

III. Compilation

This final stage of interpretation is to compile the discoveries you have made so that they are ready for presentation. There are two steps that we will consider in this final stage: *Identify the Structure* and *Identify the Main Message*.

A. What is the Structure?

The key question to ask in this step is, "What is the structure of the passage?" When reading and studying a passage of Scripture, we are to strive to understand the author's intent of the passage we are considering. Because each verse appears in the flow of the author's argument, our task is to identify what the flow of his argument is. This is called the structure of the passage. When we get the structure right, we can then move onto getting the passage's main message right. But how do we do that?

Even though the Bible has around forty different authors, from three different continents, written over a period of 1500 years, there is a perfect unity to the Bible's storyline. Its theological message is consistent. In addition to its consistent unity, it is also of a book of diversity with regards to its literary genres. The Biblical genres are Historical Narrative, Law, Poetry, Wisdom, Prophecy, Apocalyptic, Gospel, and Epistle. It is possible to place them into three main genres: narrative (43%), poetry (33%), and discourse (24%). If we are going to succeed in finding the structure of a passage, it is important to understand the different genres.

1. Narrative

A narrative is a story. There are different kinds of narrative like parables, history, and biography. The books that are primarily narrative (though some are not exclusively narrative) are Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 King, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah, the Gospels, and Acts. In a narrative, you are to look out for the characters, the plot, the conflict, and the resolution. The structure will often revolve around those features.

EXAMPLES FROM NARRATIVE

Daniel 5	John 11
<p>I. Belshazzar has a feast that completely disregarded the Lord God and focussed on satisfying himself. (5:1-12)</p> <p>II. After God interrupts the party by writing on the wall, Daniel interprets the writing on the wall and predicts Belshazzar’s fall (5:13-31)</p>	<p>I. In this first section Jesus is informed about Lazarus’ illness and Jesus demonstrates His control of the situation (11:1-16)</p> <p>II. In this next section, we see a demonstration of the care Jesus showed toward Mary and Martha in the midst of their grief (11:17-37)</p> <p>III. In this final section Jesus demonstrates His power by commanding Lazarus to come out of the grave (11:38-44)</p>

2. Poetry

In poetic literature, you need to look for things like stanzas and parallelisms. A stanza is a unit or section in the passage defined by the subject or literary marker. Parallelisms are the most frequent features in poetic literature. A parallelism “involves not so much a rhythm of words and vowels, but a rhythm of thoughts”.¹ Parallelism “is a literary pattern that states an idea in one line and focuses more closely on the same idea in the following line, either repeating the thought in different terms or focusing on the thought more specifically”.²

¹ R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, Intervarsity Press, 1978, p. 85

² C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, Baker Books, 2001, p. 36

EXAMPLES OF STRUCTURE

Psalm 19	Psalm 84
<p>I. In the first section of this psalm, David discusses how God reveals Himself to us by means of His creation (19:1-6)</p> <p>II. In this section of the psalm David discusses the way God reveals Himself to us in His Word (19:7-14)</p>	<p>I. In the first stanza of the psalm the author declares his longing to praise God (84:1-4)</p> <p>II. In the second stanza, the author describes the blessing for those making their journey to the temple with the purpose of worship and praise (84:5-8)</p> <p>III. In the final stanza, the author describes the blessing of God’s protection and provision in the life of His people (84:9-12)</p>

3. Discourse

Discourse is spread throughout Scripture and is found in portions of most books. The New Testament Epistles are primarily discourse. Discourse contains a logical style. The best way to find the structure in discourse is to write summary statements about each verse. You will notice that in some passages the ideas or themes in some consecutive verses relate to each other. So, what you need to do is group them together.

EXAMPLES OF STRUCTURE IN DISCOURSE

Romans 5:12-21	2 Peter 1:3-11
<p>I. Paul rejoices because of the spiritual blessings that changing our present our standing before God (5:1-2)</p> <p>II. Paul rejoices in his sufferings because they lead to a pathway that ends in glory (5:3-8)</p> <p>III. In the third section, Paul rejoices because of the blessings of our salvation in Christ (5:9-11)</p>	<p>I. In this first section, Peter writes about what God grants His people so that they will grow in Him (1:3-4)</p> <p>II. In this section, Peter provides a list of qualities that flow out of the truths previously mentioned. (1:5-7)</p> <p>III. In this final section, Peter lists the benefits that come as a result of the qualities he mentioned in the previous section (1:8-11)</p>

B. What is the Main Message?

After you have taken time to carefully consider the passage, it is now your task to find out the main message of the passage. There are different ways this can be done and there are different names people use for this sentence like “the bid idea”, “the main theme”, “the proposition”. How do you identify the main message? The first step in identifying the main message is, to begin with, the question, “what is this passage saying?” Try to answer this question with only one sentence. At this stage, don’t worry too much about how readable or quotable your simple sentence is of the main message. The key here is to simply state what the author is communicating based on the structure you have observed and compiled. Below are some examples of writing the main message of the previously mentioned passages.

EXAMPLES OF WRITING THE MAIN MESSAGE

Daniel 5	John 11
<i>In this chapter, we learn that even though Belshazzar enjoyed the pleasures of life, God’s judgment is certain.</i>	<i>In this passage, we will observe three actions that Jesus demonstrated at a time of grief and sadness</i>
Psalm 19	Psalm 84
<i>In this Psalm, we learn about two different ways God reveals Himself to us. One is through creation and the other is through His Word.</i>	<i>Three times in this Psalm the author declares the words, “How blessed” (84:4, 5, and 12). These three stanzas reveal the blessed results of a believer’s longing for the Lord.</i>
Romans 5:12-21	2 Peter 1:3-11
<i>In this passage, we learn that the blessings that flow out of being justified cause Paul to rejoice on three occasions (5:2, 3, 11).</i>	<i>Peter instructs his readers on how they can grow spiritually by reminding them of what God has given them.</i>

Once you have rightly identified the main message, everything else in the passage should support this theme. On the next page is a chart for you to fill in using the same sample passage (1 John 2:15-17) used in previous lessons for observation.

1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. d

Structure	Message