

## Different Questions You Can Ask of the Biblical Text Divided according to World Number

Original Source (in the public domain):

Felix Just <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Exegesis.htm>

Parts that are italicized are annotations by Julius-Kei Kato.

**WORLD ONE-RELATED QUESTIONS** – *The world “in” “or” “within” the text itself. Hint: Focus on the text itself and nothing outside it.*

1-Who are the characters in the story? What roles do they play?

1-What is the plot sequence? What narrative time is covered?

1-What is the author’s and/or narrator’s point of view?

1-What message is the author trying to convey (through the text)?

1-Is the author attempting to instruct, inspire, defend, or persuade the reader?

1-What rhetorical techniques does he use to achieve his goals?

1-What words are used, and what range of meanings do they have? *It would be best to do research in the original language in which the text was written of course.*

1-What images and symbols are used, and what do they signify?

1-What characters appear in the story? What do we know about them? *When working at the level of World 1, be careful not to go yet to historical matters. Just concentrate on the characters as they appear in the text itself.*

1-How are the characters related to one another in the story?

1-What is the literary form or “genre” of the whole work and the particular text?

1-Does the text follow or diverge from the usual expectations for this genre?

1-What is the normal purpose/goal of this genre?

2-In what social context would texts of this genre have been used? *This already belongs to World 2 because with this question, you go already “behind” the text. But I include it here to make you see the difference between World 1 and 2.*

1-Are there any parallel texts, and how is this text similar and/or different? *In biblical studies, we are talking about “parallel texts” within the Bible or outside the Bible for comparative purposes and in order to shed more light on the biblical text that we are examining. This is particularly useful in gospel studies where we compare parallel accounts for example in the Synoptic Gospels.*

1-Are there any parallel or similar stories in Rabbinic literature?

1-What particular views or theological emphases does this author show as evident in the text itself?

*The following questions are often asked in the method called “Canonical Criticism”*

1-Where does this text belong in the literary context of the entire Bible?

1-How is this text related to prior texts and/or later texts in the Bible?

1-How does its location in the Canon affect the meaning of this text?

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**WORLD 2 RELATED QUESTIONS** – *World 2 refers to the world “behind” the text. We focus on historical questions, all the historical forces that combined together to produce the text as we know it.*

*The primary historical question when we are dealing with biblical stories or even events (that are depicted for example in New Testament epistles) is: Did this event as related in the text really happen in history? Or was it created by an author to make a point? Is it an embellished version of what was originally a more modest historical event? Or is it a pure fabrication?*

*Note that the standards of history that we have now are different than the standards of history that they had in the ancient world. Moreover, “truth” is not only “historical truth”. Because the ancient biblical writers were concerned above all with communicating THEOLOGICAL truth, they felt more free to embellish and create stories to make their theological points. Hence, things that—from our point of view are—“embellishments” or “fabrications” are better seen as means to convey the wisdom of a faith community.*

2-Who is the author of the work? What do we know about him/her/them?

2-Is the attributed author the actual author, or is the work pseudepigraphic? “Pseudepigraphic” means that the name attached to the work as author is not really historically true but attached to the work often as a means to give it the authority that the name had for the community.

2-When, where, and under what circumstances was the work written?

2-Who were the original recipients? Where did they live?

*What were the circumstances which faced the author and the original recipients?*

*How did these circumstances affect them and shaped this text into the form that we know today?*

2-Does the text have any underlying source or sources?

2-Which version of a source was used, in case there is more than one?

2-What do the sources actually say and mean in their original contexts?

2-How are the sources used (quoted, paraphrased, adapted?) in the later text?

2-In what social context would texts of this genre have been used?

2-How has the author used the source(s) in shaping this text?

2-How did the author’s life circumstances affect the shaping of the text?

2-If the story claims to be historical, what really happened?

2-What social, historical, or cultural information can be gleaned from the text?

2-What background information is necessary to better understand the text?  
2-What was life like for the common people, not just the ruling elites?

2-What insights from Sociology (in the sense of: *a study of the social conditions of that time*) can help in the *understanding and* interpretation of the text?  
2 or 3-What patterns of human social behavior are evident in the text?

2-What models from Cultural Anthropology can help us understand the text?  
2-What cultural presuppositions/patterns affect the interpretation of the text?

2-Which ancient Hebrew or Greek texts underlie the various translations?  
2-Has anything been lost or obscured in the process of translation?

2-Are there any variant readings in the ancient manuscripts?  
2-Are the variants negligible (mere spelling) or significant (affecting meaning)?  
2-Can the variants be explained as intentional changes, or as accidental ones?  
2-How do the literary or historical contexts help explain the variant readings?

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**WORLD THREE RELATED QUESTIONS** – *World #3 refers to the world “in front of” the text, hence, the reader(s) of the text. It can refer to a present reader or a past one. It can even refer to a “corporate” reader such as a whole faith community (for example, How have Roman Catholics read this text?). In short, World 3 refers strictly to the readers’ interpretation of the text.*

*The primary question to be answered when doing World #3 work is: How do I/we read, understand, and interpret this text given the contexts in which we find ourselves now? Is my/our interpretation faithful to the original “spirit” of the text? Is it a legitimate development from the original, historical meaning of the text?*

3-Are there any significant differences between various modern translations? *Remember that a translation is, ultimately speaking, a work of the translator’s interpretation of the text.*  
3-When were these translations done, using which translation philosophies?

3-How do traditional Jewish methods of interpretation read this text?  
3-Do Jewish and Christian interpretations of this text differ significantly?

3-How was this text interpreted by the “Church Fathers” and in later centuries?  
3-Is the text interpreted differently by various churches and denominations?  
3-How has the text been interpreted in art, music, liturgy, and popular culture?

3-How can the text be interpreted using various theories from Psychology?  
3-Can the text help us understand the human psyche better?

- 3-Has this text been used for domination of oppressed people? How?
- 3-Can this text be used for the liberation of the poor/disadvantaged? How?
- 3-Can other texts counteract the detrimental effects of oppressive texts?

- 3-Does the text evidence gender bias? Was later interpretation also biased?
- 3-How is the meaning of the text affected if read from a feminist perspective?
- 3-What other texts can be recovered and used to balance out biased texts?

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### **The Questions as they appear in the original version by Felix Just**

Felix Just in his website presented the different questions originally in the context of the various methodologies to study the biblical text. I rearranged them to conform better with a “three-worlds analysis” approach and added a few more questions.

<b>A) The Historical-Critical Method</b>	<b>Questions Typically Asked:</b>
Composition History Questions	2-Who is the author of the work? What do we know about him/her/them? 2-Is the attributed author the actual author, or is the work pseudepigraphic? 2-When, where, and under what circumstances was the work written? 2-Who were the original recipients? Where did they live?
Traditional Literary Criticism	1-What words are used, and what range of meanings do they have? 1-What images and symbols are used, and what do they signify? 1-What characters appear in the story? What do we know about them? 1-How are the characters related to one another in the story?
Comparison of Translations	3-Are there any significant differences between various modern translations? 3-When were these translations done, using which translation philosophies? 2-Which ancient Hebrew or Greek texts underlie the various translations? 2-Has anything been lost or obscured in the process of translation?
Textual Criticism	2-Are there any variant readings in the ancient

	<p>manuscripts?</p> <p>2-Are the variants negligible (mere spelling) or significant (affecting meaning)?</p> <p>2-Can the variants be explained as intentional changes, or as accidental ones?</p> <p>2-How do the literary or historical contexts help explain the variant readings?</p>
Source Criticism	<p>2-Does the text have any underlying source or sources?</p> <p>2-Which version of a source was used, in case there is more than one?</p> <p>2-What do the sources actually say and mean in their original contexts?</p> <p>2-How are the sources used (quoted, paraphrased, adapted?) in the later text?</p>
Form Criticism	<p>1-What is the literary form or “genre” of the whole work and the particular text?</p> <p>1-Does the text follow or diverge from the usual expectations for this genre?</p> <p>1-What is the normal purpose/goal of this genre?</p> <p>2-In what social context would texts of this genre have been used?</p>
Redaction Criticism	<p>2-How has the author used the source(s) in shaping this text?</p> <p>1-Are there any parallel texts, and how is this text similar and/or different?</p> <p>1-What particular views or theological emphases does this author show?</p> <p>2-How did the author’s life circumstances affect the shaping of the text?</p>
Socio-Historical Criticism	<p>2-If the story claims to be historical, what really happened?</p> <p>2-What social, historical, or cultural information can be gleaned from the text?</p> <p>2-What background information is necessary to better understand the text?</p> <p>2-What was life like for the common people, not just the ruling elites?</p>
<b>B) New Methods of Literary Analysis</b>	<b>Questions Typically Asked:</b>
Rhetorical Analysis	<p>1-What message is the author trying to convey?</p> <p>1-Is the author attempting to instruct, inspire, defend, or persuade the reader?</p> <p>1-What rhetorical techniques does he use to achieve his</p>

	goals?
Narrative Analysis	<p>1-Who are the characters in the story? What roles do they play?</p> <p>1-What is the plot sequence? What narrative time is covered?</p> <p>1-What is the author's and/or narrator's point of view?</p>
Semiotic Analysis	1-What deeper patterns of meaning are conveyed by the words and symbols?
<b>C) Approaches Based on Tradition</b>	<b>Questions Typically Asked:</b>
Canonical Approach	<p>1-Where does this text belong in the literary context of the entire Bible?</p> <p>1-How is this text related to prior texts and/or later texts in the Bible?</p> <p>1-How does its location in the Canon affect the meaning of this text?</p>
Using Jewish Interpretative Traditions	<p>3-How do traditional Jewish methods of interpretation read this text?</p> <p>1-Are there any parallel or similar stories in Rabbinic literature?</p> <p>3-Do Jewish and Christian interpretations of this text differ significantly?</p>
History of Interpretation ( <i>Wirkungsgeschichte</i> )	<p>3-How was this text interpreted by the "Church Fathers" and in later centuries?</p> <p>3-Is the text interpreted differently by various churches and denominations?</p> <p>3-How has the text been interpreted in art, music, liturgy, and popular culture?</p>
<b>D) Approaches Using the Human Sciences</b>	<b>Questions Typically Asked:</b>
Sociological Approach	<p>2-What insights from Sociology can help in the interpretation of the text?</p> <p>2 or 3-What patterns of human social behavior are evident in the text?</p>
Cultural Anthropology Approach	<p>2-What models from Cultural Anthropology can help us understand the text?</p> <p>2-What cultural presuppositions/patterns affect the interpretation of the text?</p>

Psychological/Psychoanalytical Apps.	<p>3-How can the text be interpreted using various theories from Psychology?</p> <p>3-Can the text help us understand the human psyche better?</p>
<b>E) Contextual Approaches</b>	<b>Questions Typically Asked:</b>
Liberationist Approach	<p>3-Has this text been used for domination of oppressed people? How?</p> <p>3-Can this text be used for the liberation of the poor/disadvantaged? How?</p> <p>3-Can other texts counteract the detrimental effects of oppressive texts?</p>
Feminist Approach	<p>3-Does the text evidence gender bias? Was later interpretation also biased?</p> <p>3-How is the meaning of the text affected if read from a feminist perspective?</p> <p>3-What other texts can be recovered and used to balance out biased texts?</p>

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