

# Bible Study Bookmarks for Different Genres of Scripture



The IFES student movement SMD Germany decided to help students read different parts of the Bible well. They therefore developed Bible study bookmarks for seven different literary genres in Scripture: narratives, poetic texts, prophetic passages, epistles, Old Testament law, apocalyptic literature and wisdom literature. Each bookmark attempts to take the theological and literary characteristics of this type of text into account. You can find their content below.

## A Short Guide for the Study of Narratives in the Bible

**Pray**. Ask God to guide you in your Bible study.

**Observe**. What does the text say?

1. Look at the text:
  - Who says what to whom? Who are the main characters? What characterizes them?
  - What important events take place?
  - How do the main characters respond to these events? How do the observers respond?
  - Where does this event take place? What do we know about the place?
  - What is significant from the passages right before and after this passage?
  - What do we know about the author?
2. Look at the literary shape of the text: frequent words, comparisons, images, contrasts, cause and effect.
3. Identify key words, figures of speech and summaries.
4. Are there connections to other passages from Scripture? What do they point to?

**Interpretation**. What does the story want to say?

1. Write down all the questions which come to your mind as you study this passage. Are there connections between your observations and your questions?
2. Try to identify with the situation of the people in the story. Why do they say what they say? How do they feel?
3. Try and answer your questions!
4. Write a summary of the passage in one sentence. What is the key message of the author?

**\_Application.** What does this mean for me?

1. What is your initial response to this passage? Does it change your view of the world and of God?
2. Is there a truth for which you want to thank God or which you want to put into practise?
3. Are there implications for the relationships in which you live?
4. Pray that God lets these words come alive in you.

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## **A Short Guide for the Study of Poetic Texts in the Bible**

**\_Pray.** Ask God to guide you in your Bible study.

**\_Observe.** What does the text say?

1. Look at the text:
  - Which themes are addressed?
  - Which emotions does the text evoke?
  - Which images and comparisons are used?
  - Who is being addressed?
2. Look at the literary shape of the text:
  - What is stressed through repetition?
  - Which metaphors, moods, personifications, rhythms, surprising turns of thought, discussions or other stylistic devices are used?
  - Are there connections to other passages from the Old or New Testament? What do they point to?
3. Look at the historical context: people, nations, events, places:
  - What information is given about them here or in another text?
  - What do we know about the author's circumstances?

**\_Interpretation.** What does the text want to say?

1. Which emotions did the author want to express?
2. Which convictions and questions are expressed?
3. How does the mood of the text and its content fit together?
4. How is the reader invited to respond?
5. How are God and humankind depicted?
6. Is there a key verse?

**\_Application.** What does this mean for me?

1. What is your initial response to this passage?
2. Does it change your view of the world and of God?
3. Is there a truth for which you want to thank God or which you want to put into practise?
4. How does this text inspire your relationship with God and your prayer life?
5. Write a short poem or song using the key words of this passage.
6. Pray that God lets these words come alive in you.

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## **A Short Guide for the Study of Prophetic Passages in the Bible**

**\_Pray.** Ask God to guide you in your Bible study.

**\_Observe.** What does the text say?

1. Look at the text:
  - Which social, ethical or religious wrongs are being addressed?
  - What reasons are given for promises or the announcement of judgment?
  - What do the passages right before and after this text speak about?
  - What response is being called for from the initial hearers?
2. Look at the literary shape of the text: images, metaphors, symbolic actions. How are they interpreted in the text itself?
3. Look at the historical context: people, nations, events, places:
  - What do we know about them?
  - What was the situation like in the country/in the king's household?
4. What information is available about this prophet? What was his understanding of his life and ministry?

**\_Interpretation.** What does the story want to say?

1. Which image of God, his dealings with humankind and with his people emerges from this passage?
2. How did the hearers respond to the message?
3. How does this passage relate to the overall message/theme of the biblical book it is in?
4. How is our perspective on this text changed through Jesus and the New Testament?

5. Which fundamental theological and ethical statements are made in this passage?
6. Summarize the key message of this passage in one sentence.

**\_Application.** What does this mean for me?

1. What is your initial response to this passage? Does it change your view of the world and of God?
2. Is there a truth for which you want to thank God or which you want to put into practise?
3. Are there implications for the relationships in which you live?
4. Pray that God lets these words come alive in you.

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## **A Short Guide for the Study of Epistles in the Bible**

**\_Pray.** Ask God to guide you in your Bible study.

**\_Observe.** What does the text say?

1. Look at the text:
  - Which circumstances and questions are addressed?
  - Which theological terms are used? What do they mean?
  - What is significant from the passages right before or after this passage?
2. Look at the literary shape of the text: images, metaphors, lines of thought, references to Old Testament narratives. How are they interpreted in the passage?
3. What is the historical context?
  - Who is writing to whom? Is there a prior story to the epistle (in Acts)?
  - What situation is the church that received the letter in?
  - What is the cultural background of the issues being discussed?
4. Where else in the Bible are similar themes addressed?

**\_Interpretation.** What does the text want to say?

1. What was encouraging for the hearers, what was challenging for them?
2. How/where does this passage fit within the flow of the whole epistle?
3. What fundamental statements are made:
  - about God; about human beings; about being a Christian and the church?

4. What subsequently follows/flows out of these statements?
5. Summarize the key message of this passage in one sentence.

**\_Application.** What does this mean for me?

1. What is your initial response to this passage? Does it change your view of the world and of God?
2. Is there a truth for which you want to thank God or which you want to put into practise?
3. Are there implications for the relationships in which you live?
4. Pray that God lets these words come alive in you.

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## **A Short Guide for the Study of Old Testament Law**

**\_Pray.** Ask God to guide you in your Bible study.

**\_Observe.** What does the text say?

1. Look at the text:
  - What is the content of these laws and regulations?
  - What do these laws refer to (relationship to God, rituals, living together as a nation, etc.)?
  - Which social, ethical, religious wrongs or dangers are addressed?
  - What reasons are given for promises or for the announcement of judgment?
2. What is the context?
  - What is spoken about in the passages right before and after this text?
  - In which time period and what historical context of the people of Israel is this law given?
  - Are there passages in the Old or New Testament that refer back to this text or reflect on it?

**\_Interpretation.** In which ways do these laws want to instruct?

1. Which aim/purpose do these laws have? What understanding of a good life lies behind them?
2. Which dangers are these laws intended to protect from? What do they challenge against or encourage towards?
3. How does this passage reflect something of God's character and his concern for people?
4. Jesus fulfils the law (Matt. 5:17). What does this mean for the law given in the Old Testament, for our understanding of the law, for application of the law?
5. In what way can the law also be read as a promise (see Phil. 2:13)?

**\_Application.** What does this mean for me?

1. How can you apply the purpose/aim of these laws to your life?
2. Are there implications for the society in which you live?
3. Does this passage change the way you view God?
4. Pray that God lets these words come alive in you.

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## **A Short Guide for the Study of Apocalyptic Literature in the Bible**

**\_Pray.** Ask God to guide you in your Bible study.

**\_Observe.** What does the text say?

1. Look at the text:
  - What happens?
  - Who/what are the agents, places, nations, events? What do we know about them?
  - Which images, metaphors and numerical symbols do we find in this text? What meaning do they have when used in other parts of the Bible?
  - What reasons are given for promises or for the announcement of judgment?
  - What is spoken about in the passages right before and after this text?
2. What is the historical context?
  - In which time period and historical situation did the hearers live?
  - What historical events, places and people are relevant? What information is available about them?

**\_Interpretation.** What does the text want to say?

1. Which connotations and emotions did the images from the text evoke in the first hearers? What do they evoke today?
2. In what ways was this message challenging, comforting and/or encouraging for the first hearers?
3. What image of God, Jesus, the Trinity and of humankind emerges from this passage?
4. Read Revelation 21 and 22. In Jesus Christ, the world finds peace. How do these chapters shed a new light on the passage?
5. Summarize the key message of the passage in one sentence.

**\_Application.** What does this mean for me?

1. What is your initial response to this passage?

2. Does this passage change your view of the world and of God?
3. Is there a truth for which you want to thank God, for which you want to worship him or which you want to put into practise?
4. Are there implications for the relationships in which you live?
5. Pray that God lets these words come alive in you.

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## **A Short Guide for the Study of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job**

**Pray.** Ask God to guide you in your Bible study.

**Observe.** What does the text say?

1. Look at the text:
  - What are the main themes of the passage?
  - Which questions and emotions are described?
2. Look at the literary shape of the text:
  - Which (theological) terms, lines of thought and metaphors are used? What do they refer to?
  - What is stressed through repetition, surprising turns of thought, discussion or other stylistic devices?
3. What is the biblical context:
  - Where do the same themes appear again within this biblical book?
  - Read Proverbs 1-9 or Job 1-2 and 40-42 to see the passage in the context of the biblical book. How does this shed a new light on the text?

**Interpretation.** What does the text want to say?

1. What purpose or aim lies behind the advice and images?
2. What image of God, of humankind, of a good life emerges from this passage?
3. What challenges or questions does the text raise?
4. Are there other biblical passages that give a positive or negative illustration of what is being said in this text?
5. What is the fundamental (theological) question being addressed by this biblical book? What connection is there between this question and the passage being studied?

**\_Application.** What does this mean for me?

1. What is your initial response to this passage? Does this passage change your view of life and of God?
2. Is there a truth for which you want to thank God or which you want to put into practise?
3. Are there implications for the relationships in which you live?
4. Pray that God lets these words come alive in you.