

TRINITY EQUIPPING CLASSES



Getting to Know Your Bible

Understanding and applying
the timeless truths of Scripture



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Getting to Know Your Bible

Part One

The Big Picture: A Brief Look at the Book

The Bible Has No Equal

- Written over a 1500 year span (over a span of forty generations)
- Written by over 40 different authors from all walks of life:
 - > Moses, a political leader trained in Egypt
 - > Peter, a fisherman
 - > Amos, a herdsman
 - > Joshua, a military general
 - > Nehemiah, a cupbearer
 - > Daniel, a prime minister
 - > Luke, a doctor
 - > Solomon, a King
 - > Matthew, a tax collector
 - > Paul, a rabbi
- Written in different places
 - > Moses in the wilderness
 - > Jeremiah in a dungeon
 - > Daniel on a hillside and in a palace
 - > Paul, inside prison walls
 - > Luke, while traveling
 - > John on an island of exile
 - > Others in the rigors of a military campaign
- Written at different times
 - > Times of war, peace, prosperity, bondage of slavery, hope, hopelessness, heights of joy, depths of despair, victory, defeat, etc.
- Written on three continents
 - > Asia
 - > Europe
 - > Africa
- Written in three different languages
 - > Hebrew (most of the Old Testament)
 - > Aramaic (a small portion of the Old Testament)
 - > Greek (the New Testament)

The Bible Has No Equal (cont.)

- Written in many different literary styles
 - > Prophecy
 - > Historical narratives
 - > Poetry
 - > Wisdom Literature
 - > Apocalyptic Literature
 - > Letters to churches and friends

*Although there are many subjects in the Bible which would create opposing opinions when mentioned and discussed, especially across time and in differing cultures, still there is one unfolding story, one main theme in all the Old and New Testaments:
“**God’s redemption of man.**”*

- The Bible has been read by more people and translated into more languages than any other book in history (thousands of languages and dialects now have portions, testaments or the complete Bible in their own language)
- Although written on perishable material, and being copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press, the Bible, compared to other ancient writings, “has more manuscript evidence than any 10 pieces of classical literature combined.”
 - >The Jews had special classes of men who’s sole job was to perfectly preserve and transmit these documents from one generation to the next.
- The Bible is amazingly honest about the humanness of its characters. It shows the good, the bad, and the ugly of even its heroes. One man said, “The Bible is not such a book a man would write if he could, or could write if he would.” The Bible doesn’t gloss over the sins of its characters nor does it try to paint them as saints. It simply tells it like it is.
- The Bible has stood the test of time and the attempts of godless men to stamp it out. “Voltaire, the noted French infidel who died in 1778, said that in one hundred years from his time, Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history. But what has happened? Voltaire has passed into history, while the circulation of the Bible continues to increase in almost all parts of the world, carrying blessing wherever it goes...Concerning the boast of Voltaire...only fifty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to produce stacks of Bibles.”
- The Bible has had an incredible influence on surrounding literature. “If every Bible in any considerable city were destroyed, the Book could be restored in all its essential parts from the quotations on the shelves of the city public library.”

What Really Sets the Bible Apart

Hebrews 4:12 – *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – *All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

- 1) “All Scripture” - (Old and New Testaments alike)

- 2) “God-breathed” Gk. *theopneustos* –
The Word of God is the very breath of God; infused with life

- 3) Teaching Gk. *didaskalia* –
The living Word of God structures our thinking

- 4) Rebuke Gk. *elegmos* –
The living Word of God shows us where we are wrong

- 5) Correction Gk. *epanorthosis* –
The living Word of God puts us on the right path

- 6) Training Gk. *paideia* –
The living Word of God gives guidelines for living

- 7) The Goal
The living Word of God equips us for every good work in His kingdom

Eternality of the Scriptures

Psalm 119:89 – *Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven.*

Isaiah 40:8 – *The grass withers, the flower fades: but the word of our God shall stand forever.*

Matthew 5:18 – *I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

Matthew 24:35 – *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

Enlightenment from the Scriptures

Psalm 119:130 – *The entrance of thy words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*

The Bible is:

Joy to the heart, light to the eyes, a lamp to the feet, a light to the path, a hammer, the sword that the Spirit wields, a more sure word of prophecy, it cleanses our way, it sanctifies us, it produces faith, causes us to believe, it is hope and comfort and there is eternal blessing tied to the hearing and obedience of it.

In light of all of this, 1 Peter 2:2 says: *“As newborn babes, long for the pure milk of word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. “*

The ultimate aim of Bible Study:

Life change: What we would be different after than we were before; that we would be more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

How are we to approach this incredible book?

Picking and choosing a verse or passage here or there can result in shallowness, superficiality and error. God can speak through individual verses, but maturity comes through studying whole passages, whole books and how they relate to the book as a whole. This gives depth and richness to all of our Christian life. So, it is good to get a grip on the Bible as a whole.

There are many different ways of study: historically, topically, biographically, as literature, etc. But we want to learn to study it *expositorily* or *inductively*.

- * What is the message of each book?
- * What is the special significance of each book?
- * We want to let each book tell it's own story.
- * We approach the Bible not merely as literature, but as the Word of God, from cover to cover.

We must watch in the following areas if our study of the Bible is to be effective:

- 1) We must not become so fascinated by the object that we forget the object.

- 2) We want to get a hold on the broader meanings of scripture, but unless the broader meanings get hold of us, our study has failed.

- 3) Jesus himself has told us that He is the theme of the scriptures (John 5:39-40). Therefore, we must see beyond the written Word to get a view of Him Who is the Living Word. True Bible study will reveal Jesus in ever-increasing degrees.

An Overview of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

39

17

Historical

5 – Moses
(Historical)

12 – Joshua
to
Esther
(Historical)

5

Prophetic

5 -- Job to
Song of Solomon
(Personal and
experiential)

17

Wisdom

5 - Major Prophets
(Isaiah to Daniel)

12 - Minor Prophets
(Hosea to Malachi)

30 writers, 1200 years, one theme:

*“God’s Redemption of mankind as seen in
His Covenant with Israel through Abraham.”*

New Testament

27

5

Historical (Matthew to Acts)

9

**Christian
Church
Epistles**

**(Romans to
2 Thessalonians)**

4

**Pastoral
Epistles**

**(1 Timothy
to Philemon)**

9

**Hebrew
Christian
Epistles**

**(Hebrews to
Revelation)**

Romans: *Christ the only way*

Hebrews: *Christ the better way*

***10 writers, nearly 100 years, one theme:
“God’s redemption of mankind as seen in
His Covenant with the world through Jesus.”***

The Old Testament by Sections

THE BOOKS OF THE LAW - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

THE BOOKS OF HISTORY - Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Chronicles, 1 and 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

THE BOOKS OF POETRY (WISDOM) - Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes

THE MAJOR PROPHETS - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

THE MINOR PROPHETS - Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

The New Testament by Sections

THE BOOKS OF HISTORY - Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts

THE EPISTLES - Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, Jude

THE APOCALYPSE - The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Assignment One: Memorize the books of the Bible in order. This assignment is on the "honor system".

Getting to Know Your Bible

Part Two

Interpreting scripture

In striving to understand the Bible it is essential that we:

Put ourselves in the context of those who were hearing the messages in the first place.

Why do we need to interpret the Bible?

We live in a different context: Different time, different culture, different language, different worldview from the original hearers. If we force our culture and thoughts on the original message, we are bound to get it wrong.

The nature of the original reader

Good interpretation is simply to understand the plain meaning of the text.

The nature of the scripture.

1) It is divine in that it is God-breathed, God-inspired and thus it has eternal relevance and it speaks to all mankind in every age and every culture.

2) It is human in that God chose to speak to us through human words in history.

Therefore every book in the Bible has its historical context. That is to say, the language, time, and culture in which it was originally written, must be understood in order to properly interpret it.

Interpretation of scripture is necessary because of the tension between its *eternal relevance* and its *historical context*.

Two important things to remember:

1) God spoke His word to us over a 1500-year period through the thought patterns and cultures of those people at that time. The problem is, we are so far removed from those people and that time we need to first understand what it said to its original hearers and why God said it.

- First we have to understand what it meant to them then and there.
- Second we have to learn to hear that same word in the here and now

2) God spoke His word to us through almost every kind of communication: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, laws of all kinds, poetry of all kinds, songs, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, sermons, letters, and apocalypses.

- In order to interpret properly, we need to know some general rules that apply to all scripture, but also special rules that apply to these specific forms of literature.

The first step in interpretation: Exegesis

(What did it mean Then and There?)

Exegesis is carefully, systematically studying the scripture to try to discover the original intended meaning. We have to be careful not to use “selective” or “limited” exegesis – we must exegete all the time! So how do we do that?

Learn to read the text carefully and ask the right questions.

There are two types of questions that need to be asked:

Questions of Context

1) The historical context

What is the time and culture of the reader? Consider geographical, topographical and political factors that are relevant to the author’s setting.

A good Bible dictionary will help with these kinds of questions. Answers can also be found within the book itself, but we must learn to read with our eyes open in order to find the answers.

2) The literary context

Words only have meaning within the context of sentences, and sentences need to be read within the contexts of the paragraphs and entire letters in which they appear.

* We must always to ask the question: “What’s the point?”

Questions of Content

What is the value of a ‘denarius’? How far is a ‘Sabbath’s day journey’? What were the ‘high places’? And other such questions.

Helpful tools: Bible dictionary, Bible handbook, good translation, and commentaries

** Commentaries are helpful, but should be the last thing one resorts to.

The second task of interpretation: Hermeneutics

(What does it mean here and now?)

Hermeneutics actually covers the entire field of interpretation, including exegesis, but its more specific meaning is asking the question “What does this passage mean in the here and now?”

** We begin with exegesis because understanding the original intent must always be the forerunner of properly determining how the passage applies in the here and now..

A text always means for us what it meant for those who originally heard it, although it may also contain another deeper meaning (as is the case when the New Testament interprets the Old Testament – e.g. Deut. 25:4; 1 Cor. 9:1-11; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

However, a text cannot mean what it never meant.

The Basic Tools We Use

1) A good translation

The Bible was originally written in three languages: Hebrew (most of the Old Testament), Aramaic (half of Daniel and two passages in Ezra), and Greek (all of the New Testament). Most of us don't know these languages, so we rely on a translation into the English language. If we only read the Bible in English, we are at the mercy of the translators, who often had to make difficult decisions concerning the true meaning of passages in the original language. Consider this passage:

1 Corinthians 7:36 –

KJV – “If a man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin...”

NASB – “If a man think that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter...”

NIV – “If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to...”

NEB – “If a man has a partner in celibacy and feels that he is not behaving properly towards her...”

The KJV is very literal, but also very ambiguous. Certainly, Paul did not mean to be ambiguous. He intended one of the other three options. The Corinthians had written him a letter which invoked this response, so they knew what he meant by this wording... but we do not know for sure. The translators had to interpret the text. So what do we do?

Although you may use only one translation mainly, it is good to have several translations on hand to check out such passages. The better translations will have notes in the margin in difficult spots such as these.

2) A good Bible dictionary

A Bible dictionary has articles on most all of the persons, places and subjects in the Bible. It offers insight on cultural information that isn't necessarily common knowledge and that helps tremendously at exegesis and hermeneutics

3) A Bible handbook or encyclopedia - does the same thing as a Bible dictionary

4) A Concordance

Lists all of the words in the Bible and cross references them with their original Greek or Hebrew words and meanings.

5) Bible Commentaries

Good Bible Commentaries can offer the wisdom of men of God and insight to the meaning of passages as well as how these passages relate to the book as a whole. They should, however, be consulted only after you have worked at getting the real meaning of the passage from the Bible itself. **(The opinions found in the commentaries are not necessarily those of God!)**

Getting to Know Your Bible

Part Three

Steps to understanding a Bible Passage :

- 1) Observation (what do I see)
- 2) Interpretation (what does it mean)
- 3) Application (How does it work out in my life?)

Step One: Observation

Look for terms

Look at structure

- * Consider the literary form
- * Recreate the atmosphere
- * Questions/Answers
- * Cause/Effect

*** The more time you spend in Observation, the less time you will need to spend in Interpretation and Application and the more accurate your results will be*

Step Two: Interpretation

Ask Questions

Find Answers

Put it back together again

Step Three: Application

Identify

Pray

Respond

Observation and Interpretation without Application aborts the process. The Bible was not written to satisfy your curiosity - it was written to transform your life.

Observation: Learning how to read

How not to read the Bible:

How to read the Bible:

Read thoughtfully

Read repeatedly

Read patiently

Read with questions

> Who?

> What?

> When?

> Where?

> How?

> Why?

> So what?

Read prayerfully

Read imaginatively

Read meditatively

Read purposefully

GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE

LITERARY STRUCTURE

Biographical Structure (key persons)

Geographical Structure (key places)

Historical Structure (key events)

Chronological structure (key times)

Ideological Structure (key ideas)

Read to acquire facts

Read telescopically (to get the big picture)

Assignment Two: Use the ten reading strategies listed above and read Titus 1:5-9, paying attention to terms and grammatical structure. Write down a list of what you observe. Submit your finding to your instructor via email.

Observation: Things to Look For:

- 1) Things that are emphasized
 - a) amount of space
(Genesis 1-11 covers creation, fall, flood, tower of Babel etc.)
(Genesis 12-50 covers the lives of four men)
 - b) stated purpose (John 20:30)
 - c) the order of things (Matt 3-4: First affirmation of Jesus then temptation of Jesus)
 - d) climax/key information (Acts 2 is the one chapter without which you could not have the book)

- 2) Things that are repeated
 - a) terms and phrases
 - b) characters
 - c) patterns
 - d) NT uses of OT passages

- 3) Things that are related
 - a) from general to specific (Matt 6 - general statement about righteousness, then specific accounts of what righteousness looks like)
 - b) questions and answers (Romans 6)
 - c) cause and effect (Acts 8 - persecution produced the spread of the gospel)

- 4) Things that are alike and unlike
 - a) similes (Psalm 42:1)
 - b) metaphors (John 15:1)
 - c) use of "but" (Galatians 5:19, 22-23)

- 5) Things that are true to life
 - a) what do I relate to?
 - b) practical principles
 - c) do I relate to this person's weakness, hunger, fear, etc.?

Summarize your observations

Making use of a chart to get the big picture

The miracles of Mark 4:35-5:42

Miracle	Realm	People	Means	Results	Faith
Stilling The Storm					
Demon Possessed Man					
Woman With Hemorrhag e					
Jairus' Daughter					

Study it from right to left. From top to bottom. What kind of faith did each person have? How did the miracles crescendo?

Observations:

Assignment Three:

Construct a comparable chart for the parable of the soils found in Matthew 13:1-23. Also write a few paragraphs about the observations you made on the passage using the material covered in this session.

Chart of the Parable of the Soils, Matt 13:1-23

Soils	Description	Growth	Hindrances	Results

Observations:

Interpretation

Acts 8:26-39

Interpretation is the process of recreating. It has been called “Thinking God’s thoughts after Him.”

It is impossible to understand what a writer means until you first notice what the writer says. Therefore, to observe well is to interpret well.

Psalm 119:34 – “*Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, and keep it with all my heart.*”

Why interpret?

- 1) Language barriers (the Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek)
- 2) Cultural barriers (1st century Palestine was not 21st century west)
- 3) Literary barriers(We can’t read Song of Songs the same as we read Romans)
- 3) Communication barriers

Other reasons to learn how to interpret

- 1) Misreading the text (reading what it doesn’t say - “Money is the root of all evil”)
- 2) Mistaking a text
- 3) Distorting a text (making it say what you want it to say)
- 4) Contradicting the text (as the serpent did in the garden of Eden)
- 5) Subjectivism (This verse makes me feel good... feel bad)
- 6) Relativism (assuming that the Bible changes meaning over time)

Five Keys to Interpretation

1) Content (raw material)

2) Context (What is before/after the text)

3) Comparison (with other scripture)

Sola scriptura

4) Culture (getting our minds back there)

5) Consultation (secondary sources)

Never forget the order: Scripture first, then other sources

Let's give interpretation a try!

Romans 12:1-2

I urge you therefore, brethren,
by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies
a living and holy sacrifice,
acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual service of worship.

And do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed
by the renewing of your mind,
that you may approve what the will of God is,
that which is good
and acceptable
and perfect.

Assignment Four: Repeat the above process for Matthew 13:15-17.

Application

Application simply is asking ourselves, “What does this mean to me today?”

James 1:22-25

Two steps:

- 1) We must get into the Word ourselves
- 2) The Word must get into us to change our character and conduct

Pitfalls to avoid:

- Substitute interpretation for application – according to the Bible, to know the Word and not do the Word is not to know at all

- Substitute superficial obedience for real life-change – We apply biblical truth to areas that we are already applying it, but neglect to apply it to areas we are not applying it (e.g. we do not murder, but we cheat on our taxes).

- Substitute rationalization for real repentance – When we are convicted, we refuse to change.

- Substitute emotional experience for a willful decision. (we emote but make no real change)

Four Steps in Application

1) **Know**

1 Timothy 4:16

Know Your Text

Know Yourself

2) **Relate** (ask serious questions)

3) **Meditate** (let it stew)

4) **Practice** (just do it)

Nine questions to ask

- 1) Is there an example to follow?
- 2) Is there a sin to avoid?
- 3) Is there a promise to claim?
- 4) Is there a prayer to repeat?
- 5) Is there a command to obey?
- 6) Is there a condition to meet?
- 7) Is there a verse to memorize?
- 8) Is there an error to mark?
- 9) Is there a challenge to face?

Learning how to spot principles to live by

There are certain things that the Bible never mentions. How are we to get Biblical wisdom on something the Bible never mentions?

A Principle is: a short statement of universal truth

Understanding the difference between Law, Principle and Freedom

Law (thou shalt not steal)

Principle (thou shalt not pay for one all-you-can-eat salad bar and bring food to all of your friends)

Freedom (areas of conviction that we must give each other grace in, such as Paul wrote of in Romans 14)

If we have a grip on basic principles of Scripture, we will have an arsenal of ammunition from which to live out the Word we are studying.

Where do we start?

“For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

Ezra 7:10

“Give me understanding, That I may observe Thy law, and keep it with all my heart.”
Psalm 119:34

Getting to Know Your Bible

Part Four

Understanding the Epistles

What are the epistles?

The epistles are letters intended, at least for the most part, to be read publicly as a message to the church in the cities to which they were written.

*The Epistles must be read and understood as separate letters,
yet interpreted in light of all other scripture...*

It is crucial to note that the epistles are all:

Occasional documents, that is, there was a reason or special occasion to which each of them was written

First Century documents, that is, although they were inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore they belong to all time, the context of the author and the original recipients cannot be neglected.

** It is the two factors mentioned above that make them difficult to interpret at times.

Also keep in mind these two points:

- We don't always know the questions or problems that spawned these letters, or if there were any problems.
- They don't contain the entirety of Peter, Paul, James or John's theology. They are not theological treatises, although they do contain practical theology, or theology meant to be applied to a certain situation...they are not, in themselves, all inclusive.

The historical context

First, we must try to reconstruct the situation to which the author is speaking.

- What was going on in Corinth that sparked 1 Corinthians?
- How did he come to learn about it?
- What was his relationship and history with the Corinthians?
- What attitudes are reflected in the letter?

How do we go about finding these things out?

- 1) Consult a Bible dictionary of the introduction commentary in your study Bible

- 2) Pray for the Holy Spirit's help

- 3) Read the entire letter in one sitting

- 4) Create a working outline of the letter

- 5) Make a list of key words/concepts

The Literary Context

Remember: *What's the point?*

- It is essential that we learn to think in paragraphs if we are to understand what is really being said. (expository teaching vs. isolating scriptures)
- In a compact sentence, write down the thought of each paragraph.
- Why does Paul say this right at this point?

1 Corinthians 3-6

Points to remember:

- Many times the reason some texts are so difficult to us is that they were not written to us
- However, even if we cannot be certain of some details, often the point of the whole passage is within our grasp.
- Learn to ask and discern what is certain and what is possible but not certain
- On some difficult questions a good commentary may help.

The hermeneutical questions

So what do these passages (the epistles) mean to us today? How do we find this out? Consider these two questions:

- What is cultural and therefore belongs to the first century alone?
- What transcends culture and is thus a word for all seasons?

All of us are involved in hermeneutics without realizing it.

We can learn to use our common sense to pick out what seems to apply to our situation and what does not. For example, which passage applies to us?

2 Timothy 4:13 -- *“When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.”*

2 Timothy 2:15 – *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”*

We don't have much trouble handling these types of passages, but the ones that are in between... the ones which some of us think we are to obey implicitly and others of us are not too sure... there lies the problem. Consider:

1 Timothy 5:23 – *“Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.”*

The flaw in our hermeneutics is that we interject our theological beliefs, our cultural norms, our traditions and opinions into the passage. This results in all kinds of selectivity and “getting around “ certain texts.

Another example

Why is it that most churches who believe that women are forbidden to speak in the assembly on the basis of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 also argue against everything else in chapter 14? How can they do this? It happens because *it is easy for ecclesiastical traditions to cloud good hermeneutics.* **How can we avoid this?**

The Rules for Interpreting a Text

- ***A text cannot mean what it never meant to its author or his or her readers.***

Example: 1 Corinthians 13:10

(For example, 1 Cor. 13:10: “that which is perfect” – the one thing the text could *not* mean is that spiritual gifts will vanish. Knowledge would also have to be done away, despite the fact that Paul’s readers did not know that there was going to be a New Testament...he could not be referring to this...they would not have gotten this out of the passage.)

That is why exegesis must come first. This rule doesn’t always help us find out what a text meant, but it can help us decide what it doesn’t mean.

- ***Whenever we share similar specific life situations with the first century setting, God’s word to us is the same as His word to them.***

(e.g., it is still true that “all have sinned “ and that “by grace we are saved through faith”)

The Problems

Extended Application

Can you extend the application of a text to apply to a different context or situation? For example:

2 Corinthians 6:13 says “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.” There is nothing in the text that even remotely infers that Paul is talking about marriage here. We can’t be sure to what he is referring...perhaps to idolatry, for that is the context. But can we extend the application of this scripture to include marriage (as is common today)?

Applications of comparable contexts can only be extended when that extension is clearly taught in other portions of scripture. Since we cannot be sure of its original meaning, can we not legitimately extend the principle of this text to mean not marrying unbelievers? Probably so, but only because it is a biblical principle that can be sustained elsewhere in scripture. If it were not, we would be wrong in assuming this interpretation of the passage.

Texts that are not comparable to today

What do we do with issues that have no present counterparts, or are highly improbable? For example:

There are several such problems in 1 Corinthians 8-10. There were Christians who argued that it was okay to attend pagan feasts at temples of idols. Of course, the problem is that this kind of idolatry isn't known in our Western culture. So...

How do these kinds of 1st century problems speak to us in the twentieth century?

Usually, if we have done our exegesis right, we find a clear principle has been given to the original hearers within the text. The principle will usually transcend time and culture, even if the application does not.

** Look for the principle given, not necessarily the specific application.

Example: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

The principle is: no one should do anything that distracts from the glory of God (especially by doing something that breaks convention (it was normal for a woman to cover her head) ...if one took this text literally in an American church today, she would surely violate the "spirit" of the text by keeping the "law" of the text. Paul was speaking to a custom.

For example, Paul forbids the Corinthians from participating in feasts held in the temple of idols (1 Cor. 10:14-22). This is not a problem that we face today. What are the principles here?

- 1) The stumbling block principle – I won't do anything that is a stumbling block, that destroys my brother (not merely offends)
- 2) Do not participate in the demonic. (What is demonic to us today? All forms of spiritism, witchcraft, astrology, etc.)

We must learn that there are matters of indifference and matters that count. Distinguishing between the two is a key to applying the message of the epistles to our lives in the twenty-first century.

Example: 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Eating marketplace idol food was a matter of indifference – to Paul and to God! But not so to others. (See also Romans 14, Col. 2:16-23) Some current issues include make-up, certain types of food and drink, jewelry, movies, dancing, TV, mixed swimming, etc.

In that day it was things such as footwashing, holy kiss, eating meat offered to idols, women having their head covered when praying or prophesying, women teaching in the church.

Guidelines for what are indifferent matters and what are not

- 1) What the epistles specifically state as indifferences are still indifferences: food, drinks, observance of days, etc.
- 2) Matters that tend to differ from culture to culture, even between genuine believers, may usually be considered indifferent.
- 3) The sin lists in the epistles (Rom. 1:29-30; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9-10; 2 Tim. 3:2-4) do not contain indifferences nor cultural items, they are sins!
- 4) Although we may disagree on what are sins and what are indifferences, according to Romans 14 we all must not judge nor look down on one another...the higher law is love.

Final thoughts on the Epistles

- 1) Because they are occasional documents written in the 1st century, we must accept that at times there will be limitations to our theological understanding. The Holy Spirit gave us everything we need, but not always everything we want
- 2) While they were written to answer their specific questions, they do not always answer our questions today, but the principles derived from them will
- 3) The real point is not so much learning more information as it is obeying and walking in the light that we do have

Understanding Old Testament Narratives

What are Narratives?

Narratives are stories. The Bible is, after all, God's story, made up of lots of smaller stories, all of which are utterly true, and critically important.

The Bible narratives tell things that happened but there is a greater purpose than merely the passing on of information. In the Bible narratives we see God at work in His creation, revealing Himself, His works and His ways through the characters and the plots.

So we must always look beyond the plots and characters to see the thing that God wants to reveal through them.

Three levels of narratives

The top level is that of the whole universal plan of God that is worked out through His creation. It is the overall theme of the Bible, including the initial creation; the fall of man; the power of sin; the need for redemption; and Christ's incarnation and sacrifice. This level is sometimes called "redemptive history" or "the story of redemption."

The middle level focuses on Israel. The call of Abraham; Abraham's lineage through the patriarchs; Israel's bondage in Egypt; God's deliverance of Israel; the wanderings in the wilderness; the conquest of the promised land of Canaan, Israel's frequent sins and disloyalty; God's warning them through the prophets; the destruction of the northern kingdom (Israel) and then the southern kingdom (Judah); the restoration of the holy people after the Exile.

The bottom level is the conglomeration of all of the individual narratives that make up the other two levels. The story of Joseph being sold into slavery and the events that followed; Gideon's fleece; David's adultery with Bathsheba; Jonah's running from the Lord, etc.

It is important to understand that every bottom level Old Testament story is at least a part of the history of Israel (middle level) which in turn is a part of the God's ultimate narrative of God's creation and the redemption of it (top level).

What narratives are not

- 1) *Narratives are not merely stories about people who live in Old Testament times.* They are first and foremost stories about what *God* did to and through those people.

- 2) *Narratives are not stories filled with hidden meanings, but sometimes there are aspects of narratives that are hard to understand.* This is because when we are told *what* God did, we are not always told *how* or *why* He did it.
- 3) *Old Testament narratives do not always teach directly, as the legal or doctrinal portions of scripture do.* They teach God's works and ways through the story and they often illustrate what is taught directly and categorically elsewhere.
- 4) *Each narrative or episode within a narrative does not necessarily have a moral all its own.* The whole unit gives the message, not just the individual parts.

Principles for interpreting narratives

- 1) An Old Testament narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine. (Remember, it's a story)
- 2) An Old Testament narrative usually illustrates a doctrine that is directly taught elsewhere in scripture.
- 3) Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time (Elisha cursed the children—bear came down to kill them)
- 4) What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Often times it is just the opposite.
- 5) Most of the characters in Old Testament narratives are far from perfect and their actions are too!
- 6) We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad.
- 7) All narratives are selective and incomplete. All the details are not given. (see John 21:25) What is given is everything the inspired author thought was needful for us to know.
- 8) Narratives are not written to answer all of our theological questions.
- 9) Narratives may teach either explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something but not actually saying it)
- 10) Ultimately, God is the hero in all biblical narratives

Learning from the Joseph narrative (Genesis 37, 39-50)

The principle human character is Joseph.

The principle overall character is God. It is His story, we are learning about His acts, His ways.

What do we learn about Joseph?

- Joseph is ambitious and even haughty (ch.37)
- His father favored him (37:3)
- He rubbed it in to his brothers by telling them his dreams...not very wise (37:10-11)
- He is sold into slavery, but becomes a successful administrator for Potiphar

** It wasn't because of Joseph's ability, it was because the Lord was with Joseph (39:2-5, 21,23). God is the hero! There is not a lot of practical parallels between Joseph's life and ours (We weren't sold into slavery, put in jail, made Prime minister of a country,) but the point is, God can do incredible things with unlikely candidates!

** All of the smaller stories (bottom level) that make up the larger Joseph narrative (middle level) are a part of the larger picture (top level): God's plan for Israel as a nation and the redemption of mankind.

** The larger picture of redemption is clearly typified in Joseph (As a type Jesus, Joseph was the favored son of his father, betrayed by his own, falsely accused and punished, came "back from the dead", brought salvation to the entire known world at the time!)

** There are other applicable principles in this narrative that apply to us such as how God blesses faithfulness, fleeing from sin, the wisdom of planning ahead, etc.

Here is a list of eight common errors we must avoid while interpreting narratives:

- 1) **Allegorizing** – neglecting to look for a clear meaning and instead, assuming that the text is merely reflecting another meaning beyond the text.
- 2) **Taking a text out of context** – If you do this, you can make almost any text say anything you want.
- 3) **Selectivity** – Picking and choosing particular words, phrases and passages while ignoring others that balance the parts with the whole
- 4) **False Combination** – Taking elements from two passages that are not directly connected and making a point out of them that is not really there. (Psalm 23 Enemies are in the “house of the Lord”)
- 5) **Redefinition** – When a text is not saying something you want to hear, you redefine it
- 6) **Extracanonical Authority** – Using external sources (such as the book of Mormon) to “unlock” the mysteries of the Bible.
- 7) **Moralizing** – assuming that principles for living can be derived from all passages of scripture. (The Hebrew slaves in Egypt: if we approach this subject by asking, “What can we learn from the years of slavery in Egypt?” we miss the point of the story, which was written to show the progress of God’s history of redemption, not to illustrate a moral. Don’t put a moral in where there is not one.
- 8) **Personalizing** – No Bible narrative was written specifically and only to you and about you. (The story of Balaam’s talking donkey reminds me that I talk too much!”)

Understanding The Acts of the Apostles

Book of The Acts of the Apostles is a historical account of the early church. In this way, Acts can and should be read as a historical narrative and the rules that apply to narratives apply here as well. As we will remember, narratives are not written for the purpose of furnishing a system of doctrine. Therefore we need to understand something about the book of Acts:

- 1) Acts was not written to give us a system of doctrine
- 2) Acts was written to show the gospel of the resurrected Christ as work
- 3) Doctrine taken from Acts must be validated and clearly taught in the doctrinal sections of Scripture (tongues, healing, prophecies, etc.)

Here we see how the Gospel exploded out from Jerusalem to the world. This is what the Gospel *looks like!* And we may expect to see this wherever the true Gospel is preached! The outline of the book is foretold in Acts 1:8.

The Book of Acts in a nutshell

- * The birth of the body (1:1-2:4)
- * The activity of the body (2:5-8:4)
- * The body expands from Jerusalem to Samaria (8:5-8:40)
- * The body develops a missionary mentality (9:1-9:43)
- * The body struggles to include Gentiles (10:1-12:23)
- * The body reaches the uttermost parts of the world (12:24-21:16)
- * Paul's imprisonments and tribulations (21:17-28:31)

Notes:

- Tradition has never been a friend to the Gospel! Transition and breaking down boundaries are commonplace. Tradition, Legalism, fear, turf protection, pride, anti Gentilism.
- The Holy Spirit fell on each new segment of the Body. The Jews (2:4), the Half-Jews, or Samaritans (8:14-17), the Gentiles (10:44-46, 15:7-9)
- There are no "Lone Ranger Christians"
- House to house: breaking bread, sharing, praying
- The power of God, not the power of man
- Power and presence of God, not dead religion
- The mentality of reaching others

Exegeting Acts

We have to not only ask questions like “*what happened?*” but also “*What was Luke’s purpose in selecting and shaping the material in this way?*” So we must ask what as well as why.

Here’s a suggested assignment:

- 1) Read Acts all the way through in one or two sittings
- 2) As you read, make notes of things such as key statements, recurring themes, natural divisions of the book.
- 3) Go back and skim read it, referring to your notes as you do
- 4) Ask yourself “Why did Luke write this book?”

You will find, among other things:

- The theme is the movement of God, through the Holy Spirit, from Jerusalem to the world
- Luke doesn’t seem to care about the “biographies” of the apostles, nor for the “organization of the Church. He writes of the move of God.
- He doesn’t seem to interested in “standardizing” things or bringing uniformity
- He presents a model, not of specifics, but of the overall picture of the life of Jesus Christ in His Church.

The Book of Acts here and now

Are these writings only for the primitive church, or are they for us today? Is this the norm of Christianity? (We *must* do this or we *may* do this, or we *can’t* do this?)

We must base our Christian theology (what we believe), our Christian ethics (how we ought to behave), and our Christian experience and practice on what scripture *intended* to teach, or what is intentional. I believe that the power of God shown in the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is lived out through the lives of ordinary people in the Book of Acts is the point we should take from this book. God is an active God and he wants to touch and change the lives of people. He will do so if we give him a platform. That is the point.

The incidental parts of the book of Acts are where the debates and division come from. How does God touch lives? Are these the literal things we should be looking for today?

For example, it is intended that God wants us to observe communion... how often we do it is incidental. It is intended that believers assemble together...how often and where is incidental.

Likewise, it is intended for us to see, through the book of Acts, that God wants to break out and show his power to a lost and dying world...exactly how he chooses to do this is incidental. We are, however, given these accounts of how he chose to do it then and there. Let’s believe him to do it here and now!

Getting to Know Your Bible

Part Five

Understanding the Gospels

What are the Gospels?

Collection of teachings of and stories about Jesus Christ

The uniqueness of the Gospels - they include narratives, teaching and prophecy: a diversity of parts that create an ingenious whole

Why four Gospels?

The Gospel of Matthew – Behold, your King

Written to the Jews.

The genealogy proves that Jesus had a legal right to be the King of the Jews through His “legal” stepfather, Joseph. Matthew portrays Jesus as the prophesied King who would come.

The prominent word is “fulfilled”

The Gospel of Mark – Behold, the Servant

Written to the Romans.

No genealogy (who cares about the background of a servant?) Mark Portrays the obedient servant who was prophesied. There is lots of action, lots of miracles.

The prominent word is “immediately”

The Gospel of Luke – Behold, the man.

Written to the Greeks

The genealogy traces His line through another son of David and leads to Mary, Jesus physical mother. Luke portrays Jesus as the perfect man, shows the human side of Jesus.

The prominent words are “son of man “

The Gospel of John – Behold, your God

Written to the church.

The genealogy – He came from God! John portrays Jesus as the Divine Son of God in power.

The prominent word is “believe”

The Holy Spirit orchestrated and inspired this to give us the view of the Son of God that He desired us to have. Because of this, exegesis of the Gospels requires us to think about the historical setting of the Jesus, and the historical setting of the authors.

The Historical Context of the Gospels

This can be difficult in the Gospels because they are, by nature, two-level documents.

- 1) The level of Jesus Himself
- 2) The level of the writers

The Historical context of Jesus

1st Century Judaism

Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots = 5% of the total population

“Am-ha-aretz” (people of the earth - common people) = 95% of the total population

The way Jesus taught

It is also essential to proper interpretation that we understand the way Jesus taught. The forms through which He delivered His messages are important.

Parable – a short, simple story, drawn from everyday experiences, designed to communicate a spiritual truth. (Mark 4:1-20 – The kingdom of God is like a sower who went out to sow his seed...)

Hyperbole -- purposeful overstatement for the purpose of getting your point across. Hyperbole is a very effective teaching tool. (Matt. 5:29-30 – gouge out your eye, cut off your arm...He didn't really mean that; He was expressing the importance of not offending your brother. *When hyperbole is used we must take the teacher for what he means, not what He says*)

Proverb – a short saying that strikingly expresses some obvious truth (Matt. 6:21– “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”)

Simile – a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another dissimilar thing by using the words “like” or “as” (Matt. 10:16 – “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves”)

Metaphor – a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another, different thing by being spoken of as if it were that other (Matt. 5:13 – “you are the salt of the earth...”)

Questions – (Matt. 17:25 – “From whom do the kings of earth collect duty and taxes – from their own sons, or from others?”)

Irony – (Matt. 16:2-3 – “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”)

Questions to ask when reading the teachings of Jesus:

- 1) Who is he addressing?
- 2) What is the point of the story?
- 3) Is there a cultural element that will help me better understand Jesus' real meaning?

The Historical Context of the Gospel writers

This has to do with the culture and events that prompted each of the writers to write a gospel in the first place. We have spoken of this already in comparing the Gospels.

For example, why did Mark write a gospel?

As we read through the book of Mark, we see that:

- Mark is especially interested in explaining the *nature* of Jesus' Messiahship
- The Messiah is the strong Son of God (1:1)
- He moved about Galilee with power and compassion (1:1-- 8:6)
- Yet He repeatedly kept His Messiahship hidden (1:34; 1:43; 3:12; 4:11; 5:43; 7:24; 7:36; 8:26; 8:30)
- Jesus did this because He understood the true nature of His messianic destiny- that of a suffering servant-king who conquers through death
- This was explained to the disciples three times, yet they still didn't understand or grasp it. (8:27-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-45)
- Mark is showing us that the true nature of the prophesied One is, as Isaiah described it, a suffering servant-king, and that we who follow Him will also deny ourselves, take up our cross and be servants. (Interestingly, Mark doesn't include any of Christ's teachings on discipleship until *after* He explains His own suffering (8:31-33))
- Ancient tradition says that Mark's gospel reflects the "memoirs" of Peter and that it appeared in Rome shortly after Peter's martyrdom, a time of great suffering among the Christians at Rome

The Literary Context of the gospels

Our goals are:

- 1) To understand a given story *in its context*
- 2) To understand the gospels as wholes and thus to interpret how it relates to the specific gospel from which it comes

We accomplish this in two ways:

- By thinking horizontally
- By thinking vertically

Thinking horizontally

This means to think of the parallels in other Gospels. (Not that the writers intended these Gospels to be read parallel to each other, but God gave us four of them for a reason)

Thinking vertically

This means to always keep in mind the both historical contexts, that of Jesus, and that of the writers.

The Gospels, in their present form, are God's Word to us. But we must read it in the form *and* the context it was given to us. What is God speaking to us in the context of this passage?

Some Hermeneutical Observations

How do we bring Jesus' teachings into the 21st century, where we will never have a Roman soldier force us to go an extra mile (Matt 5:41), and where half of all adult converts will have been divorced (how do we handle the issue of remarriage?) Consider these points when applying the Gospels to your life today:

- **Jesus' teaching is distinct from the Law.**
- **The Gospel narratives function in more than one way.**
- **We cannot properly interpret the Gospels without a clear understanding of the Kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus.**

Understanding the Parables

What is a parable? – a short, simple story from which a moral lesson can be learned

The reason for the tendency to misinterpret the parables lies in the statement that Jesus himself said about them in Mark 4:10-12 (While he himself was interpreting the parable of the sower.) He said that parables hold mysteries for those who hunger for God, but they harden those who do not hunger for God.

The nature of parables

There are different kinds of parables:

- 1) True parables (The Good Samaritan)

- 2) Similitudes (Leaven in the Meal)

- 3) Metaphors (Salt of the Earth)

- 4) Epigram (grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles)

A parable is told to capture the hearers and to call them to a response to Jesus and his ministry.

It's not just a story for a story's sake. *There is always a "catch" for those who are the hearers.*

You must always think about to whom, or to what response, the parable is spoken to and what is the "catch" or the punch-line of the parable. We want to try to interpret the parables so that we understand what they caught and what we would have caught had we been there.

Two things we can look for:

- 1) The points of reference in the story
- 2) An unexpected turn in the story

Recapturing the “punch” of the parables

Understanding points of reference:

Luke 7:40-42 – Dinner at Simon the Pharisee’s house.

- Jesus was invited to a dinner (They were checking him out)
- Jesus was not offered even the common hospitality of the day. (He was not honored as a visiting rabbi...it was somewhat of a put down)
- The town prostitute bursts in, washes Jesus’ feet with her tears and her hair
- “Just as we thought! He couldn’t be a prophet!” (Their suspicions were confirmed)
- Jesus knew their hearts

In that context the parable is told. Two men owed money to a lender. One owed 500 denarii (500 day’s wages) and the other 50 denarii (50 day’s wages). Neither could pay, so the lender cancelled both debts. Who do you think responded in greater love?

Knowing the context, the punch becomes obvious.

- God is the money lender
- The prostitute and Simon are both debtors
- The parable is a word of judgment calling for a response from Simon. It was extremely humiliating to him, but called attention to his need for right perspective and repentance.
- The woman heard the parable too! She didn’t hear Jesus’ call to repentance, for she had already repented. She heard Jesus’ acceptance

Learning to identify the audience

Luke 10:25-37 -- *The Parable of the Good Samaritan*

- 1) To whom was the parable spoken? An expert in the law
- 2) Why did He come to Jesus? To justify himself.
- 3) Does Jesus answer his question (“And who is my neighbor?”) No, not directly. Instead, he focuses the attention on the self-righteousness of the lawyer, who knows the law says (“Love your neighbor”) but wants to try to see if he can get a way around that, or find a technicality.
- 4) What kind of people passed by the Samaritan who was laying in the ditch? Priestly types, who stand over against the rabbis and Pharisees who are experts in the law.
- 5) The Pharisees loved almsgiving... it was their way to “love their neighbor”

So how does the story catch the Lawyer?

The lawyer might think to himself, “What else could you expect from those priestly types...that’s just like them. The next man down will be a Pharisee and he will help the man in the ditch.”

But Jesus has set the lawyer up, for the next man down is a Samaritan. Interpreting the parable lies in understanding that the Samaritans were so hated by the Pharisees. (The lawyer can't even bring himself to say the word Samaritan in the end of the story!) *Jesus exposed the prejudice and hatred in the lawyer's heart, and therefore, the true lack of love in his heart. He was disobeying that great commandment to love his neighbor as himself.*

Luke 15:11-32 --The prodigal Son

- 1) What is the context of Luke 15? (15:1-2) Jesus defending his actions of hanging out with sinners
- 2) What are the points of reference in the story of the Prodigal Son? The father and the two sons.
- 3) How did the Prodigal Son ultimately respond to the father? In humility and submission
- 4) How did the other son respond to the father? By Justifying himself and complaining about the feast thrown in honor of the son who returned home.

So how does Jesus catch the Pharisees who heard this parable?

The point of the parable is this: God forgives sinners and freely accepts them with great joy. Those who consider themselves to be righteous reveal their unrighteousness when they do not share the father's joy at the lost son's return. The parable wasn't told for the sake of the backslider coming home (as it is usually used). It was told to call those ungodly people who think they are righteous to repentance.

Parables of the Kingdom

"The kingdom of God is like..." means "It is like this with the kingdom of God" A merchant, a mustard seed, a treasure hidden in the field. So the whole parable tells us something about the nature of the kingdom.

Remember these points about the kingdom parables:

- 1) They reveal the nature of the kingdom of God
- 2) The kingdom of God is "*already and not yet*"
- 3) The kingdom parables mainly focus on the "already" or the "at-handedness" of the kingdom. (Luke 12:16-20 – *The rich fool* – attitudes toward possessions... the point is not the unexpectedness of death, but the urgency of the hour. The kingdom is "at hand!")
- 4) Listen for the call to a response

Hermeneutics and parables

When the parables were heard they seldom needed to be interpreted. The hearers usually understood and caught the punch line. The trick is for is to translate that same point that the original hearers understood into our own context.

Getting to Know Your Bible

Part Six

Understanding the Law

General notes:

When? Given around 1440 B.C.

How many? 613 laws

Where? Found in Exodus 20 - Deuteronomy 33

Which ones apply to us today? See below

A brief outline of a covenant:

- 1) Preamble (identify parties)
- 2) Prologue (explain connection)
- 3) Stipulations (the laws themselves)
- 4) Witness (who will enforce)
- 5) Sanctions (blessings/curses)
- 6) Document clause (provision for reviewing the covenant stipulations)

(The 1st statement at Sinai and the 2nd statement prior to the conquest of Canaan both reflect this six-part format.)

Are we to keep the Old Testament Law?

The Old Testament is old. The New Testament is binding on us now. We are not bound to the laws in the Old Covenant unless they are restated in the New Covenant.

Morality, reflected in the civil laws of ancient Israel, is still required in the New Testament, but the way it is lived out or manifested may be different.

Worship, reflected in the ritual laws of ancient Israel, is still required, but it is done in spirit and in truth and focused on the Lamb of God, not the offering of sacrifices.

Some Old Testament ethical laws are restated in the New Covenant. (Matthew 22:37-40) The principles or the essence of the law is retained although the laws themselves are not.

Although the Old Testament law is not God's commandment to us, it is still the God's Word to us, profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness.

The specific laws that the New Testament directly states that we are obligated to fulfill:

- 1) Ten Commandments
- 2) Two Great Commandments

Types of laws:

- 1) Apodictic laws (do not laws, do laws) (Lev 19:9-14)
- 2) Casuistic laws (case-by-case laws) (Deut. 15:12-17)

Benefits of the Old Testament Laws:

- 1) The food laws are protective
- 2) The understanding that sin deserves punishment
- 3) Prohibitive laws served the purpose of keeping Israel separate from other pagan nations

Understanding the Prophets

An overview of the prophetic books

More books come under the heading of prophetic material than any other heading. The Prophetic books were written in between 760 and 460 B.C. and contain many different messages from God.

Major Prophets

Isaiah to Daniel

Minor Prophets

(Hosea to Malachi)

** The Major Prophets are so called only because they are longer books, not because of the importance of their message.

Getting a grip on Prophecy

Prophecy is not telling the future, prophecy is God's particular word spoken to a particular people at a particular time.

Therefore, a specific date, audience and situation helps us understand what the book is all about. (Refer to History of Israel)

Of all Old Testament prophecy:

2% is Messianic

5% pertains to the New Covenant Age

1% concerns events yet to come

92% ???

The Role of the Prophet in Israel

1) Prophets in ancient Israel were **enforcers of the covenant**.

Through the prophets, God says it is still in effect and keeping it will result in blessing, breaking it will result in punishment.

2) The prophets' message was **God's message, not their own**

Prophets did not invent the blessings or curses...they merely enforce them.
(Deut. 28-32)

3) The message of the prophets was **not original**.

For example, contrast Hosea 4:2 with the Ten Commandments.

Understanding Prophetic Forms

In order to understand the content of the prophecies, one must understand some of the forms in which they were given.

1) The Lawsuit– Isaiah 3:13-26 – God is portrayed as the plaintiff, prosecuting attorney, judge and bailiff in a court case against the defendant, Israel. The covenant had been violated and therefore a punishment must ensue.

2) The Woe– Habakkuk 2:6-8 – God speaks a “woe” or an announcement of distress and doom against Babylon. Usually the reason is given and the punishment announced...again, enforcing the covenant.

- 3) The Promise– Amos 9:11-15 – God speaks of Israel’s future and a blessing to be given the covenant keepers. (life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect and safety)
- 4) Poetry and Music – All prophetic books contain large amounts of poetry and some are exclusively poetry. Many times the prophecies were in the form of a song (see 2 Kings 3:15-16; Habakkuk 3:1.) (This helped get the message across and helped it to be remembered, in a culture where writing and reading were rare skills. Parallelism, as seen in the Psalms is used here as well.)

*** Orthodoxy is correct belief. Orthopraxy is correct actions. Through the prophets, God calls Israel and Judah (and us) to a balance of both correct belief and correct actions.*

Through the prophets God reminds us that he will always enforce his covenant.

Understanding the Psalms

The nature of Psalms:

- 1) Help us express ourselves to God
- 2) Help us consider God’s narrate and His ways

The Psalms are personal accounts of the joys and sorrows, successes and failure, hopes and regrets of real everyday people like us. ***Therefore they help us to personally interact with God, to open our heart up to Him, to know Him more.***

Some Psalms are misapplied because they are often misunderstood.

What are the Psalms?

The Psalms are poems.

Hebrew poetry makes effective use of repetition, or parallelism.

We want to learn three types of parallelism:

- 1) **Synonymous parallelism** – The second line repeats the sense of the first line
- 2) **Antithetical parallelism** – The second line contrasts the first line
- 3) **Synthetic parallelism** – The second line adds to the first line.

The Psalms are music.

Although the Psalms contain and reflect doctrine, they should not be read as if they teach a system of doctrine

The content of the Psalms is often purposefully metaphorical, so we need to carefully look for the intent of the metaphor. (The mountains skip like rams (114:4); enemies spew out swords from their lips (59:7); God is a shepherd, a fortress, a shield, a rock) Don't take the metaphors too far – (Ps.23; God wants us to act like sheep and live a rural life)

Psalms are literature.

Types of Psalms

1) Laments

The largest group: over sixty Psalms are laments, which express struggles, suffering or disappointment to the Lord.

** Individual laments include Psalms 3,22,31,39,42,57,71,120,139,142.

** Corporate laments include Psalms 12,44,80,94,137.

How do these psalms apply to us? Are you discouraged? Is your group going through a particularly tough time? Then these Psalms are invaluable to you.

2) Thanksgiving Psalms

Used to express joy and gratitude to God for favorable circumstances, His faithfulness, etc.

** Thanksgiving Psalms include Psalms 18,30,32,34,40,65,66,67,75,92,107,116, 124, 136.

How do these apply? James 5:13 – “Is anyone among you merry? Let Him sing Psalms.”

3) Psalms of Praise

These Psalms center on praise to God for Who He is, His greatness and His faithfulness to all people, especially to Israel.

** These include Psalms 8, 19, 66, 100, 104, 111, 148, 149.

How do these apply? “Sing of His wondrous works.” We focus on His attributes.

4) Salvation History Psalms

These Psalms focus on God’s saving works among the people of Israel.

** These include Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136.

How do these apply? “These things were written for our instruction.” They not only show us God’s ways, they build faith in His working in our situation.

5) Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation

- Covenant renewal psalms (Psalms 50, 81)
- Royal Psalms (celebrated the kings of Israel-- Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 144)
- Enthronement Psalms (celebrated the enthronement of Israel’s kings, and also the kingship of the Lord – Psalms 24, 29, 47, 93, 95-99)
- Songs of Zion (celebrated the city of Jerusalem – 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122)

How do these apply? They teach us history that we may get a broader understanding of the Hebrew people. They Show us the Lord, high and exalted.

6) Wisdom Psalms

Teach us wisdom and the profits of wisdom

** These include Psalms 36, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133

How do these apply? They are profitable in giving us wisdom and perspective by which to live.

7) Psalms of Trust

Show us that God may be trusted.

** These include Psalms 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131

How do these apply? They help us express our trust in God in good times and in bad.

Editorial Titles

Most Psalms have editorial titles that introduce them. In the Hebrew text, these titles are considered the very first verse of the Psalm. In your English Bible, they are usually in italics and are printed above the first verse. They include:

- Technical names designating the type of Psalm
- Musical terms
- Hymn tunes to be used
- Liturgical notes
- Historical information

The Authors of the Psalms

David – approximately 92 psalms

Moses – Psalm 90

Solomon – Psalms 72, 127

Heman the Ezrahite – Psalm 88

Ethan the Ezrahite – Psalm 89

Asaph -- Psalms 50, 73-83

Sons of Korah – Psalms 42, 44-49, 84, 85, 87, 88

The oldest psalm was written by Moses, the youngest was written in the 6th Century B.C.

The final compiling of the Psalms was done in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

A Summary

The Psalms are helpful to us in three ways

- 1) As a guide to *worship*. (How, as humans, to open our hearts to God)
- 2) As a demonstration of how we can relate *honestly* to God. (He desires truth in the inward man)
- 3) As an aid to help us reflect and *meditate on the things* God has done for us (Philippians 4:8)

Understanding Wisdom Literature

Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life.

Wisdom is not only theoretical, it is practical.

Common Misunderstandings

The wisdom books of the Bible include Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Job (as well as Psalms, which we have already studied). There are three ways people commonly misunderstand these passages:

- 1) Reading only small portions of the books (lifting a verse out of context)
- 2) Misunderstanding categories, styles and literary genres
- 3) Failing to follow a line of argument in a wisdom discourse

Ecclesiastes: Cynical wisdom

Job: Worldly Wisdom versus God's Wisdom

***** The wisdom here is that we must carefully scrutinize man's advice and find God's true wisdom, which is wrapped up in his sovereignty and righteousness.***

Practical Wisdom in the Proverbs

A Proverb is: a brief, particular expression of a truth

What you will find in Proverbs is the sharp contrast between wisdom and folly. Here we see what wisdom *looks like* as well as what folly *looks like*.

Points to remember concerning proverbs:

- > Proverbs are not legal guarantees from God' Rather, they show what will likely happen if one follows a wise course.

- > Proverbs must be read as a collection (balance them with other proverbs and the rest of Scripture)

- > Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not theoretically correct (no proverb is a complete statement of truth)

Song of Solomon: Wisdom in a Love Song

The question of a parallel between Christ and the Church

Understanding The Revelation

What it is not: a narrative telling a story or a systematic teaching of doctrine or wisdom.

What it is: an exhortation to the 1st century churches in the form of a fresh revelation of the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

The book can be broken down into eight visions:

- 1) Chapters 1-3 – Christ’s exhortation to the seven churches to remain faithful in the midst of hostility.
- 2) Chapters 4-7 – Christ the Lamb on the throne of heaven, opening the seven seals...disasters
- 3) Chapters 8-11 – Seven angels blowing seven trumpets... more disasters
- 4) Chapters 12-14 – The persecution of the church
- 5) Chapters 15-16 – Seven bowls of God’s wrath
- 6) Chapter 17:1-19:10 – The judgement of Babylon
- 7) Chapter 19:11-21 – The final victory, judgements, and blessedness of the new heavens and earth
- 8) Chapter 22 – The cry of those who love Him: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

Revealing Jesus

The first key to understanding the Book of The Revelation is found in the first verse: “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is not only the revelation that Jesus gave to John, it is through and through a revelation or revealing of the person of Jesus Christ.

Images of Jesus in Revelation:

- The faithful and true witness
- The First-born from the dead
- The Alpha and Omega, beginning and end
- The Almighty, Who was, Who is, Who is to come
- The glorious, resurrected Christ
- The holder of the Keys of Death and Hell
- The Judge of the churches
- The Lion of Judah
- The Lamb of God
- The King of kings
- The Lord of Lords
- The Judge of all men
- The Coming King Who will reign forever!

Apocalyptic Literature

The second key to understanding Revelation is becoming aware of what apocalyptic literature is all about.

The importance of exegesis in understanding The Revelation

What was the author's, and therefore the Holy Spirit's, original intent? Consider these points:

- 1) The primary meaning of Revelation is what John originally intended it to mean which was something the readers could and did understand.
- 2) Because of the prophetic aspect of the book, we should be open to a secondary meaning, inspired by the Holy Spirit, but not necessarily seen by the author or his readers.
- 3) Keep the context of the readers in consideration. Our interpretation of Revelation must not assume, for example, that the original readers had read Matthew or 1 or 2 Thessalonians and could interpret John's writing in the light of those scriptures, as many have done today.
- 4) The imagery here is rooted in the Old Testament
- 5) Remember that the whole vision (whole book) has a message...each vision is a part of the whole (*Despite the present circumstances, God is in total control of history and the church. Read through the whole book to get the big picture... don't try to figure it out*)

The Historical Context

What is the common thread that tells us the historical setting?

What themes do we see when reading the Revelation?

- Chapter 2:3,8-9, 13,3:10 – “to the one who overcomes”
- (6:9-11) – martyrs
- (7:14-16) – “who have come out of great tribulation”
- (12:11,17) – suffering and death linked to the testimony of Jesus”
- (13:7,14:9-13; 16:5-6; 18:20,24; 19:2) suffering and death/ the Beast

The suffering and persecution of the church is the reason for the book to be written.

Even the Lamb was slain, having suffered for them, and is able to understand and strengthen them in their suffering

Tribulation vs. wrath

The Literary Context

The book is a whole, with each vision being a separate but integral part of that whole. Ask yourself " How does this vision fit in with the book as a whole?"

A look at the big picture

Chapters 1-3 introduce the three main characters: John, Christ and the church

Chapters 4-5 set the stage

Chapters 6-7 -- the drama unfolds

Chapters 8-11 – Reveal the content of God’s judgement

Chapters 12-22 – details of the judgement and triumph of the Lamb

** In chapter 12, Satan attempts to destroy Christ and is himself destroyed. Here we see the recurring theme of the New Testament of the kingdom being “already” and “not yet.” Satan is a defeated foe, and yet his final end has not yet come.

What does this all mean to us today?

A Key Principle: God’s Word to us is to be found in His Word to them

Therefore, Revelation is God’s Word of comfort and encouragement to Christians who suffer everywhere.

- 1) We are certain of God’s judgment on those who oppose Him and His people
- 2) We are certain that God and His people will emerge victorious in the end.
- 3) We must be careful not to superimpose our current events over the broad canvas of the book of Revelation.
- 4) Although there may be secondary, unfulfilled prophetic dimensions, we are given no keys to unlock them. Do chapters 13-14 reveal that another world leader who will bring about these events in our time? Not necessarily, but we can be open to the possibility.
- 5) Some things in Revelation are definitely “yet to come” (11:15-19; 19:1-22:21) But we may be sure that God will bring them about in His way and His time.

Conclusion

“Just as the opening word of scripture speaks of God and creation, so the concluding word speaks of God and consummation... Until he comes, we live out the future in the already and we do so by hearing and obeying his word. But there comes a day when such books as this will no longer be needed, for, “No longer will a man teach his neighbor,...because they will all know me” (Jer. 31:33). And, with John, and the Spirit and the bride, we say, “Amen, Come, Lord Jesus.”” (Gordon Fee, *How to read the Bible for all its worth*)

**** Final Assignment:** Complete a comprehensive exegesis and hermeneutics assignment involving a portion of scripture, utilizing all skills learned in the class. Examples would include: the beatitudes, the instruction of Paul to Timothy concerning elders in the church, a particular Psalm, the creation account, etc. Use all of the skills in this course that apply to your passage.