interpretation of it.
3. Our job is to make sure that we identify what the story is, as well as what the writer wants us to understand about the story

How to figure out what the story is about: 59

1. Repetition within a story guide you to the key elements of the story
2. Highlighting, or for grounding, can direct a readers attention to what is most important.
3. This can be done via character transformation.
4. This can also be done to the amount of space taken in relating a story.
5. Key, decisive, events also serve as a form of highlighting.

Determining the point of view of stories: 61

1. Sometimes the storyteller makes an editorial comment that reveals his point of view
2. Quite frequently, however, this occurs rather rarely in Scripture.
3. More often than not normative characters within the story show the point of view.

4. In the biblical revelation the most normative character is always God. God's point of view is always central.
5. Frequently, the interpretive strategy in understanding the biblical narrative is built in the story itself, and the reader must learn to interpret those signals accurately.
6. What the author includes, and how he arranges it, also reflects Point of view.
7. What you see, and what you don't see, part of the authors selectivity, also determines point of view.
8. This selectivity can be seen in how the narrative reflects the character, an event, etc.

Rule: "assume that the storyteller has included every detail for a purpose, and do not hesitate to reflect on how the story is affected by the inclusion of the detail as compared with the effect is the detail world omitted. 65

Rule: How the story ends reflects its meaning: look upon the conclusion of the story as an implied comment on (evaluation of) the characters and events that the story has presented. 66

Rule: "pay attention to how a story influences your approval and disapproval of offense in characters, and formulate a statement of what the story means on the basis of this approval pattern." 67

A checklist of narrative elements: 68-69

1. Physical, temporal, and cultural settings in the story.
2. Characters in the story, with special emphasis on the protagonist.
3. Plot conflicts and their resolution.
4. Aspects of narrative suspense(how the story arouses curiosity about outcome).
5. The protagonist experiment in living as an implied comment about life.
6. Narrative unity, coherence, and emphasis.
7. Elements of testing and choice in the story.
8. Character progress and transformation.
9. Foils, dramatic irony, and poetic justice.
10. The implied assertions about reality, morality, and values.
11. Repetition and highlighting as clues to what the story is about.
12. Point of view in the story—how the writer gets a reader to share his attitude toward the characters and events.

Material adapted and summarized from How To Read The Bible As Literature, Leland Ryken (Zondervan, 1984)