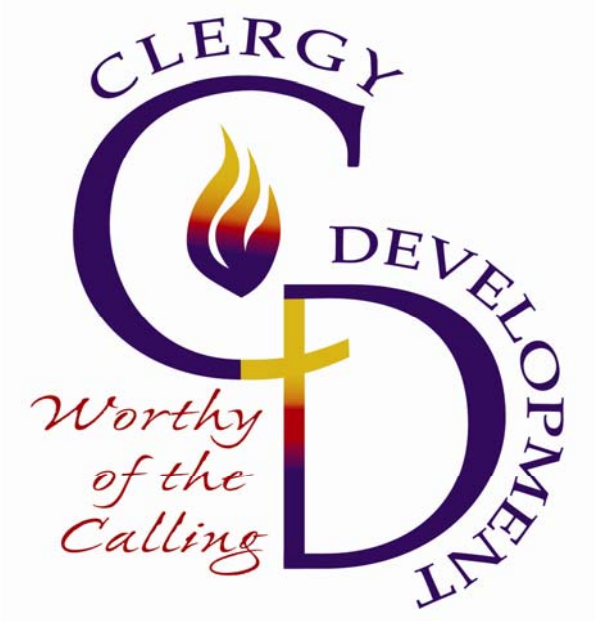
Faculty Guide

Interpreting Scripture



Clergy Development
Church of the Nazarene
Kansas City, Missouri
816-333-7000 ext. 2468; 800-306-7651 (USA)
2004

Clergy Development
Church of the Nazarene
6401 The Paseo
Kansas City, MO 64131
USA

The **Modular Course of Study** is an outcome-based curriculum designed to implement the educational paradigm defined by the Breckenridge Consultations. Clergy Development is responsible for maintaining and distributing the Modular Course of Study for the Church of the Nazarene.

Members of the development committee for the Modular Course of Study were
Michael W. Vail, Ph.D., Series Curriculum Editor
Charles E. Zink, Director, Clergy Development
Jerry D. Lambert, Commissioner, International Board of Education
Al Truesdale, Ph.D., Nazarene Theological Seminary (retired)
Robert L. Woodruff, Ph.D., World Mission Educational Coordinator
David Busic, Pastor, Central Church of the Nazarene, Lenexa, KS
Ron Blake, Pastor, Detroit First Church of the Nazarene, MI
Michael W. Stipp, Clergy Development

Series Foreword written by Al Truesdale
Journaling Essay written by Rick Ryding
Principal contributors for each module are listed in specific Faculty Guides.

Series Foreword

A Vision for Christian Ministry: Clergy Education in the Church of the Nazarene

The chief purpose of all persons—indeed, all of the creation—is to worship, love, and serve God. God has made himself known in His deeds of creation and redemption. As the Redeemer, God has called into existence a people: the Church, who embody, celebrate, and declare His name and His ways. The life of God with His people and the world constitutes the Story of God. That story is recorded principally in the Old and New Testaments, and continues to be told by the resurrected Christ who lives and reigns as Head of His Church. The Church lives to declare the whole Story of God. This it does in many ways—in the lives of its members who are even now being transformed by Christ through preaching, the sacraments, in oral testimony, community life, and in mission. All members of the Body of Christ are called to exercise a ministry of witness and service. No one is excluded.

In God's own wisdom He calls some persons to fulfill the ministry of proclaiming the gospel and caring for God's people, in a form referred to as the ordained ministry. God is the initial actor in this call, not humans. In the Church of the Nazarene we believe God calls and persons respond. They do not elect the Christian ministry. All persons whom God calls to the ordained ministry should continue to be amazed that He would call them. They should continue to be humbled by God's call. The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene states, "we recognize and hold that the Head of the Church calls some men and women to the more official and public work of the ministry." It adds, "The church, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, will recognize the Lord's call" (*Manual,* Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 400).

An ordained Christian minister has as his or her chief responsibility to declare in many ways the whole Story of God as fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. His or her charge is to "tend the flock of God . . . not under compulsion, but willingly, not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2-3, NRSV). The minister fulfills this charge under the supervision of Christ, the chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4). Such ministry can be fulfilled only after a period of careful

preparation. Indeed, given the ever-changing demands placed upon the minister, “preparation” never ceases.

A person who enters the Christian ministry becomes in a distinct sense a steward of the gospel of God (Titus 1:7). A steward is one who is entrusted to care for what belongs to another. A steward may be one who takes care of another person or who manages the property of someone else. All Christians are stewards of the grace of God. But in addition, in a peculiar sense a Christian minister is a steward of the “mystery of God,” which is Christ, the Redeemer, the Messiah of God. In all faithfulness, the minister is called to “make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel” (Eph 6:19, NRSV). Like Paul, he or she must faithfully preach “the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:8-10, NRSV).

In fulfilling this commission, there is plenty of room for diligence and alertness, but no room for laziness or privilege (Titus 1:5-9). Good stewards recognize that they are stewards only, not the owners, and that they will give an account of their stewardship to the master. Faithfulness to one’s charge and to the Lord who issued it is the steward’s principal passion. When properly understood, the Christian ministry should never be thought of as a “job.” It is ministry—uniquely Christian ministry. No higher responsibility or joy can be known than to become a steward of the Story of God in Christ’s Church. The person who embraces God’s call to the ordained ministry will stand in the company of the apostles, the Early Fathers of the Church, the Reformers of the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformers, and many persons around the world today who joyfully serve as stewards of the gospel of God.

Obviously, one who does not recognize, or who understands but rejects, just how complete and inclusive a minister’s stewardship must be, should not start down the path that leads to ordination. In a peculiar sense, a Christian minister must in all respects model the gospel of God. He or she is to “shun” the love of money. Instead, the minister must “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.” He or she must “fight the good fight of the faith” and “take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called” (1 Tim 6:11-12, NRSV).

Hence, the Church of the Nazarene believes "the minister of Christ is to be in all things a pattern to the flock—in punctuality, discretion, diligence, earnestness; 'in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left' (2 Cor 6:6-7)" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 401.1). The minister of Christ "must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, [8]but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, [9]holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching . . . able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." (Titus 1:7-9, NASB).

In order to be a good steward of God's Story one must, among other things, give oneself to careful and systematic study, both before and after ordination. This will occur not because he or she is forced to do so, but out of a love for God and His people, the world He is working to redeem, and out of an inescapable sense of responsibility. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the attitude one brings to preparation for the ministry reveals much about what he or she thinks of God, the gospel, and Christ's Church. The God who became incarnate in Jesus and who made a way of salvation for all gave His very best in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. In order to be a good steward, a Christian minister must respond in kind. Jesus told numerous parables about stewards who did not recognize the importance of what had been entrusted to them (Mt 21:33-44; 25:14-30; Mk 13:34-37; Lk 12:35-40; 19:11-27; 20:9-18).

Preparation for ministry in Christ's Church—one's education in all its dimensions— should be pursued in full light of the responsibility before God and His people that the ministry involves. This requires that one take advantage of the best educational resources at his or her disposal.

The Church of the Nazarene recognizes how large is the responsibility associated with the ordained Christian ministry and accepts it fully. Part of the way we recognize our responsibility before God is seen in the requirements we make for ordination and the practice of ministry. We believe the call to and practice of Christian ministry is a gift, not a right or privilege. We believe God holds a minister to the highest of religious, moral, personal, and professional standards. We are not reluctant to expect those standards to be

observed from the time of one's call until his or her death. We believe Christian ministry should first be a form of worship. The practice of ministry is both an offering to God and a service to His Church. By the miracle of grace, the work of the ministry can become a means of grace for God's people (Rom 12:1-3). One's education for ministry is also a form of worship.

The modules comprising the Course of Study that may lead a person to candidacy for ordination have been carefully designed to prepare one for the kind of ministry we have described. Their common purpose is to provide a holistic preparation for entrance into the ordained Christian ministry. They reflect the Church's wisdom, experience, and responsibility before God. The modules show how highly the Church of the Nazarene regards the gospel, the people of God, the world for which Christ gave His life, and Christian ministry. Completing the modules will normally take three or four years. But no one should feel pressured to meet this schedule.

The careful study for which the modules call should show that before God and His Church one accepts the stewardly responsibility associated with ordained ministry.

Contents

Introduction

Intended Use of This Faculty Guide

This faculty guide serves as an instructor's guide for teaching principles of *Interpreting Scripture* to adult learners who are preparing for ordination in the Church of the Nazarene. The content is based on intended outcomes defined through the collaborative process conducted at Breckenridge, CO, USA, between 1990 and 1997. The materials prepare the pastor-teacher to present the topic by providing background reading, lesson plans, lectures, instructions to the teacher, and teaching resources for each class session. In most lessons complete lectures, questions for guided discussions, and defined learning activities are provided.

The pastor-teacher who will lead this module should hold a master's degree. Ideally, the pastor-teacher should have participated as a student in a module using this material prior to teaching the material to others. This faculty guide assumes that the pastor-teacher has some basic understanding of hermeneutics.

It is further assumed that learners participating in a module using this material will be high school graduates and be adult learners beyond the traditional college age. Learners are assumed to be motivated to learn, and to have adult life-experiences. No prior college classroom experience is assumed on the part of the learners.

Acknowledgments

Every module is the accumulation of effort by many people. Someone writes the original manuscript, others offer suggestions to strengthen the content and make the material more easily understood, and finally an editor formats the module for publication. This module is not different. Many people have contributed to this module. Every effort has been made to represent accurately the original intent of the principal contributors.

Principal Contributor
The principal contributor for this module is Alex Varughese. Alex Varughese is professor of religion at Mount Vernon Nazarene University; he has been a

member of the Department of Religion at MVNU since 1982. Previous to his appointment at MVNU, he taught in the religion department at Eastern Nazarene College from 1979-1982. He is an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene. Varughese holds B.S. and M.S. degrees from theUniversity of Kerala, India. He received his M.A. in religion from Olivet Nazarene University and his M.Div. from Nazarene Theological Seminary. He also holds M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees in biblical studies (Old Testament) from Drew University. He is married to Marcia and they have four children (Sarah, Jeremy, Timothy, and Rachel).

Dr. Varughese has contributed articles in *Beacon Dictionary of Theology* (Beacon Hill Press), a chapter on eschatology in the Old Testament in *Wesleyan Theological Perspectives,* Vol. 5 (Warner Press), a commentary on the Book of Jeremiah in the one-volume *Asbury Bible Commentary* (Zondervan), two chapters in *Biblical Resources for Holiness Preaching,* vols. 1 and 2 (Beacon Hill Press), and numerous articles and commentary lessons in *Illustrated Bible Life*. He is the primary writer and editor of *Discovering the Old Testament* (Beacon Hill Press), and he is currently the editor of the forthcoming *Discovering the New Testament,* to be published by Beacon Hill Press. Also forthcoming is his essay on Jeremiah's oracles against the royal family in Herbert B. Huffmon's Festschrift to be published by the Sheffield Press. He is also the Managing Editor of the Centennial Initiative of the Church of the Nazarene.

Currently Dr. Varughese is chair of the Board of Ministerial Studies on the North Central Ohio District Church of the Nazarene, and coordinator of the Certificate of Ministry Preparation at MVNU. He has also served as a member of the Adult Curriculum Committee, Planning Committee of Nazarene Theology Conference (Guatemala City), and as chair of the Division of Religion and Philosophy and head of the religion department at MVNU from 1993-2003. He has served as visiting faculty at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Nazarene Theological Seminary, and European Nazarene College.

Responder

Each module was reviewed by at least one content specialist to ensure that the content did not represent a single, narrow view or opinion. The responder provided suggestions the principal contributor could integrate into this module.

Dr. Russell Lovett was the responder for this module. After serving in ministry positions in Northwestern Ohio, Eastern Kentucky, Southern Florida, and Kansas City, Dr. and Mrs. Lovett were appointed as missionaries to Europe in 1977. They served the Church of the Nazarene in Italy and France for 12 years. They returned to the USA in 1991 so Russ could pursue a doctoral degree in New Testament. He served as faculty member in religion at Olivet Nazarene University from 1991-2001.

In 2001, the church began a new university-level program for French-speaking ministers on the African continent. Dr. Lovett now serves as the chief academic officer for Faculté de Théologie de l'Eglise du Nazaréen and curriculum coordinator for French theological education in West Africa.

Russ and Donna have two married sons, Eric and Stephen.

Revision History

Third Quarter 2005, Revision 2, the current version,

- module guides were edited for gender inclusiveness

Fourth Quarter 2004. Revision 1,

- the Lesson Overview, Introduction, Body, Close format was established.

About This Module

The very nature of Scripture as Word of God is communication and thus it must be interpreted. The question is not whether to interpret Scripture but whether it is interpreted well or poorly. The module is designed for believers who are called into a ministry of communicating the Word. The primary context of their ministry is the Church, which is nurtured by the Holy Spirit's application of Scripture to its life and work. To grow in this, ministry students need to learn the appropriate tools and processes of interpretation, and to practice the use of such tools and processes. Beyond knowing, students must become lovers of Scripture, seekers after God, and joyfully committed to adopting the message into their own lives and to their contemporary contexts.

Students should have completed *Telling the Old Testament Story of God* and *Telling the New Testament Story of God* (or their equivalent) before beginning this module.

Module Materials

We have tried to design this module to be flexible and easy to adapt to your situation. For each lesson, there are several support pieces, which we have called simply "resources." These can be used in many different ways. Resources have been reproduced in the student guide for this module. The instructor will want a copy of the student guide for his or her own use.

1. The instructor may photocopy these to use for his or her own lecture outlines. There is space to add notes from the faculty guide, from the textbook, or from the additional suggested readings. Add in your own illustrations too!
2. The pages may be photocopied onto overhead transparencies for use in class.
3. These pages appear in the Student Guide for the students' use and participation.

One reason for developing this module is for the benefit of extension education. We understand that teachers all over the world are called upon to teach courses not in their area of specialty, but they teach them because they want to see pastors trained and leaders developed for the church. Extension education is basic to rapid church growth. We want to provide this as a resource for extension educators. If it helps others along the way, that's fine too.

Another reason for developing this module is to equip indigenous faculty. We believe a class like this is best taught and contextualized by someone from within the culture of the students. Many fine teachers, who are leaders in our churches around the world, do not have higher degrees in theology but have the skills to teach a module like this effectively. We want to set them free to do so, and in so doing, to actually improve the module and make it more dynamic and meaningful for their context than it would have been had we held onto it and insisted on teaching it ourselves.

Intended Outcomes for the Module

The *Manual,* Church of the Nazarene, and the *International Sourcebook on Developmental Standards for Ordination* define educational preparation for ordination. Additionally, each region of the International Church of the Nazarene has developed educational guidelines to qualify educational programs for ordination offered within their region.

The USA Region *Sourcebook for Ministerial Development* defines outcomes for the overall ministerial development program. The module assists candidates in developing these skills. Other modules in the program may also address the same outcomes. The specific outcomes that relate to this module are:

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

CN 15—Ability to describe how the Bible came into being up to contemporary translations

CN 16—Ability to identify the steps of historical, literary, and theological analysis used in exegesis

CN 17—Ability to exegete a passage of Scripture using the steps listed above

OUTCOME STATEMENTS

At the completion of this module the student will:

- Understand that the need for hermeneutics arises from the multiple sources of meaning of texts
- Recognize the formative role of corporate and apostolic understandings for interpretation of Scripture
- Be able to describe the role of author, text, and reader(s) in the issue of meaning
- Be able to compare and contrast the ways Wesleyan and prominent non-Wesleyan presuppositions impact interpretation (including personal vs. corporate interpretation)
- Recognize the importance of a sound hermeneutical method for Wesleyan theology
- Be aware of his or her own understanding of inspiration and authority of Scripture and how that understanding relates to Article 4 of the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene
- Grow in his or her joyful submission to the power of the Spirit working through Scripture
- Be able to identify and illustrate the primary methods of scriptural interpretation from major (various) periods of Church history
- Be able to understand and articulate the process of translation from original languages to the version(s) in hand
- Be able to describe the way in which translations participate in the inspiration and authority of Scripture
- Be able to give a general description of the problems of textual corruption and the resources for textual criticism

- Be able to recognize evidences of historical context (author, date, audience, place, etc.) in the biblical books and describe how they shape the meaning of the text
- Be aware of the ways the worldview(s) of the biblical authors compared to the modern worldview(s) affect the meaning of the text
- Be able to identify the immediate context, book context, and canonical context of biblical passages and to describe how those contexts shape meaning
- Be able to recognize the way genre, form, grammar, sentences, and words express the meaning of specific texts
- Be able to recognize ways Scripture teaches theology and theologizes (direct affirmation, inductive, deductive, inferential, narrative, etc.) and appropriate such theology
- Be able to understand, recognize, and appropriately exercise the hermeneutical principles relating to specific genres such as narrative (including OT narratives, Gospels, and Acts), Law, wisdom, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic, and Epistles
- Be able to move through the process of exegesis to contemporary application of the biblical texts in preaching, formation, and Christian education
- Recognize the principles he or she is using in moving from reading of Scripture to personal spiritual formation
- Recognize the role of the context (both interpreter's and audience's) in developing application
- Recognize the importance of contextualizing Scripture for a contemporary audience

Recommended Textbooks

Each module within the Modular Course of Study is intended to be textbook independent. This does not imply that the modules are textbook irrelevant, or that the module content cannot be enriched by selecting and requiring that students study a textbook along with the lessons provided in this faculty guide.

If these modules are adapted for use outside of the English-speaking countries of North America, a specific textbook may not be available in the language of the students. Therefore, the module does not rely on one textbook. The instructor may select any doctrinally sound textbook available to the students.

Examples of textbooks that would also be good references for further study are:

Fee, Gordon D., and & Douglas Stewart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.

Ferguson, Duncan S. *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction.* Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation.* Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993.

Suggested Meeting Schedule

The module lessons are designed to last 90 minutes each. Each lesson is complete in itself with an opening, a middle, and a closing. They are sequential. Each lesson assumes the learners have mastered material presented in previous lessons. The lessons can be grouped in a variety of ways to accommodate the schedules of your learners.

When lessons are taught in the same meeting, instructors will need to adjust homework assignments because participants will not have time between lessons to prepare homework. It is very important for the instructor always to be looking ahead and planning for upcoming lessons.

Here are three suggestions (out of many) for ways the meetings can be organized.

1. Resident campus. The class can meet two days a week for 90 minutes. Present one lesson per meeting time. Total time: 7 weeks.

2. Extension education. The class can meet one day—or evening—each week for 3 to 3½ hours. Present two lessons per meeting with a break period between lessons. Participants will need to travel to a centralized location for meetings, so make it worth their time. Total time: 7 weeks.

3. Intensive module. The class can meet five consecutive days for 7 to 8 hours per day. Present two lessons in the morning with a break period between lessons, and two lessons in the afternoon with another break period between the lessons. Participants must complete reading assignments before arriving at the module site, and written

assignments can be submitted 30 to 60 days following the class meeting. Total meeting time: 1 week. Elapsed time including reading and written assignments: 2 to 3 months.

The module is divided into 14 lessons. The progression of these lessons can be seen in the chart below. Space is given for you to fill in the dates when your class sessions will meet.

Date	Lesson
	1. Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction
	2. Biblical Text, Canon, and Translations
	3. The History of Interpretation: Inner Biblical and Jewish Interpretation
	4. The History of Interpretation: Early Christian Period
	5. The History of Interpretation: Patristic and Medieval Period
	6. The History of Interpretation: Reformation and Post-Reformation Period
	7. The History of Interpretation: Modern Period
	8. Inductive Method of Biblical Exegesis
	9. Inductive Method, Part 2
	10. Interpreting Old Testament Narratives and Law
	11. Interpreting Wisdom Literature and Psalms
	12. Interpreting the Prophets and Daniel
	13. Interpreting the Gospels and the Book of Acts
	14. Interpreting the Epistles and Revelation

About This Faculty Guide

Note: It is critical to remember that active participation by the learners will enhance their learning. That means you will not be an information giver. This module is not about you. The focus

The faculty guide has been written to guide an instructor as he or she prepares to teach this module. It contains complete lesson plans and resources to provide a solid educational design for the topic. You will need to prepare for each lesson well in advance of

of the module is helping students learn. Your role is to design an environment in which your students will learn. Sometimes you will give lectures. At other times you will guide discussions or assign your students to work in groups. These kinds of activities keep the participants actively involved in the learning process. Learning is a team activity.

the meeting time. Often there are background reading suggestions for the instructor, or you may know additional reference materials you want to interject into the lesson. Questions intended to be answered or discussed by the students are in italic type.

A two-column format was chosen for the faculty guide. The right-hand column contains the content of lectures, descriptions of activities, and questions to keep students involved. The left-hand column is to give suggested instructions to you, the teacher. It also contains examples you can use to illustrate concepts in the lectures. Whenever possible you should use examples from your own experience and from your students' real-life context.

Large white space has been left in the left column to allow you to write notes and personalize the faculty guide.

The faculty guide has three major components: the Faculty Guide Introduction, the Lesson Plans, and the Teaching Resources. The Introduction and Lesson Plans are in this document and the Resources are contained in the companion student guide. You are reading the Faculty Guide Introduction now. It provides a teaching philosophy for adult learners, background information for organizing the module, and ideas about conducting the lessons.

Each section of the faculty guide is numbered with a two-part page number. Page 5 of Lesson 3 would be numbered "3-5." The first number is the lesson number and the second is the page number within the lesson. Each resource sheet is numbered for the lesson in which the resource is first used. The first resource page for Lesson 2 is numbered "2-1."

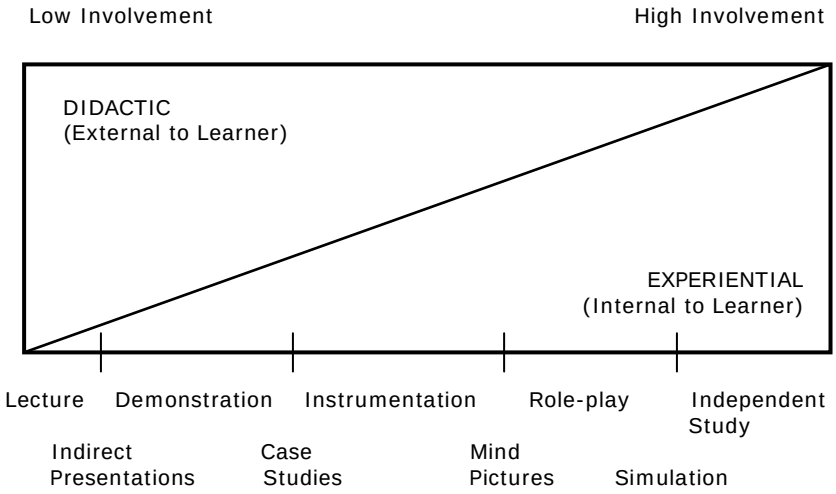
The Lesson Plans are complete in themselves. They contain an Overview, Introduction, Body, and Close. The Lesson Overview provides you with a planning tool for preparing and conducting each lesson.

The Lesson Introduction should get participants' attention, orient them to the place this lesson holds in the overall module, define the intended objectives, and prepare them for the learning activities.

The Lesson Body is the core message of the lesson. The key is to keep the learners actively involved. Even in lectures, ask questions that prompt learners to think about the content, not just hear the lecture.

The following chart shows a continuum of learner involvement in different teaching methods. Lecture requires the least learner involvement, and independent study requires the most learner involvement.

METHODS CONTINUUM



A variety of learning activities are used to present information and allow learners to experiment with their new knowledge. Each learner has a set of preferred methods of learning and has different life experiences that can color or filter what one actually learns. A variety of learning activities help adults adapt to the learning task—by hearing, by doing, by reading, by discussing, or by combinations of these. The learners should have opportunities to test and clarify their new learning by talking with the instructor and other participants, and applying new knowledge in real or contrived situations as soon as possible.

The Lesson Close provides a time for answering questions, reviewing the information, connecting this lesson to future lessons, making assignments, and punctuating the finish. The close does not provide any new information but gives a sense of closure to the lesson.

Homework assignments are important learning activities. They provide the student with an opportunity to synthesize classroom learning. Working on these assignments also extends the learning experience beyond the time constraints of class time.

The student—especially the adult student—needs frequent and timely feedback about his or her learning. While interaction with other students helps the learner refine what he or she is learning, feedback from the instructor is also critical to the quality of learning and ultimately to his or her persistence in the Course of Study.

It is your responsibility as the instructor for this module to provide students with timely responses to homework assignments in order to enhance the learning process. Reviewing and responding to homework will also provide you with critical information about what your students are learning and whether or not the teaching-learning process is succeeding.

Since these modules are preparing the learner for ordination rather than leading to a university degree, a letter grade may not be appropriate. Your response to the learners' assignments should be thoughtful and in most cases it should be written. Its purpose will always be to refine and enhance the learning of the student.

Teaching Resources are reproduced in the student guide. Each resource sheet is numbered for the lesson in which the resource is first used. The first resource page for Lesson 2 is numbered "2-1."

You must determine how each resource will be used in your context. If an overhead projector is available, transparencies can be made by replacing the paper in your photocopy machine with special transparency material.

The student guide for this module contains the series foreword, acknowledgments, syllabus, copies of all resources, lesson objectives, and assignments. A copy of the student guide should be made available to each student.

Recommendations for printing You may print this faculty guide if desired. The introduction and lesson plan segments are formatted for printing on both sides of the paper. The resource pages of the student guide should be printed on one side for use as transparency or handout masters.

The student guide should be printed on one side.

A Hidden Agenda

Hidden curriculum issues . . . because the way we teach teaches

In each session, there are certain methodological and environmental things to consider.

First, consider the classroom arrangement. Whenever possible, the room should be arranged to encourage a sense of community. Either the group should sit in a circle or around a table. If the group is very large, chairs can be arranged for easily moving into clusters for discussion.

Second, consider how you present yourself as teacher. Standing behind a lectern with your students facing you in rows says you are above the students and have something to give them (although in a very large group this standing to teach may be unavoidable). Sitting as part of the circle makes the teacher a co-learner at the same level as the students. Speak naturally. Pay close attention to your students, and value the things they share. Learn their names. Encourage participation. Remember that you are modeling for them, and the way you teach will teach them far more than the words you say.

Third, invite the Holy Spirit's presence in the classroom. Do this each time the class meets.

Fourth, the sharing-of-stories activity does more than help the students begin to reflect on their own Christian experiences. It is a way to build community between the students. This is more than an exercise to be checked off. It is vital to set the tone of your intentional community.

When meeting times exceed 90 minutes, consider adding break times. The break between segments is an important time for community building. Remain available to the students during this time. Consider offering coffee or tea during this time as a way to encourage fellowship.

Journaling: The Key to Spiritual Formation

Journaling is a major assignment of each module in the Course of Study. It is the integrating element that helps draw spiritual meaning and ministerial application from the content of each module whether

the module concentrates on content, competency, character, or context. It ensures that the "Be" component of "Be, Know, and Do" is present in every module in which one participates. What is journaling and how can it be meaningfully accomplished?

The Syllabus contains this explanation of journaling. Journaling provides the spiritual formation component for the module and is an integral part of the learning experience.

Have students read the journaling section during the Syllabus review in Lesson 1 and emphasize that journaling is an assignment for each lesson in the module.

When giving assignments in each lesson, assign journal writing each time the group meets.

Journaling: A Tool for Personal Reflection and Integration

Participating in the Course of Study is the heart of your preparation for ministry. To complete each module you will be required to listen to lectures, read books and articles, participate in discussions, and write papers. Content mastery is the goal.

An equally important part of ministerial preparation is spiritual formation. Some might choose to call spiritual formation devotions, while others might refer to it as growth in grace. Whichever title you place on the process, it is the intentional cultivation of your relationship with God. The module work will be helpful in adding to your knowledge, your skills, and your ability to do ministry. The spiritual formation work will weave all you learn into the fabric of your being, allowing your education to flow freely from your head through your heart to those you serve.

Although there are many spiritual disciplines to help you cultivate your relationship with God, journaling is the critical skill that ties them all together. Journaling simply means keeping a record of your experiences and the insights you have gained along the way. It is a discipline because it does require a good deal of work faithfully to spend daily time in your journal. Many people confess this is a practice they tend to push aside when pressed by their many other responsibilities. Even five minutes a day spent journaling can make a major difference in your education and your spiritual development. Let me explain.

Consider journaling time spent with your best friend. Onto the pages of a journal you will pour out your candid responses to the events of the day, the insights you gained from class, a quote gleaned from a book, and an 'ah-ha' that came to you as two ideas connected. This is not the same as keeping a diary, since a diary seems to be a chronicle of events without the personal dialogue. The journal is the repository for all of your thoughts, reactions, prayers, insights, visions, and plans. Though some people like to keep complex journals with sections for each type of reflection, others find a simple running commentary

more helpful. In either case, record the date and the location at the beginning of every journal entry. It will help you when it comes time to review your thoughts.

It is important to chat briefly about the logistics of journaling. All you will need is a pen and paper to begin. Some folks prefer loose-leaf paper that can be placed in a three-ring binder, others like spiral-bound notebooks, while others enjoy using composition books. Whichever style you choose, it is important to develop a pattern that works for you.

Establishing a time and a place for writing in your journal is essential. If there is no space etched out for journaling, it will not happen with the regularity needed to make it valuable. It seems natural to spend time journaling after the day is over and you can sift through all that has transpired. Yet family commitments, evening activities, and fatigue militate against this time slot. Morning offers another possibility. Sleep filters much of the previous day's experiences, and processes deep insights, that can be recorded first thing in the morning. In conjunction with devotions, journaling enables you to begin to weave your experiences with the Word, and also with module material that has been steeping on the back burner of your mind. You will probably find that carrying your journal will allow you to jot down ideas that come to you at odd times throughout the day.

It seems we have been suggesting that journaling is a handwritten exercise. Some may be wondering about doing their work on a computer. Traditionally, there is a special bond between hand, pen, and paper. It is more personal, direct, and aesthetic. And it is flexible, portable, and available.

With regular use, your journal is the repository of your journey. As important as it is to make daily entries, it is equally important to review your work. Read over each week's record at the end of the week. Make a summary statement and note movements of the Holy Spirit or your own growth. Do a monthly review of your journal every 30 days. This might best be done on a half-day retreat where you can prayerfully focus on your thoughts in solitude and silence. As you do this, you will begin to see the accumulated value of the Word, your module work, and your experience in ministry all coming together in ways you had not considered possible. This is integration—weaving together faith development and learning. Integration moves information from your head to your heart so that ministry is a matter of being rather than doing.

Journaling will help you answer the central question of education: "Why do I do what I do when I do it?"

Journaling really is the linchpin in ministerial preparation. Your journal is the chronicle of your journey into spiritual maturity as well as content mastery. These volumes will hold the rich insights that will pull your education together. A journal is the tool for integration. May you treasure the journaling process!

Bibliography

Aland, Kurt, ed. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels.* Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1989.

Baily, Raymond. *Hermeneutics for Preaching: Approaches to Contemporary Interpretations of Scripture.* Nashville: Broadman, 1992.

Barton, John. *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study.* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984.

Booth, Wayne C. *A Rhetoric of Irony.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

Bray, Gerald. *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Interpretation and Obedience.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991.

Child, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: A Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Dunning, H. Ray. *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988.

Ewert, David. *From Ancient Tablets to Modern Translations.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.

Fee, Gordon, and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.

Ferguson, Duncan S. *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1986.

Ford, Leighton. *The Christian Persuader: The Urgency of Evangelism in Today's World.* Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1988.

Green, Joel B. *Hearing the New Testament.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Guthrie, Donald. *Pastoral Epistles: an Introduction and Commentary.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Hayes, John, and Carl Holladay. *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook.* Atlanta: John Knox, 1987.

Johnson, Elliot. *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.

Jones, Scott. *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture.* Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 1995.

Kaiser, Walter, and Moisés Silva. *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993. (Abbreviated as IBI.)

Lategan, Bernard C. "Hermeneutics." In *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* Vol. 3. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Marshall, I. Howard, ed. *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.

McKim, Donald K., ed. *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

Mulholland, Robert. *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture on Spiritual Formation*. Nashville: The Upper Room, 1985.

Osborne, Grant. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991.

Purkiser, W. T. Richard S. Taylor, and Willard H. Taylor. *God, Man, and Salvation.* Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1980.

Stuart, Douglas. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980.

Thiselton, Anthony. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Thompson, Richard, and Barry Callan, eds. *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals.* Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, forthcoming.

Throckmorton, Burton H., Jr., ed. *Gospel Parallels: A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels.* New York: Nelson, 1957.

Tiffany, Frederick C., and Sharon H. Ringe. *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Varughese, Alex. "Holiness and Pastoral Responsibility." In *Biblical Resources for Holiness Preaching*. Edited by H. Ray Dunning and Neil B. Wiseman. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1990, 337-50.

Vine, W. E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.* Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997.

White, Newport J. D. The *Expositor's Greek New Testament: The Epistle to Titus*. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974.

Wiley, H. Orton. *Christian Theology*, 3 Vols. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1941.

Resources for Biblical Interpretation

This information is available to the students as an appendix in the back of the Student Guide.

You may need to spend some time in a class session or extra session to help those students who do not know how to use these resources.

Resources for biblical hermeneutics fall into the following categories:

Textbooks on Hermeneutics

See the bibliography in this module. Some of these are written in an easy-to-read format with illustrations of interpretive principles. Perhaps the best introductory work written for an average reader is Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.* Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard's *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* is more in-depth in the analysis of various literary types. Bray's *Biblical Interpretation* provides a detailed history of interpretation from the earliest to the modern period. This book provides not only major developments in the history of biblical interpretation but also a summary description of key

individuals who have contributed to biblical scholarship over the last 2000 years.

Study Bible
A good study Bible is an excellent tool for biblical study. Good study Bibles have a concordance, a listing of other texts where related themes/stories/topics are located. Also these resources provide introductions to biblical books, outlines of books, maps, brief commentary or explanation of texts, historical notes, chronological tables, and short essays on various subjects related to Bible study, etc.

- *The New Oxford Annotated Bible,* based on the New Revised Standard Version or NRSV, is an excellent study Bible.
- Another useful resource is the *Zondervan Study Bible* based on the New International Version.

Commentaries
Commentaries on the Bible are an indispensable resource for biblical interpretation. Commentaries usually follow approaches. Some may be textually oriented, with detailed attention given to historical, grammatical, linguistic, structural, and other literary issues. Others may give more attention to theological issues and contemporary application. Students need to consult both types of commentaries to gain insight on biblical texts. The following is a list of some popular sets of commentaries:

Older sets, but still useful

- Calvin's Commentaries (Eerdmans)
- *Explanatory Notes on the Bible* by John Wesley
- Adam Clarke's Commentaries

Textual/exegetical sets

- *Word Biblical Commentary* (Word Books)
- *Hermeneia* (Fortress Press)
- *Anchor Bible Commentary* (Harper and Row)
- *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Tyndale)
- *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Tyndale)

Exegetical/theological sets

- *Baker's Exegetical Commentary on the NT* (Baker Books)
- *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City)
- *Continental Commentaries* (Fortress)
- *The Daily Study Bible* (John Knox)
- *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan)
- *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox)
- *The New Century Bible Commentary* (Eerdmans)

- *The New International Commentary on the OT* (Eerdmans)
- *The New International Commentary on the NT* (Eerdmans)
- *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Abingdon)
- *The Old Testament Library* series (Westminster)
- *Proclamation Commentaries* (Fortress)

Expositional

- *Barclay's Daily Study Bible*—NT Volumes contain good background information and exposition of the text

Application sets

- *The NIV Life Application Commentary* (Zondervan)

Bible Dictionaries

Bible dictionaries provide a wealth of information on biblical subjects. These include detailed surveys on biblical history, events, books, people, culture, archaeology, theological themes, and biblical background. The following are excellent resources for biblical study:

- *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols) by Harper
- *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (5 vols) by Abingdon
- *New International Dictionary of NT Theology* by Zondervan
- *Theological Dictionary of the NT* by Eerdmans
- *Theological Dictionary of the OT* by Eerdmans

Concordance

A good Bible concordance is also a useful tool for biblical interpretation. Concordances arrange biblical texts by topics or theological themes.

- Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* is the best available today.

Bible Atlases and Maps

Bible maps are an essential tool for one's understanding of the geographical setting of the

biblical texts. Abingdon, Harper, and Oxford maps are excellent resources.

Online Resources

There are numerous online resources of Bible study. Online resources may not contain the depth of careful research and scholarly work found in printed sources.

CDs

- *The Essential IVP Reference Collection.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001. The CD contains 13 IVP reference books.

Local Libraries

You might research these locations in advance and give the students the information on which libraries would be the most helpful.

[This page intentionally blank]

Lesson 1

Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:20	What Is Hermeneutics About?	Lecture/Discussion	Resources 1-1—1-4
1:00	Reading Scripture from a New Perspective	Small Groups	Resource 1-5
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Ferguson, Duncan S. *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986, 3-39.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993. (Abbreviated as IBI.), 3-20, 81-116.

Lategan, Bernard C. "Hermeneutics." In *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* Vol. 3. New York: Doubleday, 1992, 149-55.

Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991, 5-15.

Lesson Introduction

(20 minutes)

Accountability

Introduce yourself and find out a little about each of the students.

Make sure each student has a copy of the Student Guide for Interpreting Scripture.

Spend some time going through the Syllabus, noting the requirements, and schedule.

Read through the Series Foreword, Module Vision Statement, and Journaling Essay.

Point out the Appendix on page 162 of the Student Guide. These will be helpful tools as they work on assignments for this module.

Orientation

A class in hermeneutics should provide an important foundation of both understanding and practice of the interpretation of the Bible in the life of the church. This class will introduce you to the assumptions that lie beneath the interpretation of the Bible in the church. It will explore a variety of methods presently used by many trained interpreters of the Bible.

Special attention will be given to the way in which the literary genre of biblical literature directs the process of understanding and provides certain boundaries for interpretation. A student who masters the material of this module will be prepared to approach any biblical text with an appropriate blend of confidence and humility.

There would be confidence when the methods learned in this module are applied to the text. Those methods will open up meaning that will allow God to speak from His Scripture a message that is coherent with the original purpose of the author and with the whole of biblical revelation.

There would be humility that the method neither controls nor limits the power of the Holy Spirit to speak through the text. There would be confidence that every

exercise of exegesis may produce the joyful surprise of being addressed by God in unexpected ways. That combination of hermeneutical expertise and openness to the Holy Spirit can grant you the profound conviction that the Bible can speak in a meaningful way every time it is read, preached, or taught.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to

- define and describe key terms associated with biblical interpretation
- identify the need for and the goal of biblical interpretation
- describe the role of pre-understanding, faith, obedience, reason, and the Holy Spirit in the task of biblical interpretation

Lesson Body

Lecture: What Is Hermeneutics About?

(40 minutes)

Draw the students into the subject with these questions.

What are the steps or processes you accomplish almost automatically when listening to another person speak, which result in your "understanding" that person?

Have you ever misunderstood something another person said? What factors contributed to your misunderstanding? What could have prevented the misunderstanding?

What difficulties have you encountered in trying to communicate with persons of a different culture from yours? What could help overcome those difficulties?

What do these questions have to do with understanding the Bible? Why?

Vocabulary Study

Refer to Resource 1-1 in the Student Guide.

To clear the ground for communication and to establish a foundation for understanding, the same terms need to be understood. The definitions may vary from author to author, but these represent a fairly standard understanding of the terms.

Hermeneuein—to explain, interpret, or translate
Hermeneuo—I interpret
Hermeneia—interpretation, translation, explanation

Hermes—Greek messenger god

Diermeneusen—explained (Luke 24:27)

Hermeneia—interpretation (1 Corinthians 12:10)

Hermeneutics is usually defined as the science and art of interpretation or principles of interpretation. In biblical studies the term applies to biblical interpretation. It is important to understand hermeneutics as a *science.* That is to say, there are rules and methods of interpretation that can be applied to the same texts by different people, which will result in the same or almost the same results of interpretation.

On the other hand, it is also important to recognize that hermeneutics is an *art.* Different interpreters interpret and apply the rules and methods of interpretation with differing levels of creativity, insight, and purpose. This will lead to different nuances of interpretation and, in some instances, actually to different interpretations.

As a science hermeneutics can be studied and one's skills in interpretation can be improved. As an art hermeneutics can also be studied and one's skills improved, but as an art hermeneutics requires an individual to appropriate those basic skills and apply them with creativity and purpose that will vary from interpreter to interpreter.

It is important to recognize that most definitions of hermeneutics include two parts:

1. A set of procedures by which to pursue the meaning of the text for its author and/or original audience
2. A move from that "original" meaning to a contemporary application or contemporary significance

Part 1 is often called "exegesis." Part 2 is sometimes called hermeneutics—as distinct from exegesis—and sometimes simply called application. While it is confusing for the term "hermeneutics" to refer sometimes to both parts and sometimes only to Part 2, that confusion is part of the literature dealing with hermeneutics at this time in history.

Interpretation—The use of analytical methods for breaking down the parts of a biblical text to discover its meaning, and of synthetic methods of reconstructing the communication forms of that text to ascertain the meaning of the text for the purpose of contemporary application.

Exegesis—The science of ascertaining the (an) original meaning(s) of the biblical text—from *exegeomai,* "I lead out/I bring out." This involves the process of analysis according to various methodologies and syntheses. In this module "exegesis" will primarily be defined as a science. That is to say, "exegesis" will be understood in terms of the rules and methods developed through history for ascertaining the "original" meaning of a biblical text. To be sure, there is a certain art to the application of those rules and methods, but the focus in this module will be on the

mastery of those rules and methods rather than on the creative ways they can be applied.

In the evangelical setting, exegesis is carried out as an inductive study of the biblical text, by establishing priority to the text, and following certain steps in a certain order to consider all the relevant data, to ascertain the meaning of the text—inductive Bible study. Inductive Bible study aims to answer the following questions:

- What does the text say?—observation of the text
- What does the text mean?—interpretation of the text
- What does the text say to the modern reader?—application of the text and its meaning

Inductive Bible study must be based on sound hermeneutical principles.

Application—The development of a contemporary significance of a biblical text(s). There are a variety of contexts for application.

- Preaching
- Catechism—teaching
- Systematic theology
- Moral instruction

The specific techniques for application depend in part on the context in which the application is intended to function.

Meaning—In this module the word “meaning” will be used primarily to describe the “original” meaning; that is, the meaning intended by the author of the biblical text and understood by the “original” audience of that text. There is considerable debate among the theorists of hermeneutics as to how possible it is to determine “meaning” in this sense. However, for the past two centuries interpreters of Bible texts have sought to discover such an “original” meaning, and it is still the primary goal of “exegesis.”

In this sense the only way a biblical text can have more than one meaning is if the author intended or the “original” audience may have received more than one understanding of the author’s words. In this module the word “application” or the word “significance” will be used to describe the appropriation of the original meaning by later audiences.

Though the text may have only one meaning—or in some cases more than one meaning—it may have multiple applications or significances, some more and some less appropriate to the “meaning” of the text. Ideally, these applications or significances should be

related to the original meaning. For this reason the author of this module will attempt to avoid the expression "the contemporary meaning" of the text, but will speak of the contemporary application or contemporary significance of the text.

The rules by which one relates the application or significance of a biblical text to its original meaning vary from interpreter to interpreter and are also often designated with the word "hermeneutics" or simply "hermeneutic." Thus a "hermeneutic of suspicion" tends to be suspicious of the validity of the original meaning and develops applications/significances that are only loosely related to that original meaning. In fact, some who practice a "hermeneutic of suspicion" end up with their application of a biblical text saying almost the opposite of what the original meaning declares.

Exposition—The communication of a contemporary significance arising from an original meaning of a biblical text through preaching or teaching. Expository preaching is often described as declaring what the text meant to its original audience and how it applies to us.

Two Hermeneutical Positions in the Christian Church

Refer to Resource 1-2 in the Student Guide.

- Catholic position—revelation testified to in the Bible can only be understood in light of the tradition presented by the church. The authority to interpret biblical text is vested in the church, and the church's established traditions aid the process of interpretation.
- Protestant position—the doctrine of *sola scriptura*—Scripture has its own illuminating power. Each individual believer has the right and privilege to read and understand the Bible. The Holy Spirit aids the believer in the interpretation of the biblical text.

The Need for Hermeneutics

Reading the Bible is not the same as understanding the message being communicated through the biblical text. Biblical texts contain words that have particular meaning, and the meaning is often shaped by the context of communication. Proper interpretation of the Bible requires us to consider the following contexts of the biblical text:

Refer to Resource 1-3 in the Student Guide.

- **The context of time.** The Old Testament texts come to us from a period between 1000 BC and

400 BC. The New Testament texts belong to a period between AD 48 and 95. Modern readers need to take into account this significant gap in time between our time and the time of biblical events. It is also important to keep in mind that there is a gap in time between events and the writing of the biblical texts. For example, the events surrounding the life of Jesus were not fixed in writing until at least 30 years later. In other words, the time of the writings of the texts themselves does not necessarily reflect the time of the events related in those texts.

- **The context of language.** Biblical texts come to us in three ancient languages. The Old Testament is mostly in Hebrew, with some portions of the Book of Daniel in Aramaic. The New Testament is in Greek. These ancient languages have their own peculiar idioms and phrases, and words that convey meanings shaped by certain cultural or religious contexts.

- **The context of geography.** The land of Israel is the primary geographical setting of the Old Testament. Syria-Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome provide the geographical setting of the New Testament events and texts. Knowledge of the geographical context helps the reader understand the unique geographical features reflected in the text.

- **The context of culture.** Biblical texts were shaped by the biblical communities of faith, who belonged to cultural contexts quite different from that of the modern reader. The text reflects these cultural customs and characteristics of the ancient communities of faith.

The Goal of Hermeneutics

The goal of biblical hermeneutics is to set principles that will guide the modern reader of the Bible to a correct and proper hearing and understanding of God's scripture. This is essential for the application of that message to contemporary life. Biblical hermeneutics will save us from the pitfalls of "proof-texting" or distorting the message of the Bible by reading into the text a meaning not intended by the writer—eisegesis.

The Interpreter and the Role of Pre-understanding

Refer to Resource 1-4 in the Student Guide.

See Duncan S. Ferguson, Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction *(Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 6-22.*

We hear words spoken by others within the context of our experiences. We have our own personal experiences, cultural heritage, political ideas, religious convictions, worldview, and basic attitudes and dispositions. All of these factors influence our reading and hearing of the biblical text. Ferguson defines this ***pre-understanding*** as *a body of assumptions and attitudes which a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality or any aspect of it*.

Ferguson identifies four categories of pre-understanding:

- **Informational** pre-understanding is one's prior knowledge of information about the text.
- **Attitudinal** pre-understanding is one's basic dispositions such as prejudice, bias, predisposition, etc., which have a bearing on one's understanding of the text.
- **Ideological** pre-understanding refers to one's worldview, life-attitude, frame of reference, framework or particular perspectives that may have an impact on one's understanding of the text.
- **Methodological** pre-understanding is the approach or actual method one follows in the attempt to understand a given subject.

Christians approach the Bible with their own sets of pre-understanding. Some of these may be derived from Sunday School Bible stories, sermons we have heard, what others have told us about the Bible, or what have been popular perceptions about the Bible. How do we know our pre-understanding is an appropriate pre-understanding? If pre-understanding is going to play a role in the interpretation of the Bible, then we need to ask about the validity of our pre-understanding. Ferguson gives us the following four factors that determine an appropriate pre-understanding:

1. Correct information about the text. This means answers to questions such as who wrote the text, when, why, where, etc. We should aim to discover all we need to know about the text: variant readings, translational differences, details found in the text, historical, social, cultural, geographical, and religious context, the theological framework of the writer, etc.

2. Open and receptive attitude to the text to be interpreted. Though it is not always an easy task, we should attempt to read the text as if we are reading it for the first time. Previous understanding may influence us to read the text in a particular way. A fresh reading of the text may lead us to hear a fresh meaning of the text.

3. Flexible and adaptable ideological structure to treat the text objectively. We should rethink our ideological framework, and critique and reshape it to the extent that we achieve a certain sense of objectivity, so treatment of the text is not controlled by our biased and prejudicial views. Issues to consider: race relations, women in church and society, sanctity of life, war, pacifism, capital punishment.

4. Methodological approach suitable to the text. We should recognize the fact that correct interpretation rests on proper method of interpretation and strategies, broadened contextual considerations, and extra-textual data.

Proper method alone does not lead us to the correct understanding of the meaning of Scripture. Equally important are factors such as faith, guidance of the Holy Spirit, obedience to God, and reason.

The Role of Faith

Interpretation of the Bible in the Wesleyan tradition originates in the conviction that the Bible is the written revelation of God. The Bible is the record of divine revelation written down by those who were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21). Faith in the God who speaks to us through Scripture is essential to the task of biblical interpretation. Faith here is more than cognitive knowledge but rather trust in the God who reveals himself to us through the pages of the Bible.

The Role of Obedience

The interpreter of the Bible should be willing to submit to the authority of Scripture and shape his or her life according to the instructions of God's voice. The divine Scripture calls for appropriate response. The reader must be willing to respond to the challenges and instructions found in the Bible.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The interpreter must seek the illuminating, and enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit. John Wesley believed the same Spirit who enabled the writers to write down God's message is the Spirit who enables us to understand that message. We must humbly seek the help of the Holy Spirit to gain guidance, wisdom, and understanding.

The Role of Reason

Reason should play a key role in the task of biblical interpretation. Reason prompts us to ask the right questions, recognize viable meanings of the text, and test them for validity. Faith and reason work together in an appropriate interpretation of the text.

Small Groups: Reading Scripture from a New Perspective

(20 minutes)

Divide the class into 2 groups. If the class is large, divide them into 4 groups with each group working on only one of the exercises.

Refer to Resource 1-5 in the Student Guide.

Allow some time for the two groups to interact on their assigned perspective.

In your group follow the instructions for your group. Read and listen to selected texts from a certain perspective and imagine how that perspective would impact your understanding and interpretation of the text.

Work on both exercises.

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on several students to respond.

Name one key idea you gained from this lesson that will impact your ministry.

Look Ahead

Since this module focuses on the question of "How to Interpret the Bible," it is important to know how the Bible came to have its present form. In the next lesson, we will briefly review the history of the formation of the biblical books and the translation of the Bible from its original languages.

You will need to bring your Bible with you to each class session. It might be helpful for you to bring more than one translation.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

Read and reflect on Matthew 12:22-24. What was the pre-understanding of the Pharisees that prompted them to conclude Jesus cast out demons by the prince of demons? Write down some of your ideas before reading the following.

> Separation between the world of sin and the world of God was an important element of the Pharisaic thinking. Thus it was unthinkable for a Pharisee that a holy God would enter into the world of demons to rescue a helpless person and bring healing to that person. That world belongs to the demons. The person belongs to the demons. It is a sinful world; his suffering is the outcome of his sin. The prince of demons controls that world. Jesus must be an ally of that prince. He must have persuaded the prince of demons to let the demon out of this demoniac individual. A holy person would not have done such an unholy thing!

Write a 1- to 2-page paper on what was your pre-understanding and the pre-understanding of the Pharisees. How do the different perspectives change the thinking and conclusions?

Read and reflect on 2 Timothy 2:8-15. Write a 2-page paper discussing the following:

- Prior knowledge of the text—what previous "knowledge" do we bring into the study of this text?
- Basic attitude/predisposition—what is our basic attitude toward women and their place in the society?
- Ideological framework—what is our ideological thinking about women in ministry?
- Methodological approach—how do we "interpret" this text? Discuss some guidelines for reading and interpreting this text.

Study Article 4, "The Holy Scriptures" in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene.

Read Resource 1-6. Write 2-3 thoughts gained from the reading.

Write in your journal. Respond to the perspectives from the small-group activity.

[This page intentionally blank]

Lesson 2

Biblical Text, Canon, and Translations

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Bible Study	Small Groups	Homework
0:25	The Old Testament	Lecture	Resource 2-1 Resource 2-2
0:45	The New Testament	Lecture	Resources 2-3—2-5
1:10	Translations	Lecture	Resource 2-6 Resource 2-7 Several modern Bible translations
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Ewert, David. *From Ancient Tablets to Modern Translations.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983, 99-111, 125-45, 163-211.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 53-78.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

Call on several students to state what they learned from reading Resource 1-6.

Normally at this time you will return and collect homework. For this lesson the students will need their written homework for group time, so you will collect the papers after that activity.

You will need to evaluate the homework, giving feedback on the content and level of thought but a grade is not necessary, as grades are not the measure of successful completion for a module.

Module completion is based on attendance, completion of all work, the level of participation, and overall accomplishment of ability statements.

Orientation

A course on interpreting the Bible assumes students have basic knowledge of the formation of both the Old and the New Testament canon. Formation of the biblical canon has a long history. In the same manner, the translation of the Bible also has a long history. This lesson is designed to give you an overview of the history of the biblical canon and the history of the Bible translation.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- briefly describe the story of the formation of the OT text and the formation of the OT canon
- describe the formation of the NT text and the formation of the NT canon
- summarize the story of the Bible translation
- evaluate the two primary methods Bible translators utilize today when they attempt to translate the Bible into a modern language

Lesson Body

Small Groups: Bible Study

(15 minutes)

In pairs have the students read each other's homework papers.

Exchange your homework papers with your partner. Carefully read the papers. Note areas of concern or excellence. Challenge each other in what is said. Help each other by asking for clarity of thought and support for statements that are made.

Collect the homework papers at the end of this activity.

You may make notes on each other's papers.

Lecture: The Old Testament

(20 minutes)

Refer to Resource 2-1 in the Student Guide.

The Old Testament Text

The Old Testament text that we have in the Hebrew Bible is the end result of a long and complex process of development. We do not have specific knowledge of this history of the development of the Old Testament text. However, we are able to make some tentative conclusions based on evidences we find within the Old Testament.

It is difficult to determine when the activity of writing the Old Testament text began in ancient Israel. Those who take the biblical texts literally see phrases such as "Moses wrote" in the Pentateuch as actual writing done by Moses himself. This would place the writing activity to the 13th century BC. However, this view raises questions about the language and script Moses would have used, since Hebrew most likely was not developed as a literary medium until the 10th or 9th century.

Though one cannot dismiss the possibility of some parts of the Pentateuch in written form in some language form during the days of Moses, it is quite likely most of the books in the Pentateuch were fixed in written form at a much later time in Israel's history.

At some point in Israel's history, there existed written sources that later contributed to some portions of the Old Testament. We may consider "The Book of the Law" (Dt 31:24-26, 2 Kgs 22:8-10); "the Book of the Wars of the LORD" (Nu 21:14); "the Book of Jashar" (Josh 10:13); "the Records of the Kings of Israel" (2 Ch 33:18) as such sources.

Perhaps the best illustration of the story of the writing of a biblical book is found in Jeremiah 36. This chapter tells us the story of Jeremiah dictating his words to his scribe, Baruch. This scroll included oracles Jeremiah preached during the first 22 years of his ministry. However, when this scroll was read before King Jehoiakim, the king cut them into pieces and threw them into the fire and thus destroyed the scroll. Later Jeremiah asked Baruch to get another scroll to write, and the prophet dictated to him the same words again. Scholars have attempted to describe chapters 1-25 as the content of this scroll.

In the absence of precise data that give us clear understanding of the origin of the biblical books, we think it appropriate to view both oral traditions and written records existing side by side in the earliest history of the biblical text. It is likely that writing as an ongoing activity developed in Israel perhaps at the end of the 10th century or later. Most of the biblical books came to have their written form between 800 and 400 BC. It is also likely the period of the Babylonian exile—6th century BC—was a period of intense literary activity and perhaps the most critical period in the history of the Old Testament manuscript development.

None of the autographs—original handwritten copies of the biblical books—survived. We depend on the work of the scribes who were copyists of the biblical books for the Old Testament manuscripts. These scribes were skilled in their profession and were extremely diligent in their copying work. Nonetheless, errors were introduced into the biblical text, either by confusion of similar-sounding words, similar-looking consonants, or by the omission of one or more lines. Modern scholars who specialize in text criticism have been able to identify most of these textual errors and provide us with the likely reading of such texts.

We think copying of the Old Testament manuscripts was done in three primary locations in ancient times. These places—Palestine, Babylon, and Egypt—were centers of the Jewish population. Copying was usually done when an existing manuscript was worn out, due to its frequent handling in the synagogue. When a new manuscript was produced, the old and worn-out copy was placed in a storage area of the synagogue—known as *geniza*—and was later destroyed. A discovery at the end of the 19th century yielded numerous manuscripts and fragments from a *geniza* in Old Cairo, dated to the 6th century AD. Once the storage area was full, these manuscripts were removed and buried reverently and with elaborate ceremony.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947 in the area of Qumran located northwest of the Dead Sea, have given us numerous manuscripts and fragments of Old Testament books. These manuscripts belong to a period about 100 years before Christ. The Qumran discoveries thus give us the oldest existing manuscripts of the Old Testament. These scrolls also help us construct the history of the Old Testament manuscripts with some certainty.

At Qumran, scholars have identified a diverse group of manuscripts or manuscript types that differed from each other. Some of these manuscripts showed similarity to the Old Testament preserved in the Greek translation (Septuagint), and some to the Samaritan Pentateuch, and others to the present Hebrew Bible.

This leads us to conclude that at a later time, a particular manuscript family became the standard manuscript of the Old Testament for Judaism. Scholars speculate the Jewish authorities took action carefully to separate manuscripts they considered as "authoritative" from those that were "vulgar" or profane. This process was completed by the end of the first century AD, and resulted in the establishment of an accepted manuscript family as the "official" text of the Old Testament by the Jewish authorities. We think the present Old Testament reflects this standard manuscript of the Old Testament, recognized as authoritative by first-century Judaism.

Old Testament Manuscripts

Refer to Resource 2-2 in the Student Guide.

Manuscripts coming from Qumran show no vowels, no verse divisions, and no chapter divisions. This leads us to conclude the earliest manuscripts were "consonantal" texts, and these divisions and vowels were introduced at a later time.

The "standard" manuscript was copied and preserved by scribes during the Talmudic period (AD 200-500). During this period, scribes with diligence introduced word divisions and paragraph division to the consonantal text. This activity continued until the end of the fifth century, when a group of scholars known to us as Masoretes picked up the sacred task of continuing the copying the Old Testament manuscripts.

Babylon and Palestine were the leading centers of the Masoretic scribes. The name "Masoretes" reflects their contribution of marginal notes or *masora* to the Old Testament manuscripts. They introduced in the margin corrected readings of transcriptional errors—errors

introduced during the process of transmission—in the manuscript handed down to them by the previous generations.

The Masoretic scribes also added vowel points to the consonantal text to facilitate the reading of the scriptures. Later the Babylonian Masoretic school lost its influence. and various families of Masoretic scribes living in the area of Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee became the most influential and leading copyists of the Old Testament. Two families in particular—the families of Ben Asher and Ben Naphthali—became prominent in this effort.

Scholars believe the Ben Asher family copied a complete manuscript of the Old Testament with vowels and marginal notes by about AD 900. This manuscript is known as the Ben Asher manuscript. The Hebrew Bible is also know as the Masoretic Text—abbreviated as MT—which reflects centuries of scribal activity on the part of the Masoretes to preserve the Old Testament in Hebrew.

Some of the most significant manuscripts of the Old Testament include:

- Cairo Codex of the Prophets, dated to AD 895
- Aleppo Codex of the entire OT, dated to AD 930
- Leningrad Codex—a later copy of the Ben Asher manuscript dated to AD 1008—basis of Kittel's Biblia Hebraica, the most popular Hebrew Bible today
- Leningrad Codex of the Prophets, dated to AD 916
- Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets, dated to AD 1105

Chapter divisions were introduced in the Hebrew Bible in the 14th century. These divisions were based on the chapter divisions assigned to the Latin Bible—Vulgate—by Stephen Langdon (1150-1228).

Canonization of the Old Testament Books

How and when did the books of the Old Testament become part of the authoritative books of the Old Testament, or canon of the OT? We do not know of any clear attempts to give formal recognition to the books of the Old Testament during or before the Babylonian exile. However, we think "the Book of the Law"—some portions of the Torah/Five Books of Moses—was the most recognized authority for Israel during the pre-exilic and exilic period.

It is very likely the Book of the Law as we know it today—the Pentateuch as a whole—reached its final

form during the early part of the post-exilic period, most likely under the influence of Ezra the priest. Scholars today think by 400 BC the Torah/the Pentateuch became the accepted canon of Judaism.

Most likely the canonization of the Prophets continued, and by 200 BC this section also was added to the Hebrew Bible as part of the Jewish canon. The canonization of the remaining books—often called the Writings—took place gradually. Some books such as the Psalms were added without question. Some others, like the Book of Esther and Song of Songs, took a longer time before they received canonical status.

The reference in the Gospels to "the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 5:17) indicates these two sections constituted the undisputed canon of Judaism in the first century AD. Scholars believe the Pharasaic council met around AD 95 at Jamnia and officially endorsed the books listed under the Writings and thus closed the canon of the Old Testament.

Lecture: The New Testament

(25 minutes)

Refer to Resource 2-3 in the Student Guide.

In contrast to the story of the Old Testament text, we have better understanding of the story of the New Testament text. The various books of the New Testament reveal that Syria/Palestine, Greece, Asia Minor, and Rome were the most likely places where these books originated.

Various writers wrote their books with a particular theological goal, or to meet a specific need that existed in a particular area or a church within an area. We also have reason to conclude that the New Testament books belong to a period between AD 49-95. The Pauline letters constitute the earliest books in the New Testament. The Gospels and Acts may be placed in the 60s and 70s. The Revelation is traditionally placed in the last decade of the first century.

As in the case of the Old Testament text, there are no autographs of the New Testament books in existence. Most likely, copying of the books or letters of the New Testament was done in the Early Church to circulate these documents for their reading by various churches in an area. Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, Carthage, and Rome were the most likely centers where copying and preservation of the manuscripts took place.

The original writings were probably on papyrus, which was later replaced by parchments made of leather. We have some of the earlier manuscripts available on papyrus, but from the third century onward, parchment became the standard writing material. The New Testament books originally were in the form of scrolls, with writing placed in columns. Later when the codex—book—form was created in the second century, writing in columns continued on each leaf or page.

There are over 4500 complete or partial manuscripts of the New Testament available to us today. The New Testament manuscripts show two basic styles of writing. Some of the early manuscripts from the 3rd to 6th centuries are in formal letters, similar to capital letters. These manuscripts are called uncials. The cursive style of writing, which connects one letter to another, became the dominant method in the later period. Manuscripts in cursive style follow a smaller script known as "minuscule." Since minuscule manuscripts were easier and more economical to produce, we have thousands of manuscripts in the minuscule form. However, scholars regard uncials as the earliest and most reliable sources of the New Testament.

Refer to Resource 2-4 in the Student Guide.

Two papyri collections provide us with the oldest available manuscripts.

- The Bodmer collection from the last part of the second century AD
- The Chester Beatty collection from the early third century AD—portions of the New Testament books

Key uncials, all on leather parchments in codex form:

- Codex Sinaiticus—4th century, all 27 books
- Codex Vaticanus—4th century, missing the section after Hebrews 9:13
- Codex Alexandrinus—5th century, missing the Gospel of Matthew

During his search for biblical manuscripts at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai, Constantin von Tischendorf discovered Codex Sinaiticus in 1859. He copied it and it was first published in 1862. Today it is in the British Museum in London.

Codex Alexandrinus, also kept in the British Museum, was a gift from Cyril Lucar, patriarch of Constantinople, to King James I. It is believed Lucar, once patriarch of Alexandria, brought this manuscript to Constantinople from Alexandria. It was brought to England in 1627 after the death of King James.

Codex Vaticanus received its name from its association with the Vatican library. Though the manuscript has been known since 1475, it was first published in 1867 by Tischendorf.

The first printed edition of the New Testament in Greek was done by Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1516. He first published this edition with a Latin translation of the Greek text. Later he published four more editions (1519, 1522, 1527, 1535) of this New Testament, the fourth edition in three columns: Greek text, Latin Vulgate translation, and his own Latin translation.

Robert Stephanus, a printer and publisher, published four editions of the New Testament in Greek (1546, 1549, 1550, 1551).

Theodore Beza published nine editions of the Greek New Testament between 1565 and 1604.

The Elzevir brothers, two Dutch printers, published the New Testament with the claim that their edition provided the "received text"—*textus receptus*—to the readers.

All of these editions of the New Testament—Erasmus, Stephanus, Beza, Elzevir brothers—were based on a fourth-century manuscript, often called Lucianic, because of its association with Lucian of Antioch who died in AD 312. This text is also known as Byzantine, Antiochian, Syrian, Ecclesiastical, Koine, or Common text. This text tradition remained as the standard text of the New Testament in Greek until the end of the 19th century. The majority of the late manuscripts reflect this text tradition. Its authority was seldom challenged by Christians for over 400 years, since Erasmus first published it in 1516.

Following the publications of Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus in the mid-19th century, B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort published a critical edition of the Greek New Testament in 1881. They concluded that Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus contain the most reliable text of the New Testament, based on their study of thousands of manuscripts and New Testament quotations in the writings of the Early Fathers.

The Greek New Testament published by the United Bible societies in 1966 is based on the work of Westcott and Hort. This critical edition gives us an "eclectic" text based on the best witness of New Testament passages found in ancient manuscripts and

early Christian writings; an important source for modern English translations.

Canonization of the New Testament Books

Refer to Resource 2-5 in the Student Guide.

It seems there was no effort taken by the Church to declare a New Testament canon until AD 150. In the mid-second century, Marcion from Sinope in Asia Minor established a sect and claimed the God of the New Testament was not the God of the Old Testament. He rejected the authority of the Old Testament over Christians, since in his thinking, the OT was superseded by the NT. Moreover he claimed the Epistles of Paul are more reliable than the Gospels.

It is likely the earliest effort by the Church to establish a New Testament canon was prompted by heretical teachings like that of Marcion. A discovery by L. A. Muratori in 1740 gives evidence of a list of books that existed around AD 190. This list, known as the Muratorian Canon, contains all the 4 gospels, 13 letters of Paul, Jude, 1 and 2 John, and the Revelation.

By AD 250, the Church had an accepted list of books while it continued to debate about the status of others such as Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and the Revelation. The Church also had clearly rejected some others from being a part of the New Testament. Some of these are part of the New Testament Apocrypha.

The next stage in the canonization of the New Testament belongs to the mid–fourth century in a letter written by Bishop Athanasius, AD 367. He lists all 27 books in this letter. Formal adoption of the 27 books was made by the Council of Hippo in AD 393 and by the Council of Carthage in 397.

Canon and Biblical Interpretation

From the above survey of the history of the canonization of the Old Testament and New Testament, it is clear the process of canonization began in both Judaism and in the Christian church out of the necessity to establish a “standard” for the faith and conduct of the people of God. We have outlined the long and complex history of that process. The Old Testament canon in its final form is the outcome of over 500 years of this long and complex process.

What made the Jewish authorities choose some books and reject some others is not clearly known, though we have some knowledge of the criteria that determined the canonicity of the Old Testament books. However, one thing is certain. Jewish authorities did not include in the Old Testament canon books that contained materials that contradicted the teachings of Moses and the Prophets. In first-century Judaism, Jewish authorities were still determining the authenticity and authority of certain books. Finally, when the Old Testament canon was established toward the end of the first century, the rejected books ceased to have any authority over Jewish life and conduct.

The New Testament canon was also formed out of the necessity to establish a proper basis and standard for Christian faith and conduct in the midst of heresy and false teaching. It is the canon formally approved by the Church toward the end of the fourth-century that firmly established for the Church a religious authority for determining doctrine and practice for her people. Again, as in the case of the formation of the Old Testament canon, the Church recognized as "canon" only those books that contained the "standard" or rule of faith and conduct for her people.

Is canonicity important for proper biblical interpretation? The answer is an unequivocal "yes." What Judaism and the early Christian Church came to recognize as canon is a list of books that clearly carried the stamp of divine inspiration and authority as record of God's self-revelation. These two issues—inspiration and authority—ultimately are foundational to biblical interpretation.

Though the biblical canon remains "closed," it has an open-endedness in that the Bible continues to speak even today, hundreds of years after its official closing. The "closed canon" does not mean interpretation has to be limited to the cultural and religious context that brought the process of canonization to its formal conclusion. The Bible becomes the canon for the believing community when it is approached with the attitude that the word we encounter is certainly the divine word that speaks to us across the barriers of time, culture, and geography. It is the source through which one finds grace and salvation. It is the rule of faith and standard for conduct. Only through proper interpretation can one determine the meaning and significance of what the ancient communities of faith have understood and recognized as the authoritative scripture.

Lecture: Translations

(15 minutes)

Refer to Resource 2-6 in the Student Guide.

Ancient Versions

The history of Bible translations shows that as the biblical communities of faith began to spread out into other parts of their known world and became part of other social and linguistic surroundings, it became necessary to translate the Bible from their original languages into other languages. The Jewish dispersion into Babylon and Egypt and the growth of the Church throughout the Roman Empire provided the impetus for the earliest Bible translations.

Targums do not necessarily constitute a translation in the technical sense of that activity; rather, they are oral paraphrases and renderings of the Hebrew text, started in the synagogues for the benefit of the Aramaic-speaking Jews. The tradition of explaining the Hebrew text in Aramaic could be traced to the period of the Babylonian exile. Clearly this was a practice in the post-exilic period (see Neh 8:8). Jews began to put these paraphrases into writing before the time of Christ, and the written Targums were completed in the fifth/sixth century AD.

Septuagint is the first real attempt to translate the biblical text into another language. This work was most likely done for the benefit of the Greek-speaking Jews who lived in Egypt. A legendary letter, *The Letter of Aristeas,* describes the completion of the initial work by 70 scholars in 70 days; hence the name Septuagint (LXX or 70). The original work centered on the translation of the Torah, begun around 250 BC in Alexandria, Egypt.

The work continued for the next 200 years and translators included in this work not only the rest of the Old Testament books but also other Jewish writings. These extra books are now known as Apocrypha in the Protestant tradition. Clearly the Jewish tradition rejected these books from their canon. Septuagint was the Bible of the first-century Christians.

Though the Septuagint is a translation, it is apparent the translators did not follow a uniform method of translation. In some cases, we find literal, word-for-word translation. In other cases, we find paraphrases or even expansions. It is important to remember that New Testament writers often quoted the text of this translation. When we encounter such quotations in the

New Testament, we must consult the Old Testament to see if the quotation agrees with the Hebrew text in its content and meaning.

The Old Latin version, made around AD 180, was made for the Latin-speaking Christians in North Africa. This version was made from the Greek New Testament. It is believed other Latin versions existed in Italy around the same time. A number of the third-century writers quote from the Latin Old Testament and New Testament, which indicate the entire Bible was available in Latin during this period. The Old Latin versions of the Old Testament were translations of the Septuagint version.

Prior to his death, Pope Damascus commissioned Jerome, a brilliant scholar, to revise the existing Latin versions. He completed this work in AD 385. During his final years, Jerome moved from Rome to Bethlehem. There he produced a complete Latin Bible based on his revision of the Gospels, translation of other New Testament books, and translation of the Hebrew Bible. This Latin version became known as the Vulgate, meaning "common." The Vulgate was the Bible of the Church in the Middle Ages.

English Translations

The history of the Bible in English may be traced to several attempts made by various people to translate portions or sections of the Latin Bible into English beginning in the seventh century. We will note some of the well-known works.

- Caedmon's (670) rendering of some biblical texts into poems
- Bishop Aldhelm's (700) translation of the Book of Psalms
- the Venerable Bede's (735) translation of portions of the Bible
- King Alfred's (871-901) translation of some parts of Exodus and parts of the Book of Acts

The first systematic attempt to translate the Bible into English from the Latin Bible was made by John Wycliffe (1330-84). Wycliffe, an Oxford theologian, was deeply concerned with the lack of the Bible in the hands of the common people. He recognized the Bible in the English language, made available to the common people in the church, was the only way to bring an end to the corruption of papacy and the Roman church.

With the help of other scholars and helpers, Wycliffe published the first translation of the Bible in 1380. A

second version appeared in 1384, shortly after his death. Wycliffe and his associates were denounced by the church as heretics for promoting the Bible in the language of the common people. Nicholas of Hereford and John Purvey, who continued the task of translation work after Wycliffe's death, were put in prison.

In 1415, the Council of Constance condemned Wycliffe and his writings, and ordered his bones to be dug out and burned. Wycliffe's work, however, continued to influence others, and he is considered by the Protestant Christians as the pioneering spirit of the Reformation. He is often called "the Morning Star of the Reformation."

It was William Tyndale (1494-1536) who made the first attempt to translate the Bible from its original languages. His work was also the first printed Bible in the English language. Tyndale, also an Oxford and Cambridge scholar, was determined to eliminate the ignorance of Scripture from the laity, perpetuated by the clergy who were also biblically illiterate.

He sought permission from the bishop of London to translate the Bible, but received no support. With the help of a wealthy merchant, Tyndale undertook the task of translating the New Testament from Greek. Opposition to his work forced him to move his work to Hamburg in 1524, and later he moved to Worms where he published the first printed edition of the New Testament in 1526.

Tyndale's New Testament was smuggled into England, where the copies were burned by church authorities. In order to destroy all available copies, the bishop of England made arrangement through a merchant to buy all copies of this edition, and Tyndale was happy to sell them to raise money to publish more copies. He revised this edition in 1534, and scholars consider this edition as an important source of the King James Version of 1611. In 1536, Tyndale was found guilty of heresy and was burned at the stake.

Some other attempts since Tyndale first translated his New Testament from Greek include:

- Miles Coverdale—complete Bible in 1535
- Matthew's Bible by John Rogers in 1537
- The Great Bible in 1539 by Coverdale, the first authorized version commissioned by Sir Thomas Cromwell, secretary to King Henry VIII
- The Geneva Bible (1560) published in Geneva by those who escaped England during Mary's reign. This version became a popular Bible in England. It

was the Bible of Scotland, Shakespeare, Puritans, and the Pilgrim Fathers. It is also known as the Elizabethan Bible because of its popularity during the reign of Elizabeth.

The crowning attempt of the early history of Bible translations is the King James Version (1611). When King James ascended to the throne of England, he convened a conference in 1604 to hear the complaints of the Puritan party in the Church of England. This conference called for a translation of the whole Bible as closely as possible to the original languages for use in the Church of England.

The king appointed 50 translators to complete this task. This group used the Bishops' Bible as the basis for their translation and revision, and examined their work with the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible for accuracy. Translators consulted all existing translations in English, German, Latin, Spanish, and Italian. When the entire work was done, it was reviewed by a panel of 12 translators before it was sent for approval from the church authorities.

Two Theories of Translation

Refer to Resource 2-7 in the Student Guide.

Modern Bible translators are guided by one of two methods when they attempt to translate the Bible.

The **formal equivalence** method is a word-for-word, literal translation that preserves the original word order and structure as much as possible. In reality, it is impossible to produce an exactly literal translation of an original text from one language to another, since all translations contain an element of interpretation.

This theory attempts to find a corresponding word in another language that conveys the meaning intended by the writer. However, this is not an easy task. Often it is difficult to find an exact equivalent of the original text of the Bible in another language. Equivalent words do not convey the same idea in different languages. For example the idea conveyed by the English word "mercy" is far more elaborate and filled with theological nuances in the corresponding Hebrew word *hesed.* In the formal equivalent method, often one word will be consistently found as the translation, without consideration given to other words that may possibly convey the meaning more appropriately in different contexts. The formal equivalent method's focus on literal rendering often may lead to translation of idioms that are archaic or unintelligible to modern readers.

- *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) is the closest modern translation that follows this method.

The **Dynamic equivalence** method follows thought-for-thought or meaning-for-meaning translation, that requires interpretation of the text in a faithful manner to bring out the original meaning as accurately as possible in modern idioms and thought forms. The danger is that some translations that follow this method have taken the liberty to expand the meaning or give theological interpretations, and introduce idiomatic expressions that change the character of the text and the writer's thought.

- *The New Living Translation* (NLT, Tyndale Publishing Company, 1996) is an example of dynamic equivalence.

New International Version (NIV), and *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), utilize both "formal" and "dynamic" equivalence methods. Flexibility in the use of both of these methods makes these translations preferable to some that follow only one method of translation.

In addition to translations there also exist **Paraphrases** or free renderings of the text in English, which frequently use popular colloquialism and idioms to convey God's message.

- *The Living Bible*
- *The Message*

Have several different translations available for the students to read. Preferably KJV, NASB, NRSV, NIV, NLT and The Message.

Read Romans 8:28.

Give one translation to five different students.

Is one translation easier to understand?

Allow for response and discussion.

Is there a difference in how the verse could be interpreted? Who or what is doing the work in the different translations?

Read Matthew 5:21-22.

Which of the translations speaks more clearly to people of this generation?

Would you consider using a different translation for congregational reading and for in-depth Bible study?

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on different students.

Summarize the key points presented in this lesson.

Do you have any questions or comments concerning this lesson?

Look Ahead

Biblical interpretation has a long history. As biblical books began to appear in the ancient times, the process of interpreting the content of these books also started among the biblical communities of faith. In the next few lessons we will survey some of the major periods in the history of biblical interpretation, and various methods of interpretation practiced by these faith communities that came before us.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

You may want to assign passages for the students to work on or allow them to select 1 or 2 passages to work on.

Read and reflect on 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 1 Peter 1:10-12 from Resource 2-8. Write a report on how these translations are alike or different, and discuss if the differences are major or minor; major differences mean significant change in the meaning and theological understanding conveyed by the text.

Write in your journal. Look up the word “authority” in a dictionary. Try to identify three or four different ways in which authority figures actually have authority in your life. List these ways and identify in which of the ways the Bible functions authoritatively for you.

[This page intentionally blank]

Lesson 3

The History of Interpretation: Inner Biblical and Jewish Interpretation

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Inner Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament	Small Groups	Resource 3-1
0:40	Inner Biblical and Jewish Interpretation	Lecture	Resources 3-2—3-5
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Bray, Gerald. *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996, 47-61.

Kaiser, Walter C., and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 211-16.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 21-28.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

Call on 2-3 students to read one of his or her homework papers.

Return and collect homework.

Orientation

Biblical interpretation has a long history. This history spans from the time in which the biblical books were composed to the modern period. Our attempt to establish a method of biblical interpretation must take into account this long history of biblical interpretation. In our review of the history of biblical interpretation, we will encounter various methods of reading and interpreting the Bible practiced by the faith communities that preceded our time. We will also come to recognize the complexity and difficulty associated with the task of biblical interpretation. This lesson is a brief survey of the interpretive processes we notice within the Bible itself and in early Jewish history.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- describe the practice of biblical interpretation found within the Bible itself
- trace the various stages in the history of biblical interpretation in early Judaism
- identify the various methods of biblical interpretation practiced by members of the Qumran community as well as Rabbinic Judaism

Lesson Body

Small Groups: Inner Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament

(30 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of 3 students each.

Refer to Resource 3-1 in the Student Guide.

You may want to assign each group a portion of the references.

Allow time for each group to report to the class.

Lecture: Inner Biblical and Jewish Interpretation

(45 minutes)

The canon of the Old Testament shows evidence of later books and writers interpreting previous writings. Deuteronomistic history—Joshua through 2 Kings—is a theological interpretation of Israel's history based on the theology of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy. The frequently found phrase in Joshua through 2 Kings—"did what was evil in the sight of the Lord"—recalls the warning found in Deuteronomy concerning the dangers of apostasy in the Promised Land.

The Chronicler's history found in 1 and 2 Chronicles draws heavily upon a number of previous Old Testament books, such as Genesis, the two books of Samuel, and the two books of Kings. The author(s) of Chronicles attempts to show that during the Davidic-Solomonic period, all the necessary institutions of Israel—monarchy, the Temple, the Levites, the rituals—were firmly established for Israel and that these institutions are central to the future of Judaism. It is clear that the theological interpretation of Israel's past history by the Chronicler was aimed to provide hope for Judaism's future as a people chosen by God with a particular destiny in the world.

An actual practice of inner biblical interpretation is illustrated in Nehemiah 8:1-8. According to this text, Ezra read from the Book of the Law before the assembly of the post-exilic Jews. A number of his assistants, both laity and the Levites, also read from the Law and gave the people the interpretation in order

to give the people the sense of what they were hearing. This was done either to explain the Law to the common people or to help the Aramaic-speaking Jews to understand the Law being read in Hebrew.

Let's look at some illustrations of possible inner biblical interpretations where a later tradition interprets or explains a previous text:

- Compare the legal rights of Hebrew slaves in Exodus 21:2-6 with Deuteronomy 12-17. The Law in Deuteronomy significantly expands the Covenant Code in Exodus and includes provisions not covered by the Covenant Code.
- Compare Deuteronomy 23:1-8 with Isaiah 56:3-8.

Inner biblical interpretation is much more prominent in the New Testament, where New Testament writers often interpret the Old Testament scriptures. Compare the numerous examples in the Gospels, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew, where the Gospel writer interprets prophetic passages to show their relationship to New Testament events. The New Testament writers frequently interpret the Old Testament messianic texts to show their fulfillment in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. One may indeed look at all the Old Testament references and allusions to the Old Testament texts by New Testament writers as an attempt to explain or interpret the Old Testament in light of the experience of the Christian community.

See Paul's interpretation of the traditions of Adam, Abraham, Exodus, etc. in Romans and Corinthians.

See interpretation of the Old Testament priestly and sacrificial system in the letter to the Hebrews.

Jewish Methods of Interpreting the Scriptures

Targums

Refer to Resource 3-2 in the Student Guide.

Translation was the earliest method of biblical interpretation. In the post-exilic period, free and extemporaneous oral renderings of Hebrew scriptures were given in Aramaic in the synagogues, which included not only translation but also interpretation of the scriptures. This activity began in the fifth century BC and continued until the fourth century AD. The oral interpretations were eventually written down in the early part of the Christian era, in the second through the fourth century AD.

Two significant works:

- Targum of Onkelos—Torah
- Targum of Jonathan—Prophets

The Jewish rabbis continue to depend on the Targums for their understanding of the Old Testament.

Qumran Community, the Essenes: 150 BC-AD 70

The Essenes were a Jewish monastic community that settled down at Qumran on the northwest part of the Dead Sea area. The community was characterized by its intense, messianic and eschatological/apocalyptic expectations, which included an imminent war between the Children of Light (the members of the community) and the Children of Darkness (forces opposed to God).

The Essenes saw themselves as the new Israel, the new covenant community, the truly faithful in Israel as opposed to the apostate Jews of Jerusalem. They attempted to apply the biblical prophecies directly to their existence and saw themselves living in the end time. The Qumran scrolls contain a large number of copies of Old Testament books and commentaries. The community focused its attention on the prophetic teachings and their application to the community's existence. The commentaries show that the Essenes practiced a particular method of interpretation known as ***pesher;*** *pashar* means to interpret in Aramaic.

Three techniques of the *pesher* employed by the Essenes:

- Introduce textual emendation or modification of the text to create a meaning applicable to the particular, historical context of the Qumran community.
- Contemporary application of Old Testament prophecy: the Essenes attempted to see fulfillment of the prophetic word in their own day or in the immediate future
- Atomization of the text—separating the text into phrases and applying meaning to each phrase regardless of the context. This was done also by contemporary Jewish rabbis.

See examples of pesher method in William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Introduction to Biblical Interpretation *(Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 27-28*.

Examples of the Pesher method:

- Habakkuk 1:13—changes "you" in singular referring to God to "you" in plural referring to another religious group of that period, the house of Absalom.
- Habakkuk 1:4—"the righteous" interpreted as the teacher of righteousness; "wicked"—the wicked priest who persecuted the Teacher of righteousness; Babylonian army—or Kittim—the Romans.
- Habakkuk 2:4—"Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him is puffed up/swollen;" the pesher is "they will pile up for themselves a double requital

See atomization examples in ibid., 25.

for their sins" by giving the word "puffed up" the idea of double punishment.

Rabbinic Interpretation-Pharisaic Tradition

Refer to Resource 3-3 in the Student Guide.

In the first five centuries of the common era we find among Jewish scholars an ardent attempt to interpret scriptures or to interpret the interpretations, or interpreting the interpretations of the interpretations.

The period of the rabbinic interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures is usually divided into the following two segments: **Tannaim** and **Amoraim.**

1. Tannaim—meaning "Teachers"—150 BC to AD 200

- The period of Tannaim began shortly after the Maccabean revolt (164 BC)
- Two rival schools of thought influenced this period
  - a conservative group led by Shammai
  - the more liberal group led by Hillel
  - both of these scholars were active from 20 BC to AD 15

Hillel's school influenced much of the later Jewish exegesis. Some scholars speculate that Nazareth where Jesus grew up was dominated by the School of Shammai, whereas Capernaum, the center of His Galilean ministry, was influenced by the School of Hillel. Tannaim were the interpreters or scholars who composed the **Mishnah**, the written work of the oral teachings of leading rabbis of early Judaism. The Mishnah which contains the Jewish religious and legal system, is organized under six topics:

- seeds/*zeraim*
- festivals/*moed*
- women/*nashim*
- injuries/*nezikim*
- holy things/*kodashim*
- clean things/*toharot*

Under the topic "injuries" is "the sayings of the Fathers," *pirke Abbot*. These six topics are then grouped into 63 tractates (AD 200).

2. Amoraim

The period of the Amoraim began around AD 200 and lasted until AD 500. Rabbis of this period were interpreters of the interpretations of Tannaim. Their comments on the Mishnah are known as ***Gemara*** or commentary.

Toward the end of the Amoraic period, rabbis produced the ***Talmud (****Talmudim* plural), commentary on the Mishnah in Palestine and Babylon (AD 450-550). The Palestinian Talmud was prepared by Jewish scholars of the rabbinical school in Tiberius. It is not complete and thus shorter than the Babylonian Talmud.

Talmudim cite other rabbis' statements and scriptures to support the teachings of the Mishnah. Talmud cites the Mishnah paragraph by paragraph and then interpretations of the Mishnah by later scholars to explain the meaning given by earlier scholars.

Another type of material found in the Jewish interpretation is ***Midrash*** or ***Midrashim,*** running commentaries on the biblical text. Midrashim are from the Amoraic period. The oldest Midrashim were on the books of the Pentateuch. Midrashim were eventually incorporated into the Talmudim.

The Jewish rabbinic materials contain two types of content:

- Those that covered matters of behavior and conduct or principles and regulations for human conduct derived from Old Testament legal materials. This type of content is called ***halakah***—"rule to go by."
- Those that contained scriptural texts to edify the reader, or devotional in type is called ***haggadah***—"telling." The goal of haggadah is to inspire religious devotion.

While *halakah* informs the "duty" required by the law, *haggadah* aims to inspire the believer to obedient performance of the law. This is done by means of story, parables, legends, sermons, proverbs, and wise sayings. We find halakah and haggadah in both the Mishnah and the Midrashim.

Characteristics of Rabbinic Jewish Interpretation

Refer to Resource 3-4 in the Student Guide.

See IBI, 24-25 for illustrations.

The rabbinic exegesis shows the rabbis maintained the assumption that the Bible as God's message should not be limited to the rules of normal human speech. Though some rabbis took the text at its face value, many held the view that the biblical text has a large number of meanings. Interpreters only bring out pieces of meaning when they interpret the text. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard list the following four characteristic features of rabbinic exegesis:

- Dependence on the previous, interpretive tradition established by leading rabbis.
- Literal meaning of the text.
- The practice of *midrash.* In its simplest form, midrash is an attempt to supplement one biblical text with another text, to extract additional meaning from the text. Uncovering the deeper meaning hidden in the text was a primary goal of midrash. Midrash was often carried out by the use of analogous words, phrases, or verses from biblical cross-references to illumine the text that is the subject of one's study. This method often paid little attention to the context in which the text was found.

The goal of midrash was to explain the meaning of the text, to search for its significance, to deduce from it new laws and principles, and to establish religious doctrines and practices. **Hillel** established seven exegetical rules—*middot*—as guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture. They are:

Refer to Resource 3-5 in the Student Guide.

These seven rules of Hillel and the illustrations are taken from Walter Kaiser and Moisés Silva, An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning *(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 213-14.*

1. *Inference from the lighter meaning to the heavier meaning* or what applies in less important cases will apply in more important ones as well. For example, since Sabbath in the Jewish tradition was more sacred than other holy days in the religious calendar, the restrictions placed on other, less significant holy days applied to the Sabbath day to an even greater degree.

2. *Analogy of expressions* or explain ambiguous words by consulting the meaning of similar words/phrases used elsewhere. Leviticus 16:29 refers to "afflict souls," which rabbis interpreted to mean "to abstain from food." This meaning was adopted since in Deuteronomy 8:3 the same Hebrew word means "hunger."

3. *Application by analogy with one provision* or the extension from specific to the general. This rule claimed that repetition of a phrase means ideas associated with it are applicable in all contexts. The rule made the provision for a general principle on the basis of teaching contained in another scripture text. See Deuteronomy 19:4-5. The provision stated in this verse could be applied to any accidental death resulting from two men working together in a public place.

4. *Application by analogy with two provisions* or establishing a principle by relating two texts together and then applying that principle to other

texts. See Exodus 21:26-27, which allows a slave who had his “eye” or “tooth” destroyed to go free; This provision, by analogy, could be applied to all other parts of the body.

5. *Inference from a general principle to a specific case.* See Exodus 22:9, the rule about paying double restitution. This law applied to any borrowed thing that is lost.

6. *Explanation from another passage* or difficulty in one passage may be resolved by comparing it with another similar passage. What about killing the Passover lamb on the Sabbath day, if the Passover fell on the Sabbath? Would this be violating the Sabbath law? This question was resolved by the interpretation of Numbers 28:10, which refers to “daily” sacrifices. “Daily” here was taken to mean every day of the week including the Sabbath. So, even if the Passover (14th of Nisan) came on the Sabbath day, the Passover lamb was to be slain. The question about killing the Passover lamb on the Sabbath was thus settled by this rule.

7. *Application from self-evident inferences from the text* or establishing meaning by the context. See Exodus 16:29, which places restriction on going out from one’s house on the seventh day. Rule 7 shows that this law applied only to the situation in the wilderness in the context of gathering manna, and not to other times.

These rules were later expanded by other rabbis, and made the interpretation of the text a more complex process. The application of these rules resulted in an atomistic approach to exegesis, by breaking the text into phrases, and interpreting each phrase without regard for its context. Numerical values to the letters of the alphabet, dividing words into two or more words, and reconfiguration of letters to create new words and sentences became part of the complex process of interpretation in the later rabbinic period.

See IBI, 25 for illustration.

Another important characteristic of the rabbinic interpretation is expanding the narratives to provide the presumably missing links in the story, or rabbinic traditions created to complete the story or to explain various aspects of the story. Scholars call this practice *creative historiography.* For example, the rabbis created the story of a conversation between Isaac and Ishmael to explain “after these things” in Genesis 22:1. According to this story, Isaac made the bold claim that he was willing to give up all of his organs to God, in

response to Ishmael's claim of suffering the pain of circumcision at the age of 13. Accordingly, it was after this conversation that God tested Abraham.

In the medieval period, Rabbi Solomon son of Isaac (1040-1105)—popularly known as Rashi—produced a commentary on the entire Hebrew Bible. Rashi reworked older rabbinic interpretations and attempted to give the text its meaning in the broader context. Rashi's commentary has significantly influenced the Jewish understanding of the Hebrew Bible.

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on students.

Allow for response.

Summarize the key points of this lesson.

Do you have any questions or comments concerning this lesson?

Look Ahead

In the next lesson, we will look at the method of interpreting the Bible practiced by Jesus and the various writers of the Bible. We will see how the early Christians on the one hand borrowed some elements of the interpretive method of Rabbinic Judaism, but on the other hand, introduced a new interpretive method, centered on their understanding of the person and work of Jesus, into their reading of the Bible.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

Complete Resource 3-6, 2 pages.

Write in your journal. List as many contexts as possible in which you are aware of the Bible being used in Christian worship and devotion. Try to describe the way in which the Bible functions in those contexts.

[This page intentionally blank]

Lesson 4

The History of Interpretation: Early Christian Period

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:15	Early Christian Period	Lecture/Discussion	Resources 4-1—4-7
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Bray, Gerald. *Biblical Interpretation*: *Past & Present.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996, 61-76.

Kaiser, Walter, and Moisés Silva. *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 216-18.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993. (Abbreviated as IBI.), 28-31.

Lesson Introduction

(15 minutes)

Accountability

Go through Resource 3-6 together as a class, having the students give the answers. If there is disagreement allow for discussion.

Return and collect homework.

Orientation

In this lesson we continue the survey of the history of biblical interpretation. Here we will deal with the methods of interpretation Jesus and the New Testament writers used as they interpreted the Old Testament. We will observe here that though the New Testament writers interpreted the Old Testament in the light of their understanding of the person and work of Jesus the Messiah, they often resorted to the contemporary methods of Jewish biblical interpretation.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- describe Jesus' use of the Old Testament scriptures
- evaluate the basic theological assumptions that guided the New Testament writers' interpretation of the Old Testament scriptures
- identify the methods of biblical interpretation practiced by the New Testament writers and early Christians

Lesson Body

Lecture / Discussion: Early Christian Period

(70 minutes)

Jesus and the Apostles: New Testament Writers and Their Method of Interpretation (AD 30-100)

See Kaiser and Silva, 216, for statistics of the occurrences of the Old Testament texts in the New Testament.

It is clear the interpretation of the Old Testament was an ongoing activity in the Early Church. The Old Testament in the Greek language—Septuagint—was the Bible of the early Christians. The early Christian proclamation of the story of Jesus often used the Old Testament to support the claim that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophetic expectation concerning the coming of the Messiah. On various occasions, New Testament writers make numerous, direct quotations, offer paraphrases, and allusions to the Old Testament.

Jesus' Use of the Old Testament

The proper starting point of our investigation is the use of the Old Testament by Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus' ministry took place during the time when the hermeneutical rules established by Hillel had considerable influence upon Jewish interpretation. This was also a period when *pesher* and *midrash* were popular methods of interpreting the Scriptures.

Have the students look at the scriptures.

However, it is apparent Jesus' use of the Old Testament was guided by His own understanding of His authority over the Law and the Prophets—the Jewish canon during the days of Jesus. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire" (Mt 5:21-22).

In these passages, Jesus sets himself on the one hand as the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures, and yet on the other hand, as the new lawgiver whose authority supercedes the authority of Moses.

Bray identifies the following instances as examples of Jesus' use of Hillel's rule one—the lesser rule/principle applies to a greater principle—when dealing with the Pharisees.

- John 7:23. He defended His act of healing on the Sabbath by citing Moses' permission to do circumcision on the Sabbath.
- John 10:34-36 where He interprets Psalm 82:6 and defends calling himself the Son of God.

Gerald Bray, Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present *(Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 62.*

Bray also illustrates the use of *pesher* in the following texts:

- Luke 4:16-21 seems to reflect the *pesher* method, which shows Jesus' understanding of himself as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
- See also His use of the self-designation, "the Son of Man," "the Servant of the Lord," and the "Day of the Lord"—all are terms that have apocalyptic connotations, and thus reflect the *pesher* method.

Ibid., 63.

Other texts: In Matthew 11:10 Jesus alludes to Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 to establish John the Baptist as the "messenger" who prepares the way before the Messiah. In Matthew 13:13-15, Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 and identifies His audience as the people about whom the prophet is speaking. In Matthew 15:8-9, Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 and relates that prophetic word to the Pharisees and scribes whom He calls hypocrites.

Refer to Resource 4-1 in the Student Guide.

Have the students look at these scriptures and evaluate how Jesus is using the Old Testament scriptures. You may want to have them work in groups of 2-3 and assign each group a portion of the scriptures.

Also compare Mt 4:4 with Dt 8:3; Mt 4:7 with Dt 6:16; Mt 4:10 with Dt 6:13; Mt 21:13 with Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11; Mt 21:16 with Ps 8:2; Mt 21:42 with Ps 118:22-23; Mt 22:43-44 with Ps 110:1; Mt 26:31 with Zech 13:7; Mt 26:64 with Dan 7:13 and Ps 110:1; Mk 2:25-28 with 1 Sam 1:1-6; Lk 22:37 with Isa 53:12; Jn 6:45 with Isa 54:13 and Jer 31:34; Jn 13:18 with Ps 41:9.

In John 16:12 Jesus seems to be implying the disciples will have a better understanding of the divine word and the full implications of His teaching under the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles and the New Testament Writers

The story of Jesus interpreting the Old Testament to the disciples traveling on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:27, 44-46) shows that Jesus himself directed His disciples to interpret the Old Testament on the basis of His earthly life and ministry.

Basic Theological Assumptions of the New Testament Writers

Refer to Resource 4-2 in the Student Guide.

The Old Testament citations in the New Testament make clear that the early Christian writers of the New Testament maintained some basic presuppositions, which guided them in their approach to the Old Testament. Some of these are:

- Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. Thus Christological reading of the Old Testament is a characteristic found in the New Testament writings.
- Salvation from God has come through the coming of Jesus and the preaching of the gospel.
- Jesus' unique identity as the Son of God
- The conviction that the end time was near, and the intense expectation of the imminent second coming of Christ.
- Christ is still present with His people dwelling in their hearts by His Holy Spirit.
- Interpretation was based on the Septuagint reading of the Old Testament Scriptures—as in most cases—or the memory of the Hebrew text.

Popular Early Christian Methods of Interpretation (NT Writings)

1. Typology

Refer to Resource 4-3 in the Student Guide.

The early Christians saw in the life and work of Christ a recurring of some basic events that happened in the history of Israel. Therefore they looked for correspondence between the Old Testament and New Testament events, persons, and ideas. This attempt to show historical correspondences in the history of God's redemptive activity is called **typology.** A more popular definition of typology is that certain Old Testament events foreshadowed New Testament events as divinely intended pre-figurations.

Typology is best seen in the Gospel of Matthew, Gospel of John, and the Letter to the Hebrews. Examples:

Have the students look up the scriptures.

- The exodus prefiguring the infant Jesus' return from Egypt (Mt 2:14 and Hos 11:1)
- The death of the Israelite children during the Babylonian invasion prefiguring the murder of the Jewish infants by Herod the Great (Mt 2:17-18 and Jer 31:15)
- The bronze serpent prefiguring the crucified Jesus (Jn 3:14)
- Manna in the wilderness prefiguring Christ, the bread from heaven (Jn 6:27-33)

- Israel's passage through the Red Sea and eating manna prefiguring Christian baptism and eucharist (1 Cor 10:1-4)
- Moses and his ministry prefiguring the ministry of Jesus (Heb 3:1-6)

There is also extensive typology in Heb 8:1-10 where the writer describes the sacrificial worship as a foreshadow of the priestly work Jesus fulfilled through His death.

Paul's contrast of Adam and Christ in Rom 5:12-21 is another example.

2. Literal interpretation

Refer to Resource 4-4 in the Student Guide.

Have students look up each of the scriptures and locate their Old Testament references.

In several places in the New Testament, the literal meaning of the Old Testament is applied to New Testament context and the life of the Church. See the following texts that cite the Old Testament:

- Mt 4:4
- Mt 9:13
- Mt 12:8
- Stephen's recital of history in Acts 7
- Rom 4:22-25
- Rom 9:7-9
- 1 Cor 6:16
- 2 Cor 13:1

3. Midrash

Refer to Resource 4-5 in the Student Guide.

Midrash is the traditional Jewish interpretation in which one text is supported/supplemented by other texts to explain a further meaning.

Have the students look up each of the scriptures.

- Acts 2:24-25, 34 connected with Ps 16:8-10 and 110:1 to support the resurrection of Jesus on the basis that both passages contain the phrase "at my right hand."
- Acts 2:24-25
- Acts 2:34-35
- Ps 16:8-10
- Ps 110:1
- Paul illustrates *midrash* in a number of places in Romans. In Rom 3:10-18, we find a collection of Old Testament verses taken from Psalms, Proverbs, and Isaiah; compare 3:10-12 with Ps 14:1-3; 3:13 with Ps 5:9 and 140:3; 3:14 with Ps 10:7; 3:15-17 with Pro 1:16; Isa 59:7-8; 3:18 with Ps 36:1.
- Another practice of *midrash* is found in 1 Cor 10:1-4; Paul reflects or borrows from the rabbinic tradition of a "rock" the Israelites rolled along during their wilderness, a movable well.

Bray, Biblical Interpretation*, 66.*

4. Hillel's Middot

Refer to Resource 4-6 in the Student Guide.

Have the students look up each of the scriptures.

Bray cites the following as examples of Paul's use of Hillel's Middot in his letters:

- Rule 1—Rom 5:15-21; 11:12 and 2 Cor 3:7-18
- Rule 2—Rom 4:1-12
- Rule 5—Rom 13:8-10
- Rule 6—Gal 3:8ff joining Gen 12:3 and 22:18
- Rule 7— Rom 4:10; Gal 3:17

5. Pesher

This is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in the person of Jesus. See the numerous examples of this in the Gospels where the Gospel writers frequently quote from the prophets and cite their fulfillment in something Jesus said or did.

This method is most prominent in Matthew and John:

- See Matthew and Luke's birth narratives
- Jn 2:17 (Ps 69:9)
- Jn 12:15 (Zech 9:9)
- Jn 12:38 (Is 53:1)
- Jn 12:40 (Is 6:9)
- Jn 19:24 (Ps 22:18)
- Jn 19:36 (Ps 34:20)
- Jn 19:37 (Zech 12:10)

This method is also prominent in 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude.

6. Allegorical method

Refer to Resource 4-7 in the Student Guide.

Allegorical method assumes the text has two levels of meaning: meaning at the plain, literal level, and a hidden meaning or meaning at the spiritual level. Allegorical method was influenced by the philosophical thought of Plato, who claimed reality lay behind what was visible and plain. This interpretive principle was adopted by the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria (20 BC-AD 54). This method follows the view that the Bible passage has a literal meaning and an allegorical/ symbolic/spiritual meaning. The true meaning is to be found in the allegorical/symbolic/ spiritual meaning of the text. We find some use of this method in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul:

- Gal 4:22-26
- 1 Cor 9:9-12

Have the students look up the scriptures.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The methods of interpretation presented in this lesson may raise the question, "Are these methods valid

today?" Can we read the Old Testament in the same way Jesus and the apostles did? Or, can we read the New Testament using the same principles?

In order to answer this question, we must consider another crucial question. What was the theological climate that served as the context for the interpretation of the Old Testament by Jesus and His disciples? Is it the same today? Obviously, the answer is "no." Their method of biblical interpretation was guided by the theological context of the first century.

The crucial theological context was the messianic expectation of Judaism and its hope in the fulfillment of the coming of a Davidic messiah to restore the kingdom of David. What we find in the New Testament is an attempt on the part of the New Testament writers to give evidence to their audience that this hope was indeed fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. They do so by resorting to the commonly accepted method of biblical interpretation in first-century Judaism. Had they read the Old Testament scriptures by utilizing methods foreign to Judaism, their audience would have rejected the Christian claim.

The context is different today. Whereas the New Testament writers are relating a contemporary event—the story of Jesus—to a contemporary audience in their own language and culture, we are reading the Bible as God's spoken word to humanity as a whole. The burden to prove Jesus as the Jewish Messiah is not the primary theological concern today. Rather, the concern is to show through the Scriptures God's redemptive plan for all humanity and the history of His redemptive actions that culminated in the coming of Jesus into the world, and the Church's task of proclaiming His second coming.

We have the task of interpreting the message of Jesus and His apostles to a world far removed from the first-century world. We cannot use their interpretive methods because of the distance of time, culture, context, and language.

See Lesson 1 on the need for hermeneutics.

Had these conditions been the same for us, perhaps we could have used these methods today. Nonetheless, these methods give us some crucial understanding concerning the theological premises of the Early Church and their concept of the integral relationship of the Old Testament to the life events of Jesus. This calls us to pay attention to the statements that directly allude to the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament. This method also shows us the principle

that the New Testament text illuminates, explains, and clarifies for us the Old Testament scriptures.

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on the students

Summarize the key points of this lesson.

Look Ahead

From this early Christian period of biblical interpretation, we will now move to the patristic period in the history of biblical interpretation.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

Complete Resource 4-8. Complete both pages.

Write in your journal. Formational Reading: Leviticus 19:1-10. Read your passage slowly and reflectively. Ask God to speak to you from Scripture. As He does, absorb what He says to you. Wait, reflect, pray. Do not feel compelled to “finish” the whole passage you were given. Do not feel compelled “not to finish” it either. ☺ Write down what you can capture of what God says to you through Scripture.

Lesson 5

The History of Interpretation: Patristic and Medieval Period

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:20	The Patristic Period	Lecture/Discussion	Resources 5-1—5-4
0:50	The Middle Ages	Lecture	Resource 5-5 Resource 5-6
1:10	Application	Small Groups	Resource 5-7
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Kaiser, Walter, and Moisés Silva. *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 218-24.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 31-39.

Lesson Introduction

(20 minutes)

Accountability

In pairs have the students look at each other's homework.

Return and collect homework.

Orientation

This lesson focuses briefly on the history of biblical interpretation from AD 100 to AD 1500. Significant developments took place in the history of biblical interpretation during this period. We will look at some of the key figures in the Christian tradition who have contributed in various ways to establish principles and guidelines for biblical interpretation during this period. In the early part of this period, Christian writers and commentators of the Bible were still under the influence of the Jewish method of interpretation. However, in the second and the third century, the authority of the tradition or the doctrines established by the Church set a new standard for biblical interpretation. The Church's traditions and doctrines dominated the field of biblical interpretation for the next several hundred years.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- compare and contrast the hermeneutical methods of the Alexandrian and the Antiochian schools of interpretation
- describe the significance of Origen and Augustine and their particular contributions to biblical interpretation
- discuss the nature of biblical interpretation during the medieval period

Lesson Body

Lecture: The Patristic Period: AD 100-590

(30 minutes)

The Apostolic Fathers: AD 100-150

Refer to Resource 5-1 in the Student Guide.

See Ante-Nicene Fathers, *Vol. 1 for these writings.*

Sources—Our understanding of the nature of biblical interpretation during this period come from the writings of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Barnabas (anonymous), and important writings such as *Didache*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Epistle to Diognetus*.

Christian writings during this period were aimed to accomplish the following goals:

- To provide instruction and pastoral care to the Christian communities—*Epistles of Ignatius*
- To defend the Christian faith against pagan attack; Christian writers show their intellectual respectability by the use of allegorical method, a popular interpretive method promoted by Greek philosophy
- To reject the claims of Judaism by comparing Christianity with Judaism—*Epistle of Barnabas* rejects the claims of Judaism to the covenant; Justin Martyr's (100-165) *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* follows the form of a conversation between Justin and Trypho, a learned rabbi; Justin's attempt to show the old covenant had been superseded by a new covenant
- To attack heretical teachings that developed within the Christian Church—Irenaeus' (130-200) *Against All Heresies*

This period does not show any attempt to interpret the Bible systematically or to give methodical exposition of the biblical texts. Biblical interpretation followed the New Testament writers' pattern of the Christological reading of the Old Testament to demonstrate Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecies. To a large extent, the Old Testament came to be viewed as prophecy—predictions about future events—by the early Christian writers, though it is clear there are materials in the Old Testament that cannot be considered predictions about future events. Also we find in the writings extensive use of both typological and allegorical interpretation.

See the lesson on "Interpreting Prophecy" in this module.

Typological Interpretation—Illustrations

See Epistle of Barnabas, ch. XII.

- The Epistle of Barnabas 12:1-7—The outstretched arm of Moses against the Amalekites (Ex 17), and the bronze serpent (Num 21) both were types of the Cross; there is no salvation outside of Jesus.

See the First Epistle of Clement, ch. XII.

- Clement of Rome—the scarlet color of the cloth Rahab hung in Jericho—foreshadows the blood of Jesus (1 Clement 12:7).

Allegorical Interpretation

Epistle of Barnabas, ch. VIII.

See the allegorical interpretation of the offering of the red heifer (Num 19:1-10) in the Epistle of Barnabas, ch. 8. The calf is Jesus; the sinful men who make the offering are those who led Jesus to the Cross; the boys who sprinkle—priests—are those who proclaim remission of sin and purification of heart; wool placed on the wood represents the message that through the Cross Jesus holds the Kingdom.

Midrash

Epistle of Barnabas, ch. IX.

Occasionally, we find the Early Fathers utilizing the Jewish rabbinic method of interpretation. A good illustration is the *midrash* on circumcision by Barnabas. See how he reads into the story the name Jesus and the Cross by assigning letters to the number 318, presumably the men who were circumcised as members of Abraham's household. This number is not in Genesis 17, but it is based on Genesis 14:14.

See the First Epistle of Clement, chs. XLII and XLIV.

Since the New Testament canon was not yet established, there was no authoritative way to confront and attack heretical teaching and false doctrines that developed in the first and second centuries. The Early Fathers considered traditional teachings handed down by the apostles as authoritative, and thus established traditional interpretation as a new hermeneutical principle for the Christian Church. Clement makes the argument that the apostles have preached the gospel given to them by Christ, which in turn was given to Christ by God. The apostles in turn appointed bishops and deacons to continue this ministry. These church leaders were thus the guardians of the traditional interpretation.

See Tertullian's view of the Church as the depository of true faith and apostolic traditions in On Prescription Against Heretics, chs. XX, XXI.

Tertullian (160-225), the founder of Western Christianity, was the first to argue for the authority of the apostolic church in the interpretation of the Bible. He argued that the churches, though they are many and great, all comprise the one primitive church established by the apostles. He declared any doctrine

or interpretation that promotes views contrary to the doctrines of the church as false teaching and thus heretical. He made orthodoxy, or correct doctrines held by the church, the norm for interpreting Scripture.

AD 200-590

The third through the sixth centuries of Christian history saw the emergence of three great schools of biblical interpretation. We will now look at these three schools or centers where different approaches were taken by great Christian leaders and interpreters of the Bible.

Refer to Resource 5-2 in the Student Guide.

Alexandrian School—Alexandria in Egypt was a key center of the Christian faith during the patristic period. The Christian catechetical school in Alexandria was highly influenced by the allegorical method promoted by Philo of Alexandria. Two leading teachers of this center were Clement and Origen.

- **Clement of Alexandria** (AD 190-203). Clement taught that the Scripture meaning is hidden or veiled. One must look beyond the plain and literal meaning to find the true spiritual meaning. Using the body-soul view of the human make-up, he argued that Scripture has a literal meaning, corresponding to the body, and a spiritual meaning, corresponding to the soul. Clement considered the hidden, spiritual meaning as more important than the literal meaning.

  Have the students look at this parable in Luke 15:11-31.

  See fragments of his sermon on the prodigal son. In this sermon, he draws the following spiritual meanings from the various parts of the story:
  - The robe—the robe of immortality
  - Ring—royal signet and divine seal
  - Shoes—preparation for journey to heaven
  - Fatted calf—the Lamb of God

- **Origen** (AD 184-254), successor to Clement, was a great biblical scholar, theologian, and a gifted philosopher. His goal to establish an accurate understanding of the Old Testament led him to create the *Hexapla,* the arrangement of the Old Testament in six parallel columns:
  - Hebrew text
  - Transliteration of the Hebrew text into Greek letters
  - Septuagint translation
  - Three ancient versions of the Septuagint—Aquilla, Symmachus, and Theodotian

In addition he wrote a number of commentaries, exegetical notes, and homilies. Most of his work was destroyed in the fifth century when he was condemned for heresy. Only fragments of his commentaries and about a third of his homilies survived.

"For as man consists of body, and soul, and spirit, so in the same way does Scripture, which has been arranged to be given by God for the salvation of men." Origen De Prinicipiis, *book IV in* Ante-Nicene Fathers, *Vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 359.*

Origen outlines his hermeneutical principles in the fourth book of his treatise, called *On the Principles*. In his hermeneutical system, Origen argued that Scripture has threefold meaning: literal, moral, and spiritual. He expanded Clement's twofold body/soul pattern by separating soul into soul and spirit, thus arguing for a threefold meaning of the Scriptures.

Interpretation moves from the literal to moral to spiritual meaning. Literal meaning is the plain sense of the scripture; he called it the "flesh" of the scripture. The moral sense—"soul" of the scripture—gives hidden principles for Christian living. The spiritual sense—"spirit" of the scripture—contains the spiritual law or the doctrinal truth. The spiritual meaning provides the truth about the nature of the Church and the Christian's relationship to God, which is the basis of doctrine.

Allow for response and discussion.

Are these early Christian methods—typology, allegorical, midrash, etc.—valid methods for our reading and interpretation of the Bible today?

What are the problems associated with a two-fold or three-fold, allegorical interpretation when we attempt to understand and relate the meaning and application of the biblical text?

On what occasion or circumstance might you use them?

Antiochian School

Early Church leaders in Syria established a catechetical school at Antioch in the fourth century. Antioch was a prominent center of the Christian faith, and as the Book of Acts indicates, the church in this city was the first to send out missionaries to the Gentile world.

Refer to Resource 5-3 in the Student Guide.

The Antiochian school gave more emphasis to the literal and historical sense of the text. This school rejected the allegorical system that attempted to show different levels of meanings to the Scriptures. The Antiochians placed emphasis on the ability or insight—*theoria*—to perceive the spiritual truth embedded in the historical events narrated in the Bible. The

historical fact was linked to the spiritual sense, and thus the text has only one meaning.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (AD 350-428), Theodoret (AD 393-460), and John Chrysostom (AD 347-407) were among the key proponents of this school of thought. Theodore of Mopsuestia disagreed with the popular notion that the Song of Songs was an allegory, and instead he interpreted it as an erotic poem. He attempted to relate the Old Testament to the historical events in Israel's history and sought to find meaning of the text in the historical setting. John Chrysostom's sermons (AD 347-407) also the show application of the literal and historical meaning of the text.

See Chrysostom's Homilies in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, *volumes 10-14, Hendrickson Publishers.*

Western School

Refer to Resource 5-4 in the Student Guide.

The western school is known for its emphasis on the authority of tradition in interpreting the Bible. This school did not produce a particular method of biblical interpretation. Rather, it borrowed elements from both the Alexandrian and the Antiochian schools. Jerome and Augustine are key representatives of this school.

Jerome (AD 340-420)—Jerome's Vulgate (date of translation 383-404) became the official Bible of the Church. He studied both Greek and Hebrew and translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Latin. The Church depended on the Vulgate for all doctrinal discussions.

See Augustine's Christian Doctrine, Book II, Chapter 9 where he discusses how one should proceed in studying Scripture (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 2).

Augustine (AD 354-430) is considered the greatest of the Latin fathers. He was not proficient in Hebrew and Greek. His system of biblical interpretation is found in his treatise on Christian doctrine, *De Doctrina Christiana (On Christian Doctrine)*. Augustine mainly followed the literal interpretation. For Augustine, the goal of studying the Scriptures is to seek the will of God.

His first rule for anyone attempting to study the Bible is to know the biblical books and not be ignorant of the content of the Bible. Next, one must search the clearer passages for rules of life and rules of faith. When the text is unclear, Augustine suggested one should consult the clearer texts to throw light upon the difficult texts. The authority of the tradition also influenced Augustine's hermeneutical system.

Lecture: The Middle Ages: AD 590-1500

(20 minutes)

In the Middle Ages biblical reading and study was mainly done in the monasteries, and in cathedral schools, which later developed into universities. This was not a period of biblical interpretation or historical and linguistic studies. Under the influence of monasticism, the Bible came to be viewed as a source for morality and disciplined monastic life. ***Lectio divina***—spiritual reading—was the most basic and the only form of Bible study in the monasteries. The spiritual reading was always done in an attitude of prayer. Monks maintained a deep sense of receptivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit and rarely questioned what they were reading. This method of reading the Bible continued throughout the medieval period.

Traditional Interpretation

Refer to Resource 5-5 in the Student Guide.

In the Middle Ages, biblical commentators depended heavily on the traditions handed down from the church fathers. In the cathedral schools, interpretations and commentaries from the patristic period were collected and compiled as a key source for the traditional understanding of the Bible, known as ***Catena***.

This also provided the basis of doctrines in the medieval period. Another development during this period was the compilation of ***interpretive glosses,*** scripture annotations or commentaries from the Early Fathers written in the margins or between the lines of the Bible.

In the 12th century, Anselm, with the help of several other scholars, compiled a gloss of the entire Bible. This became known as ***Glossa Ordinaria,*** which was the standard medieval commentary of the Bible.

In this method, the church—or its approved scholars—became the interpreter of Scripture. The traditional interpretation released individual believers from the responsibility to read and interpret the Bible, and invested the authority of interpretation to the church. This method in a sense opened the way for many of the abuses in the medieval church. The right and duty of every believer to read the Scriptures, advocated by the Reformers, is a timely reminder to modern-day Christians who are content with a “traditional” interpretation of Scripture.

Allegorical Interpretation

Allegorical interpretation continued to be a way of reading the Bible in the Middle Ages. In the absence of historical and linguistic studies, the Old Testament stories and events became metaphors with moral and spiritual meanings.

Allegorical method during the Middle Ages assigned four meanings—four senses—to the text: literal, allegorical, moral, and analogical. The classic example is the understanding of Jerusalem in the medieval allegorical system. In the literal sense, Jerusalem is the ancient city in Palestine. In the allegorical sense—which is understood more as typology—the city refers to the Christian Church. In the moral sense, the city is the soul of the believer. In the analogical sense, the city is the heavenly city.

Literal Method

In the late medieval period, many attempted to write commentaries of biblical books. This was mostly done in cathedral schools. These commentators gave more attention to the literal and historical meaning of the text. Under the influence of ***scholasticism,*** this method gained more prominence toward the end of the medieval period.

Key Figures of Medieval Interpretation

Refer to Resource 5-6 in the Student Guide.

Venerable Bede (673-725) produced commentaries and biblical aids.

Hugo of St. Victor (1096-1141) claimed one must first learn matters of belief and then find them in the Bible. He insisted on the primacy of the traditions of the church. Thus, the goal of biblical interpretation was to confirm what the Church maintained as its doctrines.

Stephen Langdon (1150-1228)—archbishop of Canterbury—is credited with the chapter divisions in the Bible. He followed the custom of interpreting the Bible in accord with the doctrines of the Church.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was the most influential proponent of scholasticism. Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*—the rational, systematic expression of the Christian faith—remains as the standard summary of theology in the Roman Catholic Church. He was a strong proponent of the literal sense of Scripture. He

claimed the literal sense conveyed the original meaning intended by the writer.

Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1340)—a Jewish convert to Christianity—utilized the original languages in his interpretation of Scripture. He thought it was important to understand the literal sense of the Scriptures and use it as the basis for the development of doctrines.

John Wycliffe (1329-84) was one of the most outstanding biblical scholars of his day. He is often called the "morning star" of the Reformation. He wrote marginal notes—postills—on all biblical books. Wycliffe argued for the authority of the Bible over against that of the Church. He also defended the literal sense of the Bible. He is the first scholar to undertake a systematic translation of the Bible from Latin into English.

There was not much interest in learning Hebrew and Greek by the medieval scholars until the Renaissance; only a few came under the influence of Jewish biblical exegetes. One example was Andrew of St. Victor (1175). He knew Hebrew and was influenced by the Jewish exegetical traditions. He also promoted the literal sense of Scripture.

Small Groups: Application

(15 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of about 3 students each.

Refer to Resource 5-7 in the Student Guide.

Take one of the parables and use the Allegorical Method to interpret the passage, as described in Resource 5-5.

Passage _____

- Literal
- Allegorical
- Moral
- Analogical

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on the students.

Summarize the key developments in the history of biblical interpretation during the patristic and medieval periods.

Look Ahead

We will continue our investigation of the history of biblical interpretation by reviewing the major developments during the Reformation and the post-Reformation period. We will see how the Reformation brought the Bible to its central place in the Christian tradition. We will also review post-Reformation developments, particularly the influence of rationalism and pietism on the study of the Bible.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

Complete Resource 5-8. Complete all five pages.

Write in your journal. Formational Reading: Matthew 5:17-48. Read your passage slowly and reflectively. Ask God to speak to you from Scripture. As He does, absorb what He says to you. Wait, reflect, pray. Do not feel compelled to “finish” the whole passage you were given. Do not feel compelled “not to finish” it either. ☺ Write down what you can capture of what God says to you through Scripture.

[This page intentionally blank]

Lesson 6

The History of Interpretation: Reformation and Post-Reformation Period

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Reformation	Lecture	Resource 6-1 Resource 6-2
0:35	Post-Reformation	Lecture	Resource 6-3 Resource 6-4
1:00	Historical Exegesis	Small Groups	Resource 6-5
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Kaiser, Walter, and Moisés Silva. *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 224-27.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 39-43.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

Call on several students to share the responses from their homework.

Return and collect homework.

Orientation

In this lesson we will continue the history of biblical interpretation. So far we have looked at the various ways of reading and interpreting the Bible by the people of God from biblical times to the end of the Middle Ages. This lesson covers approximately 300 years of developments in the history of biblical interpretation, beginning with the Reformation, and continuing through the post-Reformation period to the beginning of the modern period.

We will notice here the key interpretive principles developed by the Reformers, as well as the diminishing role of allegorical and typological methods. This period also saw the influence of rationalism and pietism on biblical study. The goal of this lesson is to highlight some of the key developments in biblical interpretation during the Reformation and post-Reformation period, which continue to have their impact on our present-day approach to the task of biblical interpretation.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- identify the hermeneutical principles of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley
- discuss the influence of rationalism and pietism on the study of the Bible

Lesson Body

Lecture: The Reformation Period 1500-1650

(25 minutes)

Refer to Resource 6-1 in the Student Guide.

The intellectual, social, political, and spiritual climate of western Europe in the mid-15th century set the stage for the Reformation movement led by Martin Luther and John Calvin. Several factors directly contributed to the Reformation movement that led to a new way of understanding the role of Scripture in the life and faith of a believer:

- Invention of movable type by Gutenberg and the first printed Bible in Latin (1456)
- Crisis in the papacy in the 14th century
- Renaissance of learning and culture in 1500s
- Printed materials and the spread of knowledge
- Increased criticism of the church as the center of corruption
- Signs of new spirituality within the Roman church

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Luther entered the monastery in search of deeper spiritual life. As a monk, he realized his pious exercises and good works were not sufficient to deal with his guilt and sins. He became more frustrated and depressed at the insatiable appetite for luxury he saw in the Roman church, as well as its total indifference to spiritual matters.

In 1512, at the age of 29, Luther became professor of New Testament at the University of Wittenberg. There he discovered the truth that justification came by faith, through his study of Romans 1:17. This forced his confrontation with the church, which was offering indulgences for money to rebuild St. Peter's basilica in Rome.

In response to the church's position on justification and forgiveness of sins, Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle church on October 31, 1517. This publication ignited controversy throughout Europe. The outcome was the beginning of the Protestant movement, with the watchword ***sola scriptura***, Scripture alone. Historians mark 1517-1648 as the period of the Reformation.

The Reformation resulted in the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire into Protestant and Catholic states.

Scandinavia and England broke off with Rome. France, Poland, and Hungary came under the strong influence of the Protestant movement. The Roman Catholic church responded to the Reformation movement by a strong affirmation of the doctrines of the church, through a series of meetings that met between 1545 and 1563, the Council of Trent. Protestants themselves fell into two theological positions; Lutherans formulated their theological doctrines in 1577 and Calvinists did the same in 1618-19.

Many humanists from the early period of the Renaissance aided the Reformers with valuable tools for the study of the Bible. We note here the works of two individuals in particular who were influential in the life of Martin Luther.

Refer to Resource 6-2 in the Student Guide.

Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522)

- Great uncle of Luther's friend Melanchthon
- A leading Hebrew scholar; some call him the father of Hebrew learning in the Christian Church
- Published a Hebrew grammar, Hebrew lexicon, work on Hebrew accents and orthography, and grammatical interpretation of the seven penitential psalms.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)

- He published the first critical edition of the Greek New Testament (1516) with a translation in Latin. His translation challenged the Vulgate in several places. Erasmus' New Testament became the basic tool for Luther's study of the Bible during the early years of the Reformation.

Both Reuchlin and Erasmus, however, were opposed to Luther's Reformation and did not join Luther in his opposition to the church.

Martin Luther's contributions to biblical interpretation

- Completed a translation of the Bible into German (1524)
- Lecture notes, sermons, and commentaries on a number of biblical books

See IBI, 40-41, and Bray, 172-73, for a discussion of these hermeneutical assumptions maintained by Luther.

Important hermeneutical assumptions of Luther

- Importance of faith and illumination of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives guidance to believers to apply their experience to their biblical interpretation.
- Scripture should determine what the church teaches; Scripture alone—*sola scriptura*—is the authority for a believer. Moreover, Scripture

interprets itself and therefore one need not depend on the church's traditions or commentaries on the Bible to understand the meaning of Scripture.

- Luther rejected the allegorical system and maintained that proper interpretation should come from a literal understanding of the text. The interpreter should consider historical conditions, grammar, and context in exegesis. He understood the literal sense also as the spiritual sense of the text. However, frequently he resorted to allegory to establish his claim that every part of Scripture should proclaim Christ.
- Luther believed all of the Old Testament and New Testament point to Christ. His interpretation was thus Christocentric in character. He believed the Bible is the Word of God in written form, which points to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ.
- Luther claimed the Bible contains two opposed but mutually complimentary elements: the Law and the gospel. This is the most important single principle of hermeneutic which sets him apart from the Calvinist tradition. Law refers to God in His wrath, judgment, and His hatred of sin. Gospel refers to His grace, love, and salvation. Repudiation of the Law is wrong and leads to lawlessness; fusion of the Law and gospel is wrong because it leads to the heresy of adding works to faith. He did not find any value for the Epistle of James because of its emphasis on works.

William Tyndale (1494-1536)—among the first-generation English Reformers—completed the translation of the New Testament from Greek (1526).

Zwingli (1484-1531)—chief reformer of Zurich—produced a number of sermons and expositions. He led the Reformation by preaching biblical sermons and explaining the Bible to his audience. He did not make a distinction between the Law and the gospel, and thus found no problem with the Book of James.

John Calvin (1509-64)—a Frenchman who moved to Geneva—shares with Luther the place of honor and significance as the greatest of the Reformers. His famous work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* is the most influential exposition of the Christian doctrine produced during the Reformation period. He was a brilliant biblical exegete who produced a large number of commentaries. He wrote commentaries on all but three of the New Testament books—2 and 3 John, and Revelation—and more than half of the Old Testament books. These commentaries reflect the best of biblical exegesis during the Reformation period.

See IBI, 41.

Calvin's hermeneutical assumptions

- Along with Luther, Calvin maintained the view that Scripture is the ultimate authority for the church.
- In the Bible, believers have a personal encounter with God, which convinces them of the truth of the message contained in it. Calvin believed the purpose of all true interpretation was to edify the church and the individual believer (2 Tim 3:16). He brought together the Spirit's work in the inspiration of Scripture with the Spirit's work in confirming to the interpreter's heart that an interpretation was correct.
- Calvin rejected the allegorical system and focused on the literal sense of the text. However, he was cautious not to use the literal sense in an arbitrary way. He believed the context might oblige the interpreter to go beyond the actual text without altering the meaning of the whole message. Example: "This is my body." Luther understood this text literally. Calvin did not, and said Jesus could not have meant His body in a literal way because Jesus was sitting there intact in His body.
- Scripture interprets Scripture, so one must pay attention to parallel passages, in addition to studying grammar, context, and words.
- The author's intention must be the guiding principle of interpretation. No text should be interpreted without regard for the way in which the author intended it to be read. He was critical of those who were determined to find Christ in every verse, thus against Luther who thought that Christ was to be everywhere in Scripture.
- Christological interpretation of Scripture must be historical as well as theological. Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the theme of the New Testament. The interpreter should attempt to relate Scripture to Christ in the way the text actually illustrates or points to the work of Christ; for example, sacrifices illustrated the principles underlying the death of Christ.

Lecture: The Post-Reformation Period: 1650-1800

(35 minutes)

Refer to Resource 6-3 in the Student Guide.

The Renaissance and Reformation continued to influence the way the Bible was read and interpreted in the Church. Born out of these two great movements were two radically different approaches to one's reading and understanding of the Bible. Pietism—the spiritual offspring of the Reformation movement—stood in stark opposition to rationalism, the intellectual offspring of the Renaissance movement.

Pietism

Lutheran Germany in the 17th century moved away from the vibrant and active faith and personal relationship advocated by Luther, and it came under the influence of scholasticism, which treated faith as an intellectual exercise. State churches and public worship became marks of good Christian life.

Pietism emerged as a reaction to this sterile and formal Christianity, with a call to return to personal faith and personal experience of God's grace in the life of the believer. Pietists called for the conversion of baptized Christians for the first time in Christian history. Pietists also saw the fellowship of believers as the center of the Christian life rather than the state churches, which had become centers of formal Christianity. This movement focused on Christianity as a way of life through Bible study, prayer, and development of personal moral values.

Jacob Spener (1635-1705) was one of the key leaders of pietism. His major work—*Pia Desideria,* 1675 (*Pious Requirements)*—emphasized thoughtful interpretation of Scripture based on the literal, original meaning of the text, and free from any doctrinal assumptions or interests. He placed emphasis on the devotional, practical study of the Bible. Pietists' study of the Bible had the final goal of arriving at the devotional use of Scripture.

John Wesley (1703-91), the founder of Methodism, was influenced by pietism's approach to the Bible. He also emphasized personal piety through Bible study and prayer. He regarded the Bible as inspired and infallible. Published his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament,* 1755.

Six instructions in Wesley's 1765 Preface to *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament,* page ix.

- Set a little time every morning and evening.
- Read a chapter out of the Old and one out of the New Testament.
- Read to know the "whole will of God."
- Constant eye to the "Analogy of Faith"—"the connection and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, Original Sin, Justification by Faith, the New Birth, Inward and Outward Holiness."
- Serious and earnest prayer before consulting the "Oracles of God." "Scripture can be understood through the same Spirit whereby 'it was given.'"

- Frequently pause and examine ourselves by what we read—praise and repentance as the object of this exercise.

Wesley's Hermeneutical Rules

See Scott Jones, John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture *(Nashville: Kingwood Books, 1995), ch. 4: "Interpretation of Scripture," 104-27.*

Prerequisites: Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, faith, and knowledge. Knowledge—of the whole Bible, history, science, original languages, Fathers, logic—is useful but not necessary, except logic/reason, which he regarded as necessary for a correct interpretation.

- Speak "as the oracles of God," using the very words of Scripture to understand the meaning of Scripture. This does not, however, mean Wesley regarded interpretation as an unnecessary task.
- Use the literal sense unless it contradicts another scripture or implies an absurdity. However, Wesley often resorted to giving the spiritual or figurative sense of the Scriptures.
- Interpret the text with regard to its literary context—larger literary context (surrounding verses)—and parallel passages help determine the true meaning of the text
- Scripture interprets Scripture, according to the Analogy of Faith.
- Commandments are covered promises, agreement between law and gospel. Same words can be taken as commandments and thus part of the law, or as promises and thus an essential part of the gospel; example: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" as commandment as well as promise, as Law and gospel.
- Interpret literary devices appropriately.
- Seek the most original text and the best translation.

Wesley believed the reader of Scripture needs the same inspiration of the Spirit that inspired the ancient writers of Scripture.

See the forthcoming volume by Richard Thompson and Barry Callan (eds.), Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals *(Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City).*

Wesley's hermeneutical guidelines set forth some key principles that are significant to a Wesleyan system of biblical interpretation in our day. Literary context, the role of reason and the role of the Holy Spirit, and analogy of faith were key issues for Wesley. These concerns are essential to modern Wesleyan hermeneutics.

See illustration of typology as a method of Edwards' biblical interpretation on IBI, page 42.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58)—pietism's influence in America is seen in the preaching of this great New England revivalist. He was concerned with both

doctrinal teachings as well as practical application of scripture.

Rationalism: 17th and 18th Centuries

This intellectual offspring of the Renaissance movement brought to prominence the use of reason in the study of the Bible. Bible study focused on the investigation of Scripture in the original languages. Under the influence of rationalism, the Bible itself came under the scrutiny of scholars, which later paved the way for the challenge of biblical authority in the 19th century. Rationalism rejected biblical ideas such as sin, the Fall, personal God, miracles, and revelation. They viewed the Bible as a document that contains highly irrational and immoral ideas, which they thought should be purged from the Bible to make it a trustworthy religious document.

Refer to Resource 6-4 in the Student Guide.

See Bray, 251-53, for a detailed discussion of these presuppositions of rationalism

Basic assumptions of rationalism

- Reason alone is sufficient to explain things and events in the universe.
- Rationalists rejected the idea of revelation and found no place for biblical ideas such as sin or the fall of humanity.
- Rationalists rejected the biblical idea of miracles. Scientific laws govern the universe and its proper functions, and God would not suspend the laws of nature.
- The maker of this universe is the Supreme Being who does not have a specific identity.
- Morality is one's conformity to the laws of nature. Everyone should live a life in conformity to these laws of nature.
- Christianity teaches irrational perspectives. The idea of sin and Jesus' sacrificial death are irrational ideas, taken over from the Old Testament.

The British rationalist and atheist, Thomas Hobbs, in *Leviathan* (1651) questioned the historicity of parts of the OT and argued that Moses could not be the author of the Pentateuch. The French biblical scholar, Richard Simon, in his *Critical History of the Old Testament* (1678) showed his skepticism toward the OT and expressed the view that a number of documents underlie the present form of the OT. The French physician Jean Astruc (*Conjectures on the Reminiscences which Moses appears to have used in composing the Book of Genesis,* 1753) is known for his observation that some stories in Genesis utilize the divine name Elohim while others use the name

Yahweh. This laid the foundation for what became later known as the documentary hypothesis, developed by Julius Wellhausen.

Small Groups: Historical Exegesis

(25 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of 2-3 students each.

Refer to Resource 6-5 in the Student Guide. Either assign or allow the groups to choose one of the scripture passages.

They will work on one together in their group and one for homework.

In your group you will work on one of the passages together. You will then work on a different passage as part of your homework.

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on the students.

Name one key thought that helped you in this lesson.

Look Ahead

The brief overview of the history of biblical interpretation prepares us now for a review of various methods of reading and understanding the Bible developed in the modern period (1800 - present).

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

For Resource 6-5 you will need to assign each student one passage to research or allow them to choose.

Complete Resource 6-5.

Complete Resource 6-6.

Write in your journal. Formational Reading: Psalm 76. Read your passage slowly and reflectively. Ask God to speak to you from Scripture. As He does, absorb what He says to you. Wait, reflect, pray. Do not feel compelled to “finish” the whole passage you were given. Do not feel compelled “not to finish” it either. ☺ Write down what you can capture of what God says to you through Scripture.

[This page intentionally blank]

Lesson 7

The History of Interpretation: Modern Period

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Historical Exegesis	Small Groups	Homework—Resource 6-5
0:25	The Modern Period: 1800 to Present	Lecture	Resources 7-1—7-6
0:55	Modern Methods of Reading the Bible	Lecture	Resources 7-7—7-10
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 44-52, 425-57.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

In pairs have the students read each other's comments on Calvin from the homework.

Return and collect homework.

Orientation

This lesson is a review of the history of biblical interpretation in the last 200 years. We will find here the beginning of the historical-critical method, which has dominated the field of biblical studies for nearly 150 years. We will also summarize the various approaches to the study of the Bible developed in the modern period.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- describe the various developments and key figures of biblical interpretation in the modern period
- define and describe historical criticism, literary criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, and form criticism
- define and describe various contemporary approaches to the study of the Bible

Lesson Body

Small Groups: Historical Exegesis

(15 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of 3 each.

Each group should consist of students who have worked on three different passages of Scripture.

In your group share with each other what you found in your research on the passage of Scripture you studied.

Lecture: The Modern Period: 1800 to Present

(30 minutes)

19th Century

Refer to Resource 7-1 in the Student Guide.

German universities dominated 19th-century biblical scholarship. Seventeen out of the 21 theological universities were located on German soil during this period. In these universities the study of the Bible took an objective, scientific approach known as the **historical-critical method.** Historical-critical method seeks to give emphasis to the historical context in which the text originated and was later edited or expanded to give the text its present form.

Underlying assumptions of the historical-critical method:

- Reason is sufficient to explain the biblical texts and their meaning, and scholarly study could uncover the social and religious factors that produced the text.
- The Bible is to be treated like any other, humanly-produced literature.
- Rejection of the idea of supernaturalism, revelation, and inspiration of Scripture
- Emphasis on a naturalistic worldview
- Fictional nature of many of the biblical stories, places, and people
- Biblical history and religion shows a movement of progression from simple to more complex and refined theological ideas.
- Biblical truth is culturally conditioned and therefore relevant only to the culture in which it originated.
- The Bible is simply a record of moral and ethical values.

We will now look at two historical-critical scholars who impacted biblical studies in the 19th century.

Refer to Resource 7-2 in the Student Guide.

F. C. Baur (1826-60), of the University of **Tübingen,** applied Hegelian dialectic to his understanding of the New Testament. He concluded that the New Testament reflected a tension between primitive, Jewish Christianity represented by Peter and the Gentile Christianity represented by Paul.

He saw in the New Testament an attempt to reconcile this conflict by formulating a new synthesis. The beginning of the synthesis is found in Acts and the Pastoral letters, but the Gospel of John reflects an advanced stage of this synthesis. He regarded the Synoptic Gospels, James, Jude, and Revelation as illustrations of primitive Christianity.

He rejected the Pauline authorship of most of the letters of Paul but considered Galatians, Corinthians, and Romans as illustrations of Gentile Christianity and Pauline theology. Baur classified New Testament books that reflect this conflict as earlier than those books that do not reflect this conflict. Accordingly, New Testament books that do not reflect the Jewish-Gentile conflict belong to a period later than the first century AD.

This view was significant to Baur's development of Christology, which described the primitive view of Jesus as a human messiah (Synoptic Gospels) while the more advanced view depicted Him as Christ who is pre-existent (John's Gospel). Paul's Christology lies somewhere in between these two perspectives. Baur and his students, known as the Tübingen school, thus played a key role in the development of a purely historical understanding of the Bible.

Julius Wellhausen, in his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1878), laid the foundation for documentary hypothesis of the sources underlying the Pentateuch, the JEDP theory. According to Wellhausen, the Pentateuch is a composite document with four distinct sources, which he labeled:

- **J**—Yahwistic source that uses the divine name "Yahweh" for God, originated in the Southern Kingdom around 850 BC
- **E**—Elohistic source that uses the generic name "Elohim" for God, originated in the Northern Kingdom around 750 BC
- **D**—Deuteronomic source found in the Book of Deuteronomy, developed in the sixth century BC
- **P**—Priestly source that contributed to the elaborate rituals and priestly regulations, developed in the fifth century BC

He concluded that at various stages these documents were merged together and the final editing of the entire JEDP document took place around 200 BC.

The works of Baur and Wellhausen thus show that the 19th-century historical-critical method focused not on the meaning of the text but on the sources, authorship, and reconstruction of the history of the text of the Bible, **Source Criticism**. This led to the question of the historical reliability of the biblical text, a concern shared by scholars who are proponents of the historical-critical method in our day.

Historical-critical method in the late 19th- through early 20th-century period produced two significant interpretive approaches to the study of the Bible.

Refer to Resource 7-3 in the Student Guide.

- **History of religion approach** begins with the assumption that other existing religions influenced the development of religious ideas found in the Bible. Scholars influenced by this approach sought to find in the Bible ideas and concepts borrowed from other religions. To them, biblical religious ideas reflect a reworking of other religious perspectives in the light of certain notions maintained by Israel and the Early Church.

  Thus scholars attempted to explain early Christian religious ideas as a reshaping of contemporary Jewish and Hellenistic-Roman religion. This same approach attempted to show how ancient Near Eastern religions influenced the religion of Israel found in the Old Testament. Scholars who pursue this method view many of the Old Testament stories—such as the creation story and the Flood—as adaptations of the religious traditions of Israel's neighboring cultures.

- **Form Criticism approach** is associated with H. Gunkel who believed much of the Old Testament originated as folk tales and were transmitted orally for a long period of time. Based on his understanding of religious literature from Mesopotamia and Egypt, he recognized in the literature of the Bible, literary types that follow certain rules of composition and structure.

  Gunkel found in the Book of Psalms, for example, different literary types—*gattung*—which he labeled as hymns, laments, thanksgiving, entrance liturgies, royal psalms, etc. He believed each literary type has its own particular social and

historical setting—*Sitz im Leben*—that contributed to its development.

He also believed a reconstruction of the history of the Old Testament requires us to understand the history of the development of these literary types—the oral prehistory stage in the development of the biblical text.

Early 20th-Century Developments

Refer to Resource 7-4 in the Student Guide.

Early to mid-20th-century biblical scholarship was influenced by several factors. One of the key developments during this period was **archaeological investigations and discoveries** in Palestine and the Middle East in general. Important information regarding the historical, cultural, and religious conditions of Palestine and the Middle East were made available to biblical scholarship by the efforts of Sir Flinders Petrie, William Foxwell Albright, and Nelson Gluck.

Biblical scholars from a conservative tradition used archaeological evidence to support the biblical data in the Old Testament and attempted to relate biblical events and persons to the history and culture of the Ancient Near East. However, those of the liberal persuasion used the evidence to reconstruct the history of Israel differently from what is portrayed in the Old Testament.

A. Alt, for example, attempted to show that the conquest of Canaan was a slow and gradual migration of nomadic Bedouin tribes into Canaan, who later consolidated themselves into a nation. M. Noth later expanded this view and argued that the tribal structure and organization of Israel was a later development, after the people migrated into the land of Canaan.

The 20th century also saw the **influence of existential thinking on biblical scholarship and interpretation.** Existentialism denied the traditional view of objective, rational bases for decision-making that are applicable to all human beings. In the existentialist philosophy, one must make decisions by one's own choice and personally decide on questions of morality and truth; truth has thus a subjective element. Personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential to the apprehension of the truth.

The freedom to choose and the choices one makes determine one's nature; choice is central to human

existence and it is inescapable. Even the refusal to choose is a choice. Key existentialist philosophers: Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Karl Barth (1886-1968), a Swiss Reformed theologian, was influenced by Kierkegaard's emphasis on a life totally committed to the choices one makes, and the decision to accept and commit to the Christian way of life through a "leap of faith." Barth emphasized the authority of the Bible as the word of God and the necessity of a personal encounter with the living God. His multi-volume *Church Dogmatics,* a systematic treatment of the Christian faith, shows the close relationship between systematic theology and biblical interpretation.

Rudolph Bultmann's (1884-1976) hermeneutic was influenced by Martin Heidegger, another existential philosopher who argued the interpreter brings to the text a frame of reference or preunderstanding, and this human self-understanding is essential to the interpretation of the text. He was professor of New Testament at Marburg, Germany. His classic work, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1921), has been an influential source in New Testament studies in the mid-20th century.

Bultmann applied the form-critical approach to his study of the Gospels. He not only classified the Gospel stories by their literary type but also attempted to investigate their original life-setting. He argued that the Jesus of history is not the same as the Christ of faith whom the Church proclaimed as the center of its proclamation. Bultmann also suggested the gospel message—*kerygma*—is clothed with a layer of myth that needs to be removed—***demythologized***—in order to discover the content of the kerygma.

He argued the New Testament writings were done at a time far removed from the time of the actual events/ happenings and they do not therefore reflect the actual situation. The writers have imposed on these events their own pre-scientific/mythological worldviews, and mythical categories. Myth here is not fabrication of truth but rather expressions of faith in mythical terms. Myth for Bultmann is a religious story that provides the basis for a specific theological teaching or faith. The process of demythologization is necessary to make the content of the *kerygma* relevant to the modern listeners.

See IBI, 48.

The 20th century also witnessed the rise of a new theological movement known as ***neo-orthodoxy*** or dialectical theology, influenced by the biblical and theological perspectives of scholars and theologians such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and R. Bultmann. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard list the following three basic presuppositions of neo-orthodox biblical interpretation:

Refer to Resource 7-5 in the Student Guide.

- God is a subject and one can know Him only through a personal encounter; the Bible words cannot convey knowledge of God as abstract propositions.
- The vast separation from the transcendent God and fallen humanity, and the subsequent element of mythological language to bridge that gulf and to reveal God to people. Neo-orthodoxy is less interested in the historicity of biblical events.
- The paradoxical nature of truth; no need to look for any coherent theme uniting together the divergent religious ideas; paradox is inherent to biblical ideas.

Modern Period

Refer to Resource 7-6 in the Student Guide.

The second half of the 20th century saw the rise of a new discipline in biblical studies called **Biblical Theology.** The task of this discipline is to show the inner unity of the whole Bible, which exists in two separate testaments, each with its own canonical integrity. Childs, a key proponent of Biblical Theology, argues each testament is its own true witness and thus each must be heard on its own terms. He states: “A major task of Biblical Theology is to reflect on the whole Christian Bible with its two different voices, both of which the church confesses bear witness to Christ.”

Brevard S. Child, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: A Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible *(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 78.*

He also recognizes the tension that exists between the two testaments. For Childs, “the challenge of Biblical Theology is to engage in the continual activity of theological reflection which studies the canonical text in detailed exegesis, and seeks to do justice to the witness of both testaments in the light of its subject matter who is Jesus Christ.”

Another development in the second half of the 20th century is the **new hermeneutic** with its presupposition that the language of the text and its intention controls interpretation, and not the interpreter and his or her questions addressed to the text. In this approach to the study of the Bible, the biblical text reverses from being a passive object to be interpreted, to an active agency which draws the reader into its world and in turn interprets for the reader the world in which they exist. The focus of this

approach is on the meaning of Scripture to the issues of contemporary life. This is a philosophical, existentialist way of reading the biblical text.

Historical-critical method with its many sub-disciplines, which seemed to dominate the field of biblical study, began to lose its influence during the second half of the 20th century. The second half of the 20th century saw many new developments and proposals for reading and interpreting the Bible using data taken from the fields of linguistics, sociology, literary theory, and philosophy. Some of these newer methods seem to be drawing the attention of many modern biblical scholars.

We will now review the contemporary scene with a summary description of various historical-critical methods of reading the Bible in the modern period.

Lecture: Modern Methods of Reading the Bible

(30 minutes)

Refer to Resource 7-7 in the Student Guide.

Finding a method that leads us to an informed opinion about the meaning of Scripture is crucial to our study of the Bible. Scholars utilize various methods in their approach to biblical study. Often the word “criticism” is attached to these methods. “Criticism” simply refers to the scientific investigation of the historical origin, composition, and transmission of the biblical text, which leads the interpreter to formulate an informed opinion on the nature, scope, and meaning of the text.

Biblical scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries have developed various historical-critical methods. Though these methods continue to influence biblical study, we also find other, newer methods making their mark on the landscape of biblical scholarship. We will do a brief sketch of these various methods of reading the Bible in the modern period.

Historical Criticism

Historical criticism or historical-critical method is a dominant method of biblical studies in the universities, though its validity has been under attack in the last several decades. The origin of this method goes back to the 17th and 18th centuries. It dominated biblical study in the 19th through the mid-20th century. The focus of this method is on the history and culture of biblical times, supported by the understanding of geography and archaeology. Political situations, material conditions of the people, social conditions and

relationships, and religious beliefs all play a part in the evaluation of the biblical text.

Thus historical criticism seeks not only to investigate the history *in* the text but also the history *of* the text, the historical, cultural context in which the text was produced. Modern scholars who pursue historical-critical method have questioned the historicity of patriarchal narratives, exodus and conquest stories in light of newly discovered knowledge about the history of the ancient Near East.

This method of study has been aided by non-biblical sources that convey further understanding of the culture, politics, and religions of the biblical times: Ancient Near East, first-century Palestine and the Hellenistic-Roman culture, etc. In the New Testament area, the question of the mission and work of Jesus in the context of first-century Judaism, and the teaching of Paul in the light of the modern understanding of Rabbinic Judaism are ongoing issues in the historical-critical method.

Though historical criticism seeks to analyze the text in detail, it leaves the work at that point; the method does not arrive at a coherent understanding of the text. Historical criticism also ignores the applicability of the text for contemporary life. What difference our historical inquiry of the biblical text makes to the modern reader is not a concern for this method.

The other methods we will look at—Source Criticism, Form Criticism, Redaction Criticism—are later developments in historical criticism. These methods emerged in response to historical criticism's lack of emphasis on sources, original life-settings, and redactional history of the biblical text.

Source Criticism

Refer to Resource 7-8 in the Student Guide.

Historical-critical method prompted biblical scholars in the 18th century to ask questions about the authorship and authenticity of the biblical text. Source criticism seeks to discover whether a text is the work of one person or several, whether literary sources have been used, and whether editors have reworked the text in some way.

The objectives of Source Criticism are:

- To trace the development of the document, observing how various sources contributed to the document's final form

- To evaluate its historical accuracy in light of the historical development of the document
- To determine how various biblical documents may be interdependent

Thus the concern of the literary critic is on literary, historical, and theological matters. Literary concern leads to the discovery of the composition of the book. Historical concern leads to the understanding of the history of the particular time when the book was composed. Theological concern leads to the analysis of the theological interest and climate that produced the various sources.

Some of the conclusions of source criticism:

- Various sources behind the composition of the Pentateuch: documentary hypothesis of Wellhausen
- Multiple authorship of Isaiah: Isaiah 1-39 as the work of an 8th-century prophet while 40-66 contain exilic and post-exilic materials
- The composition of the Gospels: Mark and Q as the two key sources for Matthew and Luke
- Authorship questions on a number of letters traditionally attributed to Paul: Deutero-Pauline letters

Refer to Resource 7-9 in the Student Guide.

Form Criticism

This method, first used by Hermann Gunkel for the Old Testament and Martin Dibelius for the New Testament, focuses on identifying the literary types or forms of the biblical texts. Various literary forms, or genres, correlate to specific life settings, or *Sitz im Leben*. These life settings may be specific occasions in the community of faith and the context of worship such as weddings, funerals, defeats, victories, instruction, ritual acts, etc. Form criticism aims at reconstructing the life setting, which in turn helps the reader better to understand the meaning and significance of the text to the original audience.

Gunkel identified various literary types in the book of Genesis, and labeled them as saga, legend, curse, hymn, etiology, etc. He also pioneered the identification of various genres within the book of Psalm. His student Mowinckel continued the task of identifying the genres in the psalms.

The Gospels reveal various life settings within the Early Church that might have provided the context for the writing of the Gospels. Martin Dibelius identified various genres in the Gospel accounts; among them paradigm is the most important. Paradigm, according

to Dibelius, is a concise, self-contained, and edifying story that focused on a significant saying and deed of Jesus. It was a powerful tool in the preaching ministry in the Early Church. Rudolph Bultmann in his *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1921) systematically sorted out the stories in the three Gospels into various classifications of literary forms.

Redaction Criticism

Redaction Criticism aims to study the biblical books in their final forms to evaluate the theological views of the author(s) who arranged, modified, revised, edited, or even reworked the older materials to create the final shape of the books. Such author(s) may have reworked the older texts to give new meaning appropriate to their new contexts.

Von Rad laid the foundation for this method with his observations on the theological perspectives of the final redactors of various parts of the Old Testament. He described the Hexateuch—Genesis through Joshua—as the final product of a long history of literary and theological development. Martin Noth elaborated this method with his perspective that Joshua-2 Kings reflects the theological perspectives of Deuteronomy, and thus we see in these historical books what is called "deuteronomistic history."

New Testament scholars applied this method to the study of the Synoptic Gospels. The three Gospels show three theological objectives and viewpoints. Each Gospel has its own life setting, which is the context that produced the Gospel, and each Gospel addresses a new situation with a new theological perspective. Since its introduction in the early 1900s, almost every book in the Bible has become the subject of scrutiny by scholars who purse redaction criticism.

Other Methods

Refer to Resource 7-10 in the Student Guide.

Canonical Criticism—study of the Bible in its present canonical shape or form while taking into account the contributions made by modern critical study of the Bible. The focus is more on the theological emphases of the text in its present form, and how it relates to the entire canon.

Sociological Interpretation of the Bible—focus on the social setting of the biblical text and the social, religious institutions and roles played by individuals who occupy society. This method has led some

interpreters to explain the Conquest as a peasant uprising against the oppressive overlords of Canaan with the help of the incoming Israelites from the wilderness.

This method has brought to prominence the role of the prophets as charismatic challengers of the established authority of priests, the guardians of the establishment. In New Testament studies, this method redefined the nature of the Church in the first century based on the social structures of that time.

Liberation Hermeneutics—focus on God as a God who saves the oppressed and the marginal in the world from the oppressive political and religious powers.

Feminist Hermeneutics—focus on feminist ideologies and understanding of women and their social status and mistreatment by the male dominant society. Radical feminists attempt to "purge" the Bible of all the "male dominant" language and rhetoric, and theological perspectives.

Some feminists focus on the reconstruction of the historical realities that faced women at the time in which biblical texts were produced. Others seek to show the redemptive message of the gospel that addresses the freedom of women from social and religious bondage. Others show the contributions women have made to biblical faith.

See the essay "Contemporary Methods in Biblical Study" in the New Oxford Annotated Bible *for a summary evaluation of these literary-critical methods.*

A number of **literary critical methods** have emerged in the past 50 years in biblical study and scholarship. These methods depend on and are derived from a variety of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and literature. Also, various literary theories underlie these literary critical methods. Structuralism, narrative criticism, deconstruction, and reader-response criticism are some of the more recent developments of literary criticism.

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on students to respond.

Describe the various developments in the modern period.

Define and describe
- historical criticism
- literary criticism
- source criticism
- redaction criticism
- form criticism

Look Ahead

Now that we have completed our brief overview of the history of biblical interpretation, it is essential for us to establish a method of biblical exegesis appropriate to our Wesleyan understanding of the Bible. The method you will find in the next lesson is called Inductive Method. This method will seek to study the biblical text not only by placing the text in its historical, cultural setting, but also by investigating the literary form and structure of the text, and studying the meaning of the text in its literary context. This method will also focus on the message and meaning of the text to the modern reader.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

For Resource 7-12 you may choose to have the students work on all the passages or selected passages. They will need instruction from you as to which passages to work on.

Complete Resource 7-11.

Complete Resource 7-12.

Read Resource 7-13.

Write in your journal. Formational Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:12-22. Read your passage slowly and reflectively. Ask God to speak to you from Scripture. As He does, absorb what He says to you. Wait, reflect, pray. Do not feel compelled to “finish” the whole passage you were given. Do not feel compelled “not to finish” it either. ☺ Write down what you can capture of what God says to you through Scripture.

Lesson 8

Inductive Method of Biblical Exegesis

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	The Inductive Method	Lecture	Resources 8-1—8-10
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 155-214.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

Call on 2 students to share his or her response to the homework—one for each resource 11 and 12.

Return and collect homework.

Orientation

In our previous lessons, we have examined various ways of reading the Bible from the biblical times to the modern period. We have witnessed the fact that at various times in the history of God's people, the people of God have resorted to various methods of reading and understanding Scripture. We have moved from the biblical period to early Christian, patristic, medieval, Reformation, and modern periods in the history of biblical interpretation. Each method was valid and meaningful to its respective period. Each method we witnessed also has its own weaknesses. This raises the question, "What is an appropriate exegetical method that would help us to hear God in the context in which we live today?"

We have followed the view in this module that exegesis should be carried out in a proper and methodical way in order to bring out the meaning of the biblical text. That means exegesis should be done following the rules and methods that have developed through history for ascertaining the "original" meaning of a biblical text. In this lesson, we follow the inductive method, a popular method of exegesis in the evangelical setting.

Inductive method gives priority to the text, and follows certain steps in a certain order to consider all the relevant data to ascertain the meaning of the text. Inductive Bible study aims to answer the following questions:

- What does the text say?—observation of the text
- What does the text mean?—interpretation of the text
- What does the text say to the modern reader?—application of the text and its meaning

Inductive Bible study, in order to be done properly, must follow sound hermeneutical principles.

Scholars follow different steps of exegesis in the inductive method. Some may have five, six, or seven, or more steps. This lesson follows a 10-step process, though it is possible to combine some into one or more steps. These steps will be illustrated using Amos 5:21-24 as the text of our study.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- identify and describe the various steps of inductive Bible study
- do exegesis of a biblical text using the inductive method

Lesson Body

Lecture: The Inductive Method

(75 minutes)

Steps of Exegesis: Amos 5:21-24

Refer to Resource 8-1 in the Student Guide.

Step 1

The study of a biblical passage should begin with an *investigation of the book in which the passage is located*. This requires a thorough reading of the book. Key questions to ask:

- To what section of the Bible does the book belong?
- What is the relationship of the book to other Old Testament/New Testament books?
- To what period in Israel's history/Christianity does the book belong?
- What are the major theological themes of the book?
- What is the major literary type of the materials in the book?
- What is literary structure of the book?

You should have found answers to these basic questions in the Old Testament and New Testament survey modules.

Illustration

Amos' book is composed of numerous short speeches. These speeches—literary units—can be grouped together as follows:

- 1:1—title of the book
- 1:2—introductory oracle announcing judgment
- 1:3-2:16—oracles of judgment against the nations, Judah, and Israel
- 3:1-6:14—judgment upon Israel
- 7:1-9:10—five visions of judgment
- 9:11-15—Israel's restoration

This literary structure of the book clearly shows judgment was the main theme of Amos' preaching.

Refer to Resource 8-2 in the Student Guide.

Step 2

Identify the literary unit that is the focus of exegesis.

A literary unit is a passage of scripture that has a clearly defined theme or central idea. For the most part, books of the Old Testament and New Testament

are made up of a large number of individual passages or literary units, each with a key idea or theme. Changes in theme, characters, speakers, addressees, location, literary form, etc., help us identify the boundaries of various literary units in a biblical book.

Illustration

Chapter 5 begins with a lament (vv 1-3). This is followed by an exhortation (vv 4-7), praise (vv 8-9), indictment and admonition (vv 10-13), exhortation (vv 14-15), judgment (vv 16-17), and a woe oracle which deals with the tragic destiny of those who expect to experience salvation on the day of the Lord (vv 18-20). Judgment is the theme of verses 25-27. Amos 5:21-24 is a distinct literary unit; this is preceded by a "woe" oracle (vv 18-20) and followed by a judgment speech (vv 25-27).

Step 3

Refer to Resource 8-3 in the Student Guide.

Identify the literary form—genre—and its rhetorical function.

See the various forms of prophetic speech and rhetorical function at the end of this lesson.

Illustration

Literary form—genre

Amos 5:21-24 is in the form of an instruction—*torah*—similar to a priestly instruction, aimed to instruct the listeners to do that which is right and required by God. The speech is in the first person; Yahweh himself is the speaker; the usual messenger formula, "thus says Yahweh," is lacking. We may designate this as a prophetic *torah.*

Rhetorical function

The oracle opens with Yahweh's words "I hate," "I despise" addressed to the worshiping community. Yahweh worship was an elaborate act, yet He rejects the worship. The *rhetorical function of this speech is thus to create shock and dismay among the worshipers; the prophet also aims to offer an alternative to the present form of worship.*

Step 4

Refer to Resource 8-4 in the Student Guide.

Discuss the immediate setting of the biblical passage.

The goal of this step is to place the text in its actual historical, social, cultural, and religious setting. The

following questions will help us to place the text in its proper setting.

- Who was the author?
- Who were the recipients?
- When did the message of the book first originate?
- What is the particular historical situation of that period, political leadership and political developments of that time?
- Does the text contain references to particular cultural customs of that period?
- What were the religious practices or beliefs of the people being addressed?
- What spiritual need prompted the writing of the message contained in the text?

Reconstruction of the setting would allow the reader to engage the text and enter into the world in which the text originated. This is essential to one's understanding of the meaning of the text intended by the writer.

Illustration

Historical and political setting

Amos' ministry took place during the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 BC), in the middle of the eighth century BC. Jeroboam II was the great-grandson of Jehu (842-815 BC), who brought an end to the Omri dynasty that ruled Israel for 34 years (Omri 876-869 BC, Ahab 869-850 BC, Ahaziah 850 BC, and Jehoram 849-842 BC).

Jehu's massacre of the Omri dynasty was authorized by the prophet Elisha. This blood purge, however, led to serious political instability in the Northern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom's alliance with Judah—the Southern Kingdom—was broken. King Ahaziah of Judah, who was also killed during the military coup carried out by Jehu, was the son of Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. The murder of Jezebel, Ahab's wife and princess of Tyre, caused the Northern Kingdom's political alliance with Tyre to come to an end.

Israel—the Northern Kingdom—thus became politically weak and powerless to protect itself from external threats. Jehu's army could not withstand the Syrian campaign against Israel in the Transjordan region. The Syrian campaign continued during the reign of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu (815-801 BC). However, conditions changed during the days of Jehoash, the grandson of Jehu (801-786 BC). He recaptured most of these areas from the Syrians. Political strength and prosperity returned to Israel. The next ruler, Jeroboam

II—Jehu's great-grandson—brought remarkable recovery of economic and political strength to his kingdom (2 Kings 14:23-29).

During the days of Jeroboam II, the citizens of the Northern Kingdom saw the rise of Assyria as an empire. Assyria's policy was to carry out military campaigns against the small and independent kingdoms in the Syria-Palestine region. Israel existed under this political threat from an imperial power. Though Amos does not mention Assyria as the agent of Yahweh's judgment against the Northern Kingdom, it is very likely Assyria is the "enemy" mentioned in Amos 3:11.

Cultural, social, and religious setting

The economic and political prosperity of Israel under Jeroboam II did not benefit the entire nation. The oracles of Amos show that the poor remained poor while the rich accumulated more wealth through greed and oppressive treatment of the less fortunate citizens in the land. The nation as a whole, by culture, religion, and other traditions, was made up of people who belonged to the family of God through the covenant at Mount Sinai. The covenant conditions called for justice and righteousness in the society and care and concern for the poor, widows, and the oppressed in the society. However, Amos' book informs us that the rich in the community showed no regard for the plight of the poor in the land.

The citizens of the Northern Kingdom, though they were followers of Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, practiced idolatry and worshiped in shrines they set up in defiance of the divinely chosen place of worship in Jerusalem. Though Jehu carried out a holy war against the Cannanite religion and the Baal worshipers, he himself did not "walk in the law of the Lord" (2 Kings 10:31). The same indictment is given to the rest of his family that ruled Israel. Parenthetically, Israel's kings as a whole continued the path of Jeroboam I, Israel's first king, who is often mentioned in 1 and 2 Kings as the king "who made Israel to sin."

During the time of Amos, places like Bethel and Gilgal were venerable places of worship in the Northern Kingdom. Amos' book contains a number of oracles that indicate ritual observances of sacred days at these places went hand in hand with idolatry and superficial religiosity.

Amos 5:21-24 seems to indicate those who had violated the covenant laws were the first in line to offer whole burnt offerings and thank offerings to Yahweh. There was no shortage for rituals in the land. Yet in the midst of their false religious worship and hypocrisy, complacency, sin, and idolatry, they believed and claimed Yahweh would come to save them from their enemies on the Day of the Lord. It is likely that Amos pronounced the words in 5:21-24 at the royal sanctuary at Bethel. The oracle is addressed to those who claimed religious piety through their elaborate and self-righteous religious activities.

Refer to Resource 8-5 in the Student Guide.

Step 5

Establish the relationship of the text to the passages that precede and follow the text.

Biblical passages also have a literary setting. That means the text belongs to a literary context marked by preceding and following passages. These preceding and following passages may be related to the text being studied by a common theme and/or literary arrangement. Some passages may be chronologically arranged; others may be arranged by a common literary type or genre. Often, the meaning of the preceding and following passages may determine the meaning of the text being studied. Recognizing the literary and theological continuity of the text to the surrounding texts—or lack thereof—is important for a proper understanding of its meaning.

Illustration

The text of this study is preceded by oracles of judgment, chapters 1-4.

Chapter 5 begins with a lament (vv 1-3). This is followed by an exhortation (vv 4-7), praise (vv 8-9), indictment and admonition (vv 10-13), exhortation (vv 14-15), judgment (vv 16-17) and a woe oracle that deals with the tragic destiny of those who expect to experience salvation on the day of the Lord (vv 18-20).

Judgment is the theme of verses 25-27. Chapters 6:1-9:10 continue the theme of judgment. The book ends with an oracle of Israel's restoration, which is the only statement of salvation found in the book.

Though there is no logical sequence in the present arrangement of the various oracles in chapter 5, the passage of this study has a clear, thematic relationship to verses 4-7 and 14-15. The admonitions found in

these three oracles all deal with proper relationship with God and others in the community as the necessary prerequisite for true worship. The theme of this passage is again related to the preceding judgment oracles in that here there is a hidden warning to those who ignore the admonition to follow justice and righteousness in community life. This warning is made explicit in the following verses of the chapter, 25-27.

Refer to Resource 8-6 in the Student Guide.

Step 6

The next step of exegesis involves the *identification of literary structure of the text* the writer has utilized to expand the main idea.

Here we must analyze the text as a literary work and look for sub-themes and the development of the plot or the main idea.

- How does the text begin?
- Does the text address specific people?
- Does the text introduce a speaker?
- Does the speaker utilize sub-themes to expand the main idea?
- How does the text end?

A careful reading of the text will show the literary structure or different verse groups through which the writer seeks to develop the main theme.

Illustration

Literary structure

- Verses 21-23—Worship that is unacceptable to Yahweh—what Yahweh rejects
- Verse 24—Worship that is acceptable to Yahweh—what Yahweh accepts

Refer to Resource 8-7 in the Student Guide.

Step 7

Study the grammatical structure, relationship of words and phrases, *and meaning of words and phrases*.

When dealing with prose materials, we need to identify the sentence structure, the main clause and subordinate clauses. It is important to note how the subordinate clauses (dependent clauses) are related to the main clause (independent clause). This task should also include asking questions about:

- The nature of the independent clause; is it a command or a declaration or assertion, etc.?

- Dependent clause: does it answer questions of when, where, why, how?

The main objective is to discover the flow of thought that clarifies our understanding of the message of the text. When dealing with Hebrew poetry, we must look for various types of parallelism, and poetic devices such as similes and metaphors.

The next part of this step is the investigation of the meaning of words in their original, ancient setting. What a particular word meant in the ancient language and culture is important for us to understand so we may faithfully bring out the meaning of the biblical text. Often a word may have a range of meanings. Some words may have particular theological meaning.

It is important to select the meaning that is appropriate to the context. Our attempt here is to connect words and phrases to each other and to understand the meaning of the text in its original setting. This task involves the use of Bible commentaries, Bible dictionaries, study Bibles, and other resources that contain Hebrew word studies.

Illustration

Grammatical structure

The first part of this text—verses 21-23—clearly expresses the type of rituals God rejects. Verse 21 contains two clauses that assert or declare Yahweh's attitude to Israel's worship. Verse 22 begins with a logical connective "though" that sets forth a condition. However, this conditional clause is followed by two assertive/declaratory statements that show the futility of meeting the condition. Verse 23 begins with an imperative/command, and it is followed by another declaratory clause.

This is followed by a contrasting statement in verse 24. Verse 24 introduces the antithesis of verses 21-23. Verse 24 begins with the connective particle "but," which introduces the antithesis. This verse defines what Yahweh accepts as worship from His people.

Relationship of words and phrases and meaning of words and phrases

Yahweh's speech to the worshiping community begins with a strong and shocking expression, "I hate" in verse 21. In the Hebrew thinking, "hate"—*sane*'—expresses the intense feeling of disgust against

someone or something. “I hate” is the exact opposite of “I love.”

Other biblical writers also use the verb “hate” with Yahweh as the subject. Yahweh hates all the abominable forms of pagan worship (Dt 12:31; 16:22); He hates wickedness (Ps 5:6; 11:5), idolatry and evil (Is 1:14; 61:8; Jer 44:4; Mal 2:16), and the perverse among Israel (Hos 9:15; Jer 12:8). Amos also uses this word in a different context. In 5:10, he describes the religious community as those who “hate”—*sane’*—“the one who reproves in court.” Obviously, Yahweh’s expression of hatred is the result of Israel’s stubborn refusal to give heed to the prophetic exhortation.

“I despise”—*ma’as*—emphasizes Yahweh’s hatred, but it also conveys the idea of rejection. Yahweh’s response to Israel’s worship is further described by the following phrases: “I take no delight” (v 21), “I will not accept” (v 22), “I will not look upon” (v 22), “I will not listen” (v 23). All these phrases essentially repeat the same idea expressed above.

Throughout this oracle the various activities of worship are identified with the second-person possessive pronoun—*your* feasts, *your* solemn assemblies, *your* burnt offerings and cereal offerings, *your* fatted beasts, *your* songs, *your* harps. These are activities shaped according to the will of the worshiper against Yahweh’s will expressed in the Mosaic law. These rituals display nothing more than the religiosity and the pride of the worshiping community.

The repeated use of the second-person possessive pronoun “your” shows Yahweh’s assessment of Israel’s worship as self-centered in nature with no regard for the object of their worship, and His covenant conditions. Yahweh, the object of their worship, totally rejects the worship of Israel. The ritualistic expressions of Israel’s worship are unacceptable to her God.

Verses 21-23 contain a list of various expressions of Israel’s worship rejected by Yahweh. This list does not contain any irreverent or pagan activities. All the activities mentioned here are practices prescribed by the law of Moses. However, it is not an exhaustive list but contains only three specific areas of concern that most likely serve to illustrate the general picture of Israel’s religious attitude in worship. The three areas Amos deals with are festivals (v 21), offerings (v 22), and music in worship (v 23).

Feasts/festivals—*hag*—is an overall term for all the major festivals of Israel in the Old Testament period. They were the following: the feast of Passover and the Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths. The Law required all male Israelites to appear before Yahweh at the appointed place of worship (Jerusalem) during these three festival times (Ex 23:15-18; Deut 16:10-16). The citizens of the Northern Kingdom, in defiance of the holy place in Jerusalem, kept these festival days in the places of their idolatry at Bethel and Gilgal.

These festivals commemorated 1) Passover: God's redemptive power, 2) Weeks/Pentecost: the giving of the law at Sinai, and 3) Booths: the tent-dwelling days of Israel and God's graciousness in the wilderness. These were meant to evoke gratitude and thanksgiving among the worshiping community. It is reasonable to assume Yahweh rejected these festivals celebrated by the citizens of the Northern Kingdom because they lacked the spirit of humility, gratitude, true faith, repentance, and commitment to do justice and righteousness in the society.

"Assemblies"—*ʿasara*—most likely refers to community gatherings during festival times. The Deuteronomic law called for observance of a solemn assembly on the seventh day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Dt 16:8). Such holy assemblies were also a part of the feast of Booths (Lev 23:33-36; Num 29:35-38). In the context of these festivals, this was a day of rest as well as a day of worship.

Also, when the covenant community was faced with a national calamity, leaders called out such assemblies to make supplication to Yahweh (Joel 1:14; 2:15). In verse 21 Yahweh expresses His intense dissatisfaction with these assemblies of Israel. *I take no delight*—from the verb *riah,* which means "to smell" or "breath in the scent" is the opposite of Yahweh's action of accepting an offering with His favor—"a pleasing odor to the Lord" (Lev 1:9).

In verse 22, Amos announces Yahweh's rejection of the three most important offerings of Israel's worship. These three offerings—burnt offerings, cereal offerings, and peace offerings—were brought by the believers to express their desire to maintain a faithful and righteous relationship with God.

A righteous relationship with God was the essential prerequisite for these offerings. Burnt offerings—*ʿola*—indicate "sending up" in smoke the odor of the

See Leviticus 1 for the ritual.

sacrificial animal, which was completely burnt on the altar. An important part of this ritual was the identification of the believer with the sacrificial victim by laying hands upon its head. It was not an offering for the forgiveness of sin or guilt, but rather a symbol of the worshiper's total dedication and commitment to God, and an expression of willingness to give one's life to God, if that would be the divine demand.

Cereal offerings or grain offerings—*min+a*—were mostly a tribute or a gift by the worshiper to God. This custom in Israel was parallel to the practice of vassals paying a tribute to a sovereign king in the ancient times. The Mosaic law required the Israelites periodically to bring their gift to Yahweh to express their gratitude to Him for His favor and blessings.

See Leviticus chapter 3.

Peace offerings—*selem,* which is literally offerings of fatlings—in Israel were a Communion sacrifice offered by the believer for the purpose of maintaining the alliance and fellowship between a believer and Yahweh. During this ritual the worshiper offered only a portion of the sacrificial victim on the altar. This was Yahweh's portion. The rest was consumed by the worshiper. This offering symbolized the wholeness of relationship that existed between the worshiper and Yahweh.

In verse 23, Amos deals with music, which was an integral part of worship in Israel. This verse suggests worship was conducted in the background of elaborate singing accompanied by musical instruments. *The noise of your songs* probably means the loud voice with which the worshiping community sang hymns of the Temple. Song—*sir*—in the Book of Psalms is a title to a hymn of praise used in the Temple worship in Israel. Loud praises, exultation, and singing were most likely heard during worship services at Bethel and Gilgal. The *harp* was the most popularly used musical instrument in Israel's worship. Here it is mentioned in particular because it was a symbol of luxury.

The phrases *I hate, I despise, I take no delight in, I will not accept, I will not look upon, take away,* and *I will not listen* all express Yahweh's hatred and rejection of the rituals and performances that were a part of worship in the Northern Kingdom. In the traditional priestly language, the positive forms of these verbs—accept, regard, bring near, hear, etc.—are expressions of Yahweh's good will and response to the worshiper. The use of the negative forms of these verbs cannot be taken to mean Yahweh is calling for an end to the sacrificial system and the role of music or other forms

of praises in worship. The key to our understanding of this denunciation is found in the following verse.

Verse 24 begins with a conjunction, "but," which introduces an antithesis. This verse describes what kind of worship is acceptable to Yahweh. Some scholars understand this verse as a judgment word that points out the overflowing effect of Yahweh's justice and righteousness, which He will carry out throughout the land. However, a proper understanding of this verse requires us to place the words "justice" and "righteousness" in the context of Israel's prophetic tradition and teaching. Here, Amos is referring to the most basic and fundamental requirements for maintaining a relationship with God.

Though cultic rituals have their legitimate place in worship, Israel's prophets maintained the view that the worshiping community must establish a moral and ethical foundation to the personal and corporate life of its members. Legal and cultic observances must be preceded by a commitment to obey the moral and ethical demands of God. In that sense we find here in verse 24 a fine example of prophetic instruction—*tora*.

Justice (*mishpat)* and righteousness (*s*^{e}*daqa)* belong to the vocabulary of the Sinai covenant. Israel's traditions affirm the deliverance from Egypt and the establishment of the covenant at Sinai were actions through which Yahweh had demonstrated himself as a just and righteous God. Through these events, He not only fulfilled His promises to Israel's ancestors but also showed himself as the God who is extremely concerned about the vindication of the just, the poor, and the oppressed in the world.

See Exodus 3:7-10.

Through His judicial act, He proclaimed Pharaoh as wicked and Israel as innocent—the Exodus story. The Exodus experience was a demonstration of Yahweh's *mishpat* on behalf of Israel. The 8th-century BC prophets rightly insisted Yahweh's primary call to Israel was therefore to establish *mishpat* in their relationships, which included relationship with God and others in the community.

Mishpat in relationship with God is expressed through obedient worship and faithful living. *Mishpat* in relationship with others is performed through meeting the covenant obligations to others, which included actions to guarantee everyone an opportunity to experience the blessings and prosperity of the Promised Land. The performance of *mishpat* was the

moral obligation of every Israelite individual, not just the duty of the court system.

Righteousness—*s^{e}daqa*—is frequently found in the Old Testament literature in conjunction with justice (*mishpat)*. Amos described justice as "the fruit of righteousness" (6:12). Righteousness, when it is associated with justice, is understood as a quality or attitude displayed by the desire to live according to the standards set up by the society. The 8th-century BC prophets used this term to describe the right attitude or right thinking a covenant member must have for another individual in Israel. Frequently, this term is applied to the right attitude one must have for God.

Amos uses two profound metaphors in verse 24 to instruct his listeners. The metaphors are taken from the natural surroundings of Palestine. He instructs his listeners to *let justice roll down like waters*. Floods are unusual occurrences in Palestine, except after a winter rain when the melting snow would produce a sudden surge in the flow of water.

Most streams in Palestine do not qualify for the description as an everflowing stream because they dry up quickly in intense heat. However, a few streams come out of springs that seldom dry up. Yahweh's will for His people is that they become an eternal, never failing source of justice and righteousness in the world. The implied message is that this condition is necessary for Yahweh to accept, love, and have regard for the offerings and sacrifices of those who worship and call upon His name.

Refer to Resource 8-8 in the Student Guide.

Step 8

Make conclusions about the theological truth or lessons the writer of the text intended to communicate to the ancient listeners.

Our attempt here is to discover how God speaks or acts in response to human needs. In the context of human sin, the text may contain a word of warning, a call to repentance, or even a threat of judgment. In the context of despair and hopelessness, His word may be a word of hope or an assurance or comfort or a promise of help or salvation. In the context of doubt, His word may be a revelation of His majesty and glory or a miracle to create faith. God's word may be an instruction, guidance, counsel, or an admonition. Or it may be a call to praise, express gratitude, or examine one's relationship with God and others. In general, the literary form of the passage should serve as our guide

in the determination of the nature of the theological truth and its application today.

Since God's word or action is an event of revelation, we must ask, "What response did revelation elicit from its recipients?" Human response may be praise and worship, obedience and submission, humility and gratitude; all are characteristics of those who are faithful to God. Where human response had been disobedience and rejection of God's word, rebellion and stubbornness, the text instructs us to model our lives after those who have been faithful to God. The theology of the text helps us establish the biblical principles the text is trying to communicate to us today.

Illustration

God encountered His people at a critical time in their history. The Northern Kingdom, though they claimed to be covenant-keeping people of Yahweh, worshiped God at unauthorized places of worship. These worship centers—Bethel, Dan, Gilgal—have become centers of idolatry and pagan practices. Their devotion to God was skin-deep, though there was no shortage of religious rituals and observances of religious festivals and holy days.

The society was corrupt with oppression and injustice at all levels of relationship. Worship did not have any impact on the people's moral, ethical, and spiritual lives. Worship was not a way of life for the people of God. This crisis is what prompted God to speak through Amos.

The following are some of the key theological lessons of Amos 5:21-24.

- *God rejects empty and meaningless religious rituals that lack any connection between worship and public life.* There is nothing stated implicitly or explicitly in this text that leads us to assume God rejected the system He himself established at Sinai. Ritual is part of the worship of God. However, God is not pleased with any act performed in the setting of worship that is not lived out in everyday life. In other words, worship should have a direct relation to public life.

- *God rejects those forms of worship and practices that focus on self-satisfaction and personal enjoyment, rather than repentance and contrition*. See the repeated use of second-person plural

possessive pronouns (“your”) in this oracle. Israel performed these rituals to demonstrate their religiosity and spirituality.

Though Israel was an idolatrous nation, its members presumed to have a righteous relationship with God. Rather than bringing offerings prescribed by the Law to seek atonement and reconciliation with God, the sinful community brought offerings that claimed righteousness with God. Sinners cannot claim righteousness before God. Worship that lacks a repentant and contrite attitude on the part of the worshiper is unacceptable to God.

- *Rituals have no inherent power to coerce God or manipulate Him to be pleased with the worshiper*. God accepts and regards only those who have a firm commitment to fulfill all of His requirements. He is not manipulated by extravagant offerings or lavish displays of religious rituals.

- *The worshiping community must forcefully and persistently carry out the call to establish justice in society.* God’s people are the recipients of God’s justice. Therefore, they must be spokespersons for God where there is injustice, wickedness, and oppression. This needs to be done impartially and without reservation. This is their primary obligation to God and others in the community. God’s people must be committed to carry out their covenantal responsibility and obligations to others in society.

- *The worshiping community must forcefully and persistently maintain uprightness in their conduct toward each other and with God*. This straightforwardness is the natural outcome of a society’s determination to maintain justice. Righteousness is a quality of the human heart, and it must be evident in a believer’s life at all times and in all situations in life.

- *Obedience to God is the key prerequisite to worship.* This obedience must be full and expressed in an overflowing manner in every aspect of the life of the worshiping community. God does not accept any form of worship which lacks this requirement.

- *Worship that is acceptable to God is worship that results in the transformation of the individual, which further leads to the transformation of society.* Proper worship not only changes the

individual but also leads the worshiper to become an agent of change and transformation in society.

Refer to Resource 8-9 in the Student Guide.

Step 9

Relate the text and its theology to the overall message of the Bible.

The following questions will help us here:

- Is the theology of the text before us unique in that it deals with a particular culture or specific situations in the life of ancient Israel or the early Christian church?
- Do we find parallel expressions elsewhere in the book in which the text is located?
- Do we find parallel expressions elsewhere in other books of the Bible?
- Is the theology of the text consistent with the overall theological teachings of the Bible?
- Do we find clarifications or expansions of the theology of the text elsewhere in the Old Testament?
- Does the New Testament interpret the Old Testament text or clarify it or modify it?

These questions will help us to establish the canonical authority of the text. Further, this step will help us distinguish between religious practices that are culturally conditioned and time-bound, and theological truths that are timeless and unchanging in character and application.

Illustration

Leviticus 1-7 summarize the appropriate conditions for the various offerings in ancient Israel. Whole burnt offerings, peace offerings, and cereal offerings were offerings for those who stood in a right relationship with God. Sinners were required by the Law to bring sin offering, or guilt offering, to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God. It is clear Israel's worship disregarded the Law because the worshiping community, though they were sinners, were bringing the offering of the righteous people.

This oracle of Amos is similar in many respects to Isa 1:10-17, Hos 6:6, and Mic 6:6-8. These prophetic sayings deal with the essentials of worship and the conditions for Yahweh's acceptance of the worshiping community. Samuel's admonition to King Saul (1 Sam 15:22-23) is an early lesson on obedience as the key to Yahweh's acceptance of sacrifice. Similar emphasis

on the conditions of worship is found in Ps 15, 24, and 51.

See Jeremiah's Temple Sermon in ch. 7, and his speeches to Judah's kings in 22:15-17.

Concern for justice and righteousness is a key theme in the preaching of all the eighth-century prophets—Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah. Isaiah reiterates the theme of true religion and worship in 58:1-7. We find similar emphasis on justice and righteousness in Jeremiah and other later prophets of Israel.

In the Gospels, Jesus' teaching of the requirements of entering into the kingdom of God is a reiteration of the prophetic emphasis on total obedience to God's will (Mt 5:20; 7:21). Observance of ritual without true commitment to lovin God and one's neighbor is meaningless and hypocritical. This was Jesus' primary message to the Pharisees of His day. James also defines true religion in terms of social justice and righteousness in society (Jas 1:26-27).

The message of Amos 5:21-24 is thus consistent with the biblical teaching on worship that is acceptable to God.

Step 10

Refer to Resource 8-10 in the Student Guide.

Apply the message of the text to contemporary Christian life.

Exegesis cannot remain in a vacuum. The theological lessons of the text contain the message of God to us today. Some texts may suggest lessons constrained by the limits of time and culture. Theological lessons with universal application are those that promote the divine characteristics and attributes, God's plan of redemption for all humanity, proper moral and ethical conduct, and those that enable all human beings to become truly the image of God.

In general, a theological principle that may lend itself to various forms of practical expressions consistent with the intent of the biblical text can be considered a timeless principle. Specific lessons, on the other hand, relate to a particular context with limited application.

In most cases, proper exegesis of the text will guide us in this evaluation process.

Illustration

- *How we worship God is a matter of great concern to God*. Our worship should be guided by the principles and guidelines of worship we find in

Scripture. His acceptance or rejection of our worship depends on our commitment to follow His guidelines. *Self-righteous attitude and self-righteous worship are an abomination to God*.

- We live in a culture in which "almost anything goes" is becoming the rule of worship. In our market-driven society, worship seems to follow the "customer satisfaction" philosophy that aims to meet the needs and wants of the worshiping community. Against such tendencies and practices, *the text calls us to focus on the real object of our worship, who is the majestic and holy God, the one who calls us to worship Him in the splendor of His holiness.*

- *Rituals are important to worship*. Rituals help us remember and celebrate the grace God bestows upon us through Christ. Contempt for rituals means contempt for the saving grace of God. However, rituals cannot save us. *The text challenges us to be freed from the presumptive thinking that rituals are a substitute for a personal relationship with God.*

- *We must recognize and acknowledge our sinfulness before God when we come to worship Him*. Repentance is essential to restoration of relationship with God. Our sacrifice God accepts is "a broken and contrite heart" (Ps 51: 17).

- *Worship is an act of obedience*. We obey God because we love Him. Our worship must flow from this obedient love for God. Extravagant religious performances are not a substitute for faithfulness and obedience to God. Does our worship reflect our love for God?

- *God calls us to be agents of change and transformation in society.* Faithful obedience to God should lead to faithful living. Faithful living is exemplified by our concern for doing justice and righteousness in interpersonal relations and our community life. Do we have a heart that grieves over oppression, economic inequities, injustice, and violence in our world and in our communities? Are we passionate about living a life that fulfills the love commandment? Are we concerned about meeting our moral and ethical obligations to others? Does our worship lead us to serve others in the world in which we live? "We enter to worship . . . We leave to serve;" is this a cliché or a living reality in our lives?

Various Forms of Prophetic Speech

Refer to Resource 8-11 in the Student Guide.

Prophetic literature comes to us in a variety of literary forms or types (genres).

Each genre has its own literary features, which in turn serve a rhetorical function.

The *rhetorical function* of a genre is the effect or the outcome the author/speaker intended to produce in the reader or the listening audience by the use of its particular literary features.

Narratives

- ***historical narratives***—see Isa 36-39 and Jer 39-41.
- ***biographical or autobiographical narratives***—see Hos 1:2-9; 3:1-5; Am 7:10-17

Rhetorical function: aim to attest the historicity of events and the authenticity of the prophets

- ***vision narratives***—reports of revelation through visions; see Am 7:1-9; 8:1-3; Jer 1:11-19

Rhetorical function: to establish the prophet as the recipient of revelation

- ***accounts of symbolic actions***—Prophets occasionally conveyed a divine word by performing an action; see Isa 20:1-6.

Rhetorical function: to create in the reader the powerful effect of the action being performed

Dialogue with God—Hos 9:14; Jer 14:11-22; 15:15-21

Rhetorical function: to establish the personal relationship between God and the prophet; the prophet as a mediator/intercessor

Prophetic prayers—Jer 17:14-18

Rhetorical function: to persuade God to avert His judgment or to seek God's help for himself or for the people

Messenger-style speeches—the prophet as Yahweh's messenger

- Judgment oracles—announcement of judgment
- Salvation oracles—announcement of salvation

Rhetorical function: to establish the prophet as the authentic spokesperson of God

Woe oracles

Announcement of doom, destruction, and misfortune; always begins with the word "Woe."

Rhetorical function: to create in the listener the effect of the utter destruction that awaits

Legal disputes

Prophetic speech patterned after the court proceedings (indictment, summons, witnesses, defendant's speech, plaintiff's speech, verdict); see a fully developed legal dispute in Mic 6.

Rhetorical function: to bring a case against the audience in which God is the plaintiff and the audience is the defendant.

Wisdom sayings—Am 3:3-8

Prophetic statements patterned after wisdom statements.

Rhetorical function: to impart wisdom that would lead to the proper relationship with God

Funeral song—Am 5:1-2

Lament over the dead, usually given before the death happens, in anticipation of the impending death

Rhetorical function: to create the mood of a funeral anticipated by the prophet because the judgment of destruction is upon the reader

Parables—Isa 5:1-7

A story to illustrate a theological truth

Rhetorical function: to interact with the people and to involve them in the story, through which the readers see themselves as playing a part in the story told

Hymns—Am 4:13; 5:8-9

Usually a hymn praising God the Creator

Rhetorical function: to express praise in the midst of sin and judgment

Priestly instruction—Am 5:21-24

Prophetic speech patterned after a priestly instruction

Rhetorical function: to challenge the audience to do what Yahweh truly demands as worship from His people; to caution against falsehood in worship

Prophetic liturgy—Hos 14:1-3; Jer 3:21-25

See Amos 4:4-5 for a satirical variation of the priestly call to worship.

Prophetic speech that outlines the ritual for worship

Rhetorical function: to give instruction for true worship

Oracles against foreign nations—Isa 13-23; Jer 46-51; Ez 25-32; Am 1:3-2:3

Speeches of judgment addressed to the nations surrounding Israel

Rhetorical function: to demonstrate the truth that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the sovereign Creator, Ruler, and Judge of all nations

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on different students to name one of the steps and describe it.

Can you identify and describe the various steps of inductive Bible study?

Look Ahead

In our next lesson, the class will work together and do exegesis of a New Testament text following the 10 steps of inductive method.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

For Resource 8-13 you may assign each student one of the passages or allow them to choose a passage.

Complete Resource 8-12.

Complete Resource 8-13.

Write in your journal. Formational Reading: Habakkuk 3:2-19. Read your passage slowly and reflectively. Ask God to speak to you from Scripture. As He does, absorb what He says to you. Wait, reflect, pray. Do not feel compelled to “finish” the whole passage you were given. Do not feel compelled “not to finish” it either. ☺ Write down what you can capture of what God says to you through Scripture.

Lesson 9

Inductive Method, Part 2

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Theological Exegesis	Small Groups	Resource 8-13
0:35	Inductive Method	Guided Discussion	Resource Books
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Varughese, Alex. "Holiness and Pastoral Responsibility." In *Biblical Resources for Holiness Preaching*. Edited by H. Ray Dunning and Neil B. Wiseman. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1990, 337-50.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

In pairs have the students share with each other their responses to Resource 8-12.

Return homework and collect Resource 8-12.

Orientation

We will apply the 10 steps of exegesis presented in the previous lesson to a New Testament text.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- do exegesis of a biblical text using the inductive method

Lesson Body

Small Groups: Theological Exegesis

(25 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of 3 students each.

Each group should consist of students who studied the same passage for Resource 8-13.

Rotate among the groups and listen to how well students are grasping the concepts presented.

Collect homework at the end of this time.

In your group share with each other what you found about the passage you studied.

Challenge each other to support the statements that are made.

Guided Discussion: Inductive Method

(50 minutes)

Guide the students through the inductive method as presented in Lesson 8.

Allow students to explore more than one translation but try to stay with scholarly translations and not paraphrases.

You may need to have a supply of resource books available.

Call on students to work out responses for each of the steps before offering your thoughts and ideas.

We are going to work through the 10 steps of the Inductive Method of exegesis as presented in the last lesson. We will be using Titus 2:11-14 as our passage for investigation.

Step 1—investigation of the book

Step 2—identify the literary unit

Step 3—identify the literary form or genre, and its rhetorical function

Step 4—immediate setting

Step 5—relationship of the text to preceding and following passages

Step 6—identification of literary structure

Step 7

1. **Grammatical structure**
   - *For*—connecting particle
   - *the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all*—main clause

- *training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions*—purpose clause, in Greek, the clause has *hina,* meaning "in order that"
- *and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly*—purpose clause
- *while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*—temporal clause
- *He it is who gave himself for us*—main clause
- *that he might redeem us from all iniquity*—purpose clause
- *and purify for himself a people of his own*—purpose clause
- *who are zealous for good deeds*—adjectival clause

2. Analysis of words and meaning of words and phrases

See his exhortation to live a proper Christian life in 2:1-10.

Paul begins this text with the connecting particle *for,* which introduces the theological basis for the Christian's duty to live a godly life. *The grace of God* that *has appeared* is the primary motivating factor for a believer to live such a life.

The following is a list of some other key references to his use of the word "grace" in his Epistles. We are called to enter into grace by participating in the historical event of grace through being crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20; Rom 5:2). We are justified by the grace of God (2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:7). Though we possess grace, it remains a free gift. Therefore, no one can boast about it (1 Cor 1:20; 2 Cor 12:1-5). This grace is now at work in the life of believers, the power of which not only overcomes sin in the historical scene (Rom 5:20), and in the lives of individuals (1 Tim 1:14), but also provides support and comfort to a believer in distress or weakness (2 Cor 12:9). On the one hand, self-effort to continue in grace will lead to a believer's fall from it (Gal 5:4); on the other hand, one must grow strong in grace (2 Tim 2:1), guarding through the Holy Spirit this treasure entrusted to him/her (2 Tim 1:14).

The concept of God's grace is a key theme in Paul's writings, particularly in his theology of salvation. Grace has been manifested historically in the cross of Christ, through which God offers salvation to all mankind (Rom 3:23-24). It is possible to think Paul understood grace as "the kindness and love of God" that "appeared" for the salvation of the unrighteous (Titus 3:4-5).

The expression *the grace of God has appeared—epephanē*—is found only here in the New Testament. This act—*appeared*—refers to a sudden intervention of God on the historical scene. Accounts of such appearances are numerous in the Bible. But here it has to do with the climactic, divine entrance into history, the Christ event. Paul summarizes all the historical events associated with the life of Christ as *the grace of God*.

The purpose of this gracious, divine activity is evident in the phrase *bringing salvation to all men.* Salvation—*sōtērios*—is essentially freedom from the power of sin. It is a gift God himself brings to us.

The phrase *instructing us* (v 12) conveys Paul's understanding of the educative power of the grace of God. Grace has the power not only to save sinful humanity but also to instruct those who respond favorably *to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and*

to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

The Greek word for *instructing* is a participle form of the verb *paideuein*. In 1 Cor 11:32 and 2 Cor 6:9, Paul uses the same verb to describe actions of discipline through judgment/punishment. The Septuagint uses this word most often in this sense. However, in 2 Tim 2:25; 3:16; and here, Paul uses this verb to express the idea of educating the uneducated.

See NIV on verse 12.

Grace disciplines a believer to say "no" to the world and "yes" to God. Paul conveys here both the negative and the positive results of the teaching ministry of grace. A Christian is instructed to *deny ungodliness and worldly desires*. First of all, there is the act of denial or renunciation. The Greek aorist participle used here—*arnēsamenoi*—leads us to think the reference is to a particular time when the act of a complete breakaway from the past is accomplished.

See 1 Tim 2:2; 4:7; 6:5, 11.

Though some commentators may see here a reference to the sacrament of baptism as a specific context for such renunciation, it is more likely Paul has in mind the consecration of a believer, a theme well expressed in Rom 6:12-19. *Ungodliness—asebeia*—often used by Paul as the opposite of *eusebeia,* which means godliness; is not only a lack of reverence for God, impiety, but also a lack of acknowledgment of God in one's thoughts and actions. It is the denial of the power of the true and living God. Elsewhere Paul describes ungodliness as the religious condition of the heathen (Rom 1:18).

See Eph2:3; Gal 5:16-24.

The educative power of grace also enables a believer to deny *worldly desires—kosmikas epithumias*. Paul uses this phrase here as a synonym of another favorite Pauline expression, "desires of the flesh." The world—*kosmos*—through its own wisdom does not acknowledge God, and therefore it is apart from God (1 Cor 1:21). Consequently, its plans and actions are also evil (Jn 7:7).

Paul now turns to the positive effects of the teaching ministry of God's grace. Grace teaches a believer *to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age.* A Christian's ideal behavior is expressed in these phrases. Paul has already instructed Titus to urge the church leaders, old men, old women, young women, and young men to live sensibly, or to live a sober life, a life with "self-control," as in NIV. A Christian is taught by grace to exercise self-control in his or her thoughts and actions.

Grace also instructs a believer to live a righteous life—*dikaiōs*—or to behave in an upright manner. Uprightness is the right kind of behavior toward others. The idea of being conformed to the moral standards set forth by God is meant here.

A Christian also receives instruction on his or her relationship to God. He or she is called to live a "godly"—*eusebōs*—life, in total acknowledgment of God's power and authority over him or her, and in total consecration of his or her whole being to the service of his or her Creator and Redeemer. Moreover, a believer is instructed to live such a life of renunciation and consecration *in the present age*. Paul's use of *the present age* as the sphere of Christian life leads directly to the hope of life in another age yet to come.

Looking for the blessed hope. Paul expresses here an eagerness in his *looking,* for it does not refer to a casual peek at the future, rather to an active and eager expectation and diligent waiting. This *hope—elpida*—is further qualified with the adjective *blessed*. It is a blessed hope because it is centered on one's faith in Jesus Christ.

See 1 Tim 1:1.

This hope is based on an assurance from God, and therefore, it is certain. Again, it is a blessed hope, for it contains the expectation of *the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.* Paul has already dealt with the *appearing* of the grace of God in verse 11. Here he uses again the same Greek word for appearing, *epiphaneian;* however, this time in reference to the *glory* of Jesus Christ.

See Rom 8:18-25.

Paul is most likely thinking in terms of the second appearing—*parousia*—of Christ. Commentators notice here a similarity to the language of the accession of great monarchs in the ancient times. Paul is contemplating the majestic appearance of "the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15).

The next phrase in the Greek text—*tou megalou theou kai sōtēros hēmōn*—may be literally rendered, "of the great God and our Saviour" (KJV). Another possible translation is *of our great God and Savior* (NASB, NIV, and RSV). The question raised by this phrase is this: Does Paul speak here about the appearing of two Persons (God and Jesus Christ), or one Person (Jesus Christ)? It is certain Paul does not entertain here the thought of a great God and a little God, the Arian heresy. The context suggests the emphasis here is on the second coming of Christ. Christ is not only our Savior but also our God.

Who gave Himself for us. These words summarize the redeeming and purifying ministry of the grace of God. The proper basis for a believer's hope in the Second Coming is laid for him or her in the work of Christ. A believer does not wait for the appearance of an unknown benefactor in his or her life, but the One "who gave himself" for him or her. This is both the uniqueness and the paradox of the Christian gospel.

A heathen monarch or god would not surrender his/her life to save a nation. Such an idea is inconceivable. The good news of God's grace is that this great God gave up His life "as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:6; cf. Mk 10:45). It is described as a willing and voluntary act, not a coerced one or something imposed upon Him. The purpose of His death makes His sacrifice the purest, the noblest, and the most desirable of all events in humankind's history.

Christ gave us His life *that He might redeem us from every lawless deed*. The Greek verb translated here as *redeem—lutroō*—includes the concept of freeing someone by paying a ransom. This meaning is illustrated in the practice of the Israelites paying half a shekel to the Lord as a ransom during the time of census (Ex 30:12-15; also 13:13; Lev 25:47-55). The payment of a set amount is thus central to this concept.

See H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology, *3 vols.(Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City), 1941, 2:246; W. T. Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor, and Willard H. Taylor*, God, Man, and Salvation *(Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977), 385-87; H. Ray Dunning,* Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology *(Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 378-79.*

The language of this verse is reminiscent of Psalm 130:8: "And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (NASB). Paul here deals with the redemptive work of Christ (Gal 1:4; 1 Tim 2:6). In Paul's theology, Christ's death is described as a representative act (Rom 5:6-8). The Greek prepositional phrase *huper hēmōn—for us*—conveys the idea of "on behalf of" that brings out the representative character of Christ's death.

Christ's death offers to a sinner total freedom from his or her *lawless deed* or "wickedness." Lawlessness—*anomias*—is breaking the law, and it is the essence of sin (1 Jn 3:4). It is also the evidence of a person's state of subjection to the power of sin.

Newport J. D. White, The Expositor's Greek New Testament: The Epistle to Titus *(Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 196.*

Purify for Himself a people for His own [special] *possession*. Deliverance from the power of sin is followed by the purifying ministry of grace. Some commentators attempt to connect the phrase *purify—katharizō*—with "the washing" of regeneration in 3:5 and prefer to see here a reference to the sacrament of baptism. It is more likely Paul has in mind the

Donald Guthrie, Pastoral Epistles: an Introduction and Commentary *(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990)*, *201.*

sanctifying work of Christ, "since the act of purification is performed by Christ Himself."

The language of purifying/cleansing is a familiar theme in the Bible. After the people of Israel make the covenant with God at Mount Sinai, Moses sprinkled the blood upon the people to consecrate them as a holy nation before God (Ex 24:3-8). This act was in accordance with God's plan to make Israel His "own possession . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:5-6, NASB). Paul makes here a direct allusion to the prophetic statement of Ezekiel:

> They shall not defile themselves any more
> with their idols and their detestable things,
> or with any of their transgressions; but I will
> save them from all the backslidings in which
> they have sinned, and will cleanse them;
> and they shall be my people, and I will be
> their God (37:23, RSV).

The goal of this cleansing is to create *for Himself a people for His own possession. A people for His own possession* is a frequently used expression in the Old Testament (cf. Ex 19:5). This phrase indicates special property rights or ownership and the value of the property as a treasure. Paul here expresses the special relationship between the Redeemer and the redeemed.

This becomes clear when we consider the ancient, pagan practice of a conqueror king keeping for his special use a portion of the spoil before it was divided among his soldiers. In like manner, Christ the victorious King, who triumphed over the power of sin, is described here by Paul as choosing the redeemed for His special use. Once they were slaves to sin; now they are called to be servants *zealous for good deeds*. This is the proper response of the redeemed to the Redeemer. Just as Israel was called in the Old Testament to obey the Law as a response to their deliverance from slavery, the Church is called to live out the gospel in its ethical lifestyle.

See also Eph 2:10.

Step 8—theological truths of the text

Several theological truths come to expression in this passage: *The grace of God is an event that has happened in humankind's history—the grace of God has appeared*. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is declared in John 1:14. His life and ministry and His sacrificial death make visible for us the appearance of grace in a personalized form. Paul elsewhere speaks of the time of this appearance as "the fulness of the time"

(Gal 4:4, NASB). This historical manifestation of God's grace is something that can be individually experienced as Paul states: "recognizing the grace that had been given to me" (Gal 2:9, NASB).

Grace is God's *unmerited favor and His free and good will* to all humankind. Paul's use of the word *grace* in the greeting section of all of his Epistles is an evidence of his joy and gladness at this divine favor God bestowed upon the Church. Grace thus evokes gladness in a believer, because he or she is the recipient of the favor of God without merit.

Grace *appeared* to sinful humankind. *God comes to us in the context of our need*. Where there is bondage, where there is a cry of despair and hopelessness, God manifests himself as Yahweh, with the promise of His presence (Ex 3:7-8).

Grace enables an individual to receive salvation—For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation. Grace therefore may be spoken of as *prevenient,* or grace that goes before salvation. This grace enables a sinner who is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1, KJV) to awake and to hear the gospel of salvation. Grace further enables a believer to respond to the gospel call. This grace is bestowed upon *all* humankind.

Salvation is extended to all humankind. Grace shows no partiality to anyone. All who favorably respond to the gospel call become the recipients of salvation. God through Jesus Christ offers freedom from the power of sin impartially to all people, and He *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4, NASB).

One who responds to the favor of God *receives instructions* from God *in the art of godly living*. It is the ministry of grace to educate a believer and to produce in him/her true Christian character. The Book of Proverbs refers to this activity as the function of *wisdom,* the source of which is God (Prov 1-4).

Grace also enables a believer to renounce ungodliness and worldliness and to live a sober, righteous, and godly life. It is the *power of the grace of God* at work in the life of a believer, which *brings him to the moment of his denial* of his former way of life *and to the consecration of his life* to God (Gal 5:24).

The hope of a believer in Christ is *a solid assurance* of eternal life in Him. Therefore it is a blessed hope.

Jesus Christ is God. He alone is the true God and the Savior of humanity. His glory will be manifested at His second coming, and this glory will be the glory of God.

Christ alone is the Redeemer of sinners. Christ's death is a representative act to proclaim freedom to those under the captivity of sin. He died to redeem sinners not only from the guilt of sins committed but also from the power of sin.

Christ is also our Sanctifier. The goal of His death also includes cleansing the heart of a believer. Peter's remark that God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles when He cleansed the Gentiles' hearts by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:9) is a testimony to this effect of the Atonement.

Paul speaks of this ministry of Christ also in Eph 5:25-27. In this passage, he describes the goal of Christ's work: "sanctify . . . [and] present to Himself the church . . . having no spot or wrinkle . . . that she should be holy and blameless" (NASB). It is clear in this passage Paul has in mind an activity other than a ceremonial washing by water. The emphasis is on the need for an inner cleansing; that is, the cleansing of the heart that remains to be accomplished subsequent to the ministry of redemption from the power of sin.

The Church is the possession of Christ. Christ alone is her Savior and Lord. A believer is consequently called to be *zealously* involved in living out the character of her Lord.

Step 9—relate the text to the overall message of the Bible

Step 10—apply to contemporary Christian life

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on different students.

How do you feel about your ability to do the inductive method?

Which step is the most difficult?

Look Ahead

In our next lesson, we will review some significant guidelines for interpreting narrative and legal materials in the Old Testament.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

Using the 10-step Inductive Method, study and prepare a 3- to 5-page paper on Colossians 1:21-23.

Bring your journal to the next lesson.

Write in your journal. Reflect on the hymn “And Can It Be?”

[This page intentionally blank]

Lesson 10

Interpreting Old Testament Narratives and Law

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Inductive Method	Small Groups	Homework
0:30	Interpreting Old Testament Narratives	Lecture	Resource 10-1
1:00	Interpreting Old Testament Law	Lecture	Resource 10-2
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Fee, Gordon, and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, 78-93, 149-64.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 259-84.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

Call on students to share a portion from their journals on the formative reading sections they have done.

Return homework.

Orientation

Though we have established the inductive method of studying the Bible as a useful way to discover the meaning of a biblical text to its ancient and modern readers, it is important to keep in mind that each major genre or literary type in the Bible presents itself with certain hermeneutical principles to the modern interpreter.

The inductive method should take into account hermeneutical principles that would help us to avoid the mistake of subjective reading and misinterpretation of the biblical text. We will begin with the hermeneutical guidelines for interpreting narrative and legal materials in the Old Testament.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- describe the guidelines for reading and interpreting narratives in the OT
- describe the guidelines for reading and interpreting the legal materials in the OT

Lesson Body

Small Groups: Inductive Method

(20 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of 3 students each.

In your group share with each other your reports/ papers on Colossians 1:21-23.

Circulate among the groups to listen to the discussions and how well the students are grasping the concept of the inductive method.

Discuss the differences and similarities represented in the papers.

Collect homework papers.

Challenge each other on the thoughts and ideas presented.

Lecture: Interpreting Old Testament Narratives

(30 minutes)

Refer to Resource 10-1 in the Student Guide.

History and Narratives

More than 40 percent of the Old Testament is narrative. Narratives fall into different categories, such as

See IBI, 261-74 for various other categories of narratives, such as reports with various sub-categories.

- personal history, family/clan history
- national history, reports of events or happenings, etc.
- heroic narratives, prophet story
- comedy
- speeches

Key hermeneutical principles:

1. Establish the particular historical period in which the story is located. Placing the story within the actual historical setting allows us to see its relationship to the larger story and its impact on subsequent events. Every narrative in the Old Testament is a part of a larger narrative, which in turn is a part of the overall biblical story.

   Various segments of Old Testament history:
   - Primeval period—creation to 1900 BC
   - Patriarchal period—1900-1700 BC
   - Mosaic period—13th century BC
   - Wilderness wandering period—1280-1240 BC
   - Conquest and settlement—1240-1225 BC
   - Pre-monarchy—Judges—1226-1025 BC
   - Early monarchy—1025-1000 BC
   - Davidic-Solomonic period—1000-922 BC
   - Divided Kingdom—922-587 BC

- Babylonian Exile—587-539 BC
- The Period of Restoration—539-450 BC

2. Biblical narratives often lack details, though in some narratives we may find a great deal of detail. Some narratives may contain historical gaps. Avoid the temptation to fill the gaps with fictional or imaginary events. Nonetheless, imaginative thinking and historical understanding may give the reader plausible explanations to unexplained elements of the story.

Use an illustration such as Abram's call.

3. Follow the plot of the story, its movement from beginning to end. Usually, the plot involves a crisis in human situation/relation. What is the crisis, how did the crisis come to be, how was it resolved or not resolved?

4. Biblical stories convey the reality of divine revelation. Revelation seldom happened in a vacuum. At the heart of divine revelation is human need or crisis. God comes to meet specific human need/crisis. In the narratives, the modern reader should attempt to identify the human need.
   - What is the crisis that prompted God to appear on the scene with a message?
   - What is God doing with/for/in/ through His people?
   - What is He saying to His people?
   - How has He made himself known to His people?
   - What response did God elicit; what action or response of faith, obedience, trust, belief, etc., from 259-84is people?

   These are the primary concerns of the writers.

Group project. Ask the class to read Genesis 16:1-14. Identify the plot in this story. What is the human crisis that serves as the context for revelation? Ask the class to share their thoughts on how conflicts develop in family relationships. How do human actions cause disruption of relationships? What lessons do we learn about God through this story? How does this story end up as God's story?

5. Revelation presupposes supernatural events. Some may be explained; others we may not be able to explain. When miracles are part of the story? Focus on what God is doing for the people in the narrative to elicit faith, obedience, etc., rather than attempting to explain the various elements of the miraculous event.

6. Biblical narratives are shaped by particular theological convictions. For example,
   - Narratives in Genesis 1-11 attempt to portray God as the sovereign creator working in the midst of human sin to bring His creation into harmony with His will.
   - The theme of God's covenant promises underlie the patriarchal stories of Genesis 12-50.
   - Israel as a covenant community redeemed by the Lord is the underlying theme of Exodus.

- God's holiness and His call to Israel to be a holy people dominate the Book of Leviticus.
- God's guidance in the wilderness in the midst of Israel's sin and rebellion is the focus of Numbers.
- Deuteronomy sets up the pattern for Israel's life in the Promised Land.
- The theology of blessings and curses of Deuteronomy is central to the historical narratives in Joshua-2 Kings.
- The Chroniclers see history from the perspective of the positive impact of the Davidic kingdom.

7. Narratives usually do not teach doctrine, though we may use narrative to illustrate doctrinal issues.

Ask the class to read the story of Jephthah—Judges 11—and discuss whether his action was good or bad.

8. Not every narrative has a moral; not every character is an example to follow; not every narrative has a good ending. We must decide for ourselves what was good or what was bad—what was acceptable conduct or what was unacceptable—on the basis of the overall teachings of the Scriptures.

9. When applying the meaning and message of the narrative to the modern-day situation, we need to look for points of contact between the biblical story and our present-day life situations. Sin, doubt, anxiety over issues of life, lack of trust, selfishness, etc., remain as the context in which God encounters us through Scripture.

   For the most part, human crisis and need remain the same because we share a common humanity with the biblical characters, though we are distant from them in many different ways. We need finally to ask, "What response does this story elicit from us?" We will discover the amazing truth that the response to Scripture for us is the same as for the ancient people of God.

Lecture: Interpreting Old Testament Law

(25 minutes)

Refer to Resource 10-2 in the Student Guide.

Before interpreting the Old Testament Law, attempt to understand the specific nature/character of the legal statement. The covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai is the historical context of the Law.

Biblical laws fall into three categories.

- Casuistic laws—Case laws with an "if . . . then" clause—contain specific case illustration and consequence/penalty statement.

Ask the class to read Exodus 22 and identify the laws in this chapter by their particular legal categories.

- Apodictic laws are absolute prohibitions or unconditional and categorical directives or commandments that allow no exceptions.
- Priestly instructions—*torah*—are instruction/admonition for personal spirituality or ritual purposes. The Book of Deuteronomy is *torah* given to guide Israel's life in Canaan.

The law also deals with different dimensions of human life and relationships including worship, sacrifice, social conduct, social order, family life, and hygiene. The law as a whole aims to preserve the distinctiveness of Israel as a holy people. Keep in mind the following social and cultic functions of the Law:

- Prohibits criminal behavior—criminal laws
- Provides judicial principles and standards for maintaining justice in the society—civil laws
- Safeguards the rights of family members—family laws such as inheritance laws
- Calls for humanitarian conduct—laws that deal with proper treatment of slaves, widows, sojourners, etc.
- Establishes and regulates religious practices—ritual laws or cultic laws

Attempt to understand Israel's laws in light of the legal systems of the ancient Near East, the Code of Hammurabi, in particular. Israelite laws upheld the worth of human beings of all classes and gender, whereas the Code of Hammurabi shows preferential treatment of the nobility and men. Israelite laws safeguarded the rights even of criminals by requiring just and fair punishment that does not exceed the degree of crime committed; the "tooth for a tooth" principle.

Though the legal codes in the Old Testament have no direct bearing on the life of the modern Christian, we must pay attention to the spirituality and theological principles underlying these materials. Laws in the Old Testament provide us with a model for our ethical and moral conduct. The Law calls for personal responsibility in all areas of relationships.

The Ten Commandments are the non-negotiable standards of spirituality, morality, and ethics for all humankind. The Ten Commandments show the purpose of the Law in the context of the Sinai covenant was to elicit love for God and love for the neighbor. Moreover, the legal system was promulgated at Sinai to ensure the holiness of Israel, which was to be patterned after God's holiness.

When dealing with individual laws, attempt to understand them in the context of the collection or series to which they belong. Are they part of the covenant code or holiness code or rules for ritual, etc.?

When dealing with specific laws that may seem contrary to the spirit of the New Testament teachings, emphasis must be placed on the supreme law of love in the Sermon on the Mount, justification by faith, and the grace of God and His righteousness at work through Christ Jesus.

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on various students.

What are the guidelines for interpreting Old Testament narratives?

What are the guidelines for interpreting Old Testament legal material?

Look Ahead

We will now look at some key hermeneutical principles for interpreting wisdom materials and the Psalms.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

For Resource 10-4 you may want to assign the scripture passages or allow the students to choose.

Complete Resource 10-3.

Complete Resource 10-4.

Write in your journal. Read Genesis 4:1-16. Allow God to speak to you about crisis in sibling relationships. What does He say about listening to God? Write down what you observe in this story about God. What are the various ways in which God shows himself as a gracious God? How do we become “our brother’s/ sister’s keeper”?

Lesson 11

Interpreting Wisdom Literature and Psalms

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:15	Wisdom Literature	Lecture	Resource 11-1 Resource 11-2 Resource 11-3
0:45	Interpreting the Psalms	Lecture	Resources 11-4—11-10
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Fee, Gordon, and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, 187-230.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 313-22, 284-91.

Lesson Introduction

(15 minutes)

Accountability

Call on 2 students to give a report on Resource 10-3.

Call on 2 students to give a report on Resource 10-4.

Return and collect homework.

Orientation

The Psalms and the wisdom books offer us a different kind of materials. The usual method of analyzing prose materials cannot be strictly applied to these books, since these books are poetic in nature. Apart from the fact these books are in poetic form, the Psalms do not have much in common with the wisdom books, except there are a few psalms that promote the theology of the wisdom books.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- identify the various literary types found in the book of Psalms
- describe the hermeneutical guidelines for interpreting wisdom books in the OT
- describe the hermeneutical guidelines for interpreting the Psalms

Lesson Body

Lecture: Wisdom Literature

(30 minutes)

Refer to Resource 11-1 in the Student Guide.

Wisdom books—Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and some Psalms—are the products of Israel's wisdom teachers, wisdom tradition, or movements. Israel's wisdom teachers were engaged in promoting a personal philosophy and attitude toward life that led individuals to become meaningful, productive, and responsible members of the society.

Wisdom teachers promoted the theological principle that wisdom to live a meaningful life has its source in one's attitude of respect and reverence for God. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" was the operating principle of the wisdom movement. Interpreting wisdom books must take into account this basic theological conviction that underlies all wisdom books.

Wisdom books are divided into two categories based on our understanding that in Israel wisdom was promoted in two different ways. Wisdom teachers dealt with universal life issues and complex human problems for which there were no clear-cut answers. Why do the righteous suffer? Is there a moral order and system of divine justice that measures out blessings to the righteous and punishment to the wicked? What is the purpose and meaning of life and human existence?

These kinds of issues became the focus of reflections and speculations for the wisdom movement. We find such issues as the subject matter of dialogues or discourses in Job and Ecclesiastes. Scholars refer to this category of wisdom as reflective wisdom/ speculative wisdom/philosophical wisdom/higher wisdom.

Wisdom was also imparted through short, pithy, meaningful statements and instructions. These instructions provide practical admonitions for growth, maturity, and personal responsibility. Such proverbial/practical wisdom is found in the Book of Proverbs, a collection of Israel's proverbial sayings.

When dealing with the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, keep in mind the crucial theological concerns expressed in these books. Job deals with the problem

of theodicy/justice of God, the problem of suffering, rigid orthodoxy that claims to have answers to problematic life issues, the sovereignty of God, human inability to know the mysterious ways of God, fear of the Lord, and God's providential care of all of His creation.

Ecclesiastes seeks to deal with existential questions in light of the seeming meaninglessness of everything humans do to find meaning to life.

We cannot strictly apply the steps of the inductive method when dealing with the wisdom books. A specific text cannot be understood without taking into account the overall message of the book.

Refer to Resource 11-2 in the Student Guide.

Job

When dealing with the book of Job, we must not attempt to make theological conclusions based on one speaker or one unit of text without taking into account the book's overall structure and theological perspectives. For the most part, the book is in the form of a dialogue between Job and his friends, and speeches given by various human speakers, and finally the speeches of God. The dialogue is preceded by a prologue, which contains the story of Job and his misfortunes, and is followed by an epilogue that gives us a report about Job's restoration to wealth and fortunes.

This threefold structure of the book must be kept in mind when attempting to understand the meaning and message of the book.

Ask the class to read Job 4-5 and discuss how the speaker approaches the problem of Job's suffering.

Each speaker and cycle of speeches should be evaluated by asking questions about the theological assumptions and arguments of the various speakers and the basis of such assumptions and arguments. As a wisdom book, this book does not speak for God to humankind, as prophets do, but rather it contains expressions of human concerns and theological thinking. The book thus deals with what humans think *about* God and the issues of the book are directed *to* God.

Even the Satan, who is presented as an accuser, has his own perspective of God. The dialogue is all about God—what He does/says—from various perspectives, including God's own perspective; see God's speeches in chapters 38-41. It is clear the friends of Job argued from a traditional, orthodox concept of God and the theology of just retribution, whereas Job spoke also on

Ask the class to read Job 6-7 and discuss how Job responds to the speech of Eliphaz (chs. 4-5).

the basis of such an understanding of God coupled with his personal life experience, which contradicted the traditionally taught doctrines about God. This is the paradoxical issue in the book; he believes the doctrine, but the very doctrines he once espoused turned against him as his accuser.

Job's logical solution to this paradox was to perceive God as a God who perverted the system of justice He himself has established.

Another paradoxical issue in the book is Job's undying faith that God will not reject a blameless individual. God has become for Job both his accuser and vindicator, the one who hides from him and the one who will reveal himself as his redeemer, and the one to whom Job defiantly argues his case and claims his innocence.

Job's friends' speeches are carefully constructed theological ideas, challenged by Job on the basis of his personal experience. In the end, we find here the truth that theology does not have an answer to all of life's issues and human wisdom has its limit; true wisdom is with God and the fear of the Lord is the path to that wisdom.

Emphasis should be given to the "theology" promoted through the speeches of God that emphasize God's sovereignty as Creator and His providential care of all His creation. Ultimately, this truth is what liberates Job from his preoccupation with his suffering and challenge of God's way of dealing with the righteous and the wicked in the world.

Wayne C. Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony *(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1.*

The book of Job is widely known for irony. Irony in a text is the recognition that some statements cannot be understood without rejecting what they seem to say. "That is without taking them to mean something else than what they mean to say . . ." In other words, the apparent meaning cannot be taken as its intended meaning by the speaker. For example, Job's wife says to Job, "curse God and die" in 2:9. It seems to us she is rejecting faith in God and joining sides with the Satan—the Accuser—who was confident Job would curse God when afflictions came upon him. In reality, Job's wife is expressing her despair and sees death that would come from God as the only escape for Job from his pain and suffering. She knows cursing would result in death and that would be freedom for her husband.

The book of Job is well known for its difficult Hebrew text. A substantial number of words do not make much sense; the meaning is not known or does not make any sense when applied to its context. Some scholars think about 40 percent of the Hebrew text is difficult to understand. English translations are *possible* renderings or interpretations or renderings based on the Septuagint or the Latin translations. Consult a good study Bible or exegetical commentaries for discussions on textual difficulties.

Mythological ideas in the book of Job are not central to the theology of the book; rather they are incidental to the dialogue section, such as reference to monstrous creatures. In the same way, the book does not claim to provide us with answers to issues such as the Satan, his role in human suffering etc. The Satan's role is also incidental to the prologue. He is not even mentioned in the rest of the book.

Refer to Resource 11-3 in the Student Guide.

Ecclesiastes

When dealing with the Book of Ecclesiastes, we must pay careful attention to the existential questions and issues: an individual's freedom to choose and decide on the path of life over against the order and structure of the universe and the established ways humans cannot alter and change. Ecclesiastes' pessimistic attitude of doubt and despair, and the reality of death are real-life issues that confront readers today.

The author, though, views God on the one hand as ultimately responsible for all that is wrong in the world, and on the other hand finds comfort in the truth that it is possible to establish a personal relationship with the God who himself is a mystery to His creation. "Fear God" is the wisdom we find in this book.

Proverbs

Ethical and moral conduct, and personal responsibility are key issues in the Book of Proverbs. Each proverb is set in the context of a collection, and interpretation should seek to relate the message of individual proverbs to the collections to which they belong.

Proverbs are instructions, and not promises from God that guarantee the promised outcome if one follows the truth contained in them. In studying the proverbs, we must look for the moral, ethical principles and instructions. Avoid literal interpretation of the proverbs.

Some proverbs may need to be contextualized—translate the language into the context in which we live today, without losing its meaning.

Lecture: Interpreting the Psalms

(40 minutes)

Refer to Resource 11-4 in the Student Guide.

Psalms are words addressed *to God.* They are expressions of

- praise
- human faith
- distress
- doubt
- despair

Therefore, they are *not sources of doctrines or theological propositions or imperatives/commands.*

Psalms provide for us the *language* to speak to or address God.

Psalms are poetry and thus contain symbolic and metaphorical language. As poetry, psalms show significant features of Hebrew poetry, the most important of which is parallelism: balancing words/phrases in the first line with words and phrases in the second line.

Ask the class to read Psalm 19:1, 1:6, 3:2 and identify the parallelism in these verses.

- Synonymous—repetition of same idea
- Antithetic—opposite meaning
- Synthetic—extension or expansion of ideas

It is also important to recognize the meaning intended by the psalmist's use of symbolic and metaphorical language.

- *Nephesh*—soul with various other meanings
- Other terms such as "enemy," "workers of evil," "rock," "fortress," "shepherd," etc., convey significant meanings

Each psalm is a literary unit; we should not take one verse and try to interpret or apply it without studying the context.

The original life setting of the psalms is important. Attempt to understand the specific context of the origin of the psalms. Most psalms originated in the context of worship in Israel.

Refer to Resource 11-5 in the Student Guide.

Literary Type

Understand the literary type of the psalm. We will look at a general listing of the main literary types found in the book of Psalms:

Hymns

Praises, expressions of praise; some hymns simply praise God because He created the world and sustains it; some praise God because He is the King of Israel and the universe; some praise Him for establishing Zion as His city and dwelling place.

Psalm quotes are from NRSV.

Psalm 8

> O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

Psalm 19

> The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Psalm 93

> The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved.

Psalm 48

> Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.

Refer to Resource 11-6 in the Student Guide.

Laments

- Complaints and expressions of grief and sorrow of the individual—*personal/individual laments*
- Community of believers—*community laments*—over 50 psalms in this type

Some laments arise out of the context of sickness, some out of sin, some out of oppression of the enemy, some out of a sense of innocence in the midst of false accusation. Laments as a whole end with expressions of trust and hope in God's help and deliverance.

Ask the class to identify the various parts of Psalm 6, verse units that show the development of the thought of the psalmist.

Psalm 6

> O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.

Psalm 51

> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Psalm 13

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Ask the class to read Psalm 17 and discuss the place of verses 3-5 in the psalm; what role does it play?

Psalm 17

Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit. From you let my vindication come; let your eyes see the right. If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress. As for what others do, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped.

Refer to Resource 11-7 in the Student Guide.

Psalms of Trust/Confidence

Individuals and community express trust and confidence in God.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

Thanksgiving Psalms

Individuals and community express thanks to God for His saving and gracious actions.

Psalm 9

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.

Royal/Messianic Psalms

Ask the class to read Psalm 2 and discuss the possible context of this psalm, the setting in which this psalm originated in Israel.

Psalms that deal with God's choice of the Davidic kings and the establishment of His kingdom as an everlasting kingdom.

Psalm 2

Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and his anointed.

Liturgical Psalms

Refer to Resource 11-8 in the Student Guide.

Psalms that prescribe the requirements for worship in the temple.

Psalm 15

> O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors.

Wisdom Psalms

Psalms that deal with the two ways of life—godliness/righteousness and ungodliness/wickedness. Godliness leads to blessedness and wickedness leads to destruction.

Psalm 1

> Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; But their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.

Historical Psalms

Refer to Resource 11-9 in the Student Guide.

Recital of Israel's history and God's saving actions on behalf of Israel; the goal is to praise God who directed the destiny of Israel.

Psalm 105

> O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually. Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

Additional Considerations

Refer to Resource 11-10 in the Student Guide.

Study carefully the *structure* of the psalm and the development of the thought of the psalmist. Attempt to understand the primary objective; is it a praise, a lament with hope, thanksgiving, call to worship, call to thanksgiving, liturgical?

Psalms that display hatred and curse of the enemies should be evaluated in light of the following:

- Expressions of hate and curse underlie the theological conviction that God is ultimately the Judge who will carry out His judgment against the enemy. Calling God to carry out judgment was an important part of Israel's religious beliefs.
- Secondly, as Christians, we must look at these psalms with the love commandment as the basic command of the gospel. Love your enemies, pray for them, etc., should guide our interpretation of the imprecatory psalms.

As far as possible, attempt to keep the *original purpose* of the psalms before applying the psalms to the contemporary New Testament situations.

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on the students.

Name one key lesson you learned today.

Look Ahead

In our next lesson, we will review the principles for interpreting the prophets and Daniel.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

Complete Resource 11-11.

Write in your journal.

Read Psalm 51. Write down your evaluation of the inner agony of the psalmist. What descriptions for sin do you find in the psalm? What is the remedy for sin? How can one be restored to a joyful relationship with God? How does this psalm speak to you about your personal relationship with God?

Lesson 12

Interpreting the Prophets and Daniel

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Student Response	Small Groups	Homework
0:35	Interpreting the Prophets	Lecture	Resource 12-1 Resource 12-2 Resource 12-3
1:05	Interpreting Daniel	Lecture	Resources 12-4—12-7
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Fee, Gordon, and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, 165-86.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 292-312.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

Ask each of the students to name one significant thing they have learned in this module that has helped them in their preparation for the ministry.

Return homework.

Orientation

Prophetic literature provides us with a challenging task of interpretation, since prophecy is a widely misunderstood phenomenon in the Bible. We will attempt to study in this lesson what prophecy means and what were the primary functions of the prophets. This understanding is necessary for a proper interpretation of the Old Testament prophets.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- define prophecy and describe the various forms of prophetic speech
- describe some key principles for interpreting the OT prophetic literature
- define apocalyptic literature in the OT

Lesson Body

Small Groups: Student Response

(25 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of 3 students each.

In your groups share with each other the responses to Resource 11-11.

Collect homework at the end of this section.

Challenge each other to support statements made.

Lecture: Interpreting the Prophets

(30 minutes)

Refer to Resource 12-1 in the Student Guide.

Prophets were God's spokespersons to Israel.

- Their words—prophecy—often addressed the contemporary situations and God's word to that particular time. In that sense, prophets were *forth-tellers* of God's word. This is the proclamation/ preaching function of prophecy.
- Prophets also spoke about future events, giving insights into what actions God may do in order to fulfill His plans and purposes. This aspect of prophecy is *foretelling or prediction*.

In other words, we need to recognize the fact that prophecy has this twofold aspect, and not every prophecy is a prediction of the future.

Prophets used various kinds of literary forms—genres—to convey the content of revelation they received from God. We will investigate some of the frequently found genres in biblical prophecy in a few minutes. Each genre has its own literary features, which in turn serve a rhetorical function.

The **rhetorical function** of a literary feature is the effect that literary feature intended to produce in the reader or the listening audience. For example, the punch line of a joke is intended to cause laughter in the reader; a riddle is designed to make the reader think in a particular way for its solution. The sermon should be aimed to bring about the effect the text intended to produce in its original setting.

Refer to Resource 12-2 in the Student Guide.

Literary Form-Genre

Narratives, third person or first person

Rhetorical function:

- to establish the historicity and authenticity of the text
- to give credibility to the prophet as a person who is deeply involved in the history of God's people, as the one who is the recipient of revelation, and thus to authenticate the message as a trustworthy word

Dialogues with God

Rhetorical function:
- to establish the personal relationship between God and the prophet; the prophet as a mediator/ intercessor

Messenger-style speeches proclaiming salvation or judgment or both

Rhetorical function:
- to establish the prophet as the authentic spokesperson of God who has received an urgent word from God, which calls the audience to repentance if the word is a word of judgment, or to thanksgiving and praise if the word is a word of salvation

Vision Accounts

Rhetorical function:
- to establish the prophet as the recipient of revelation; vision is one of the accepted media of revelation in the Old Testament

Symbolic Actions

Rhetorical function:
- to create in the reader the powerful effect of the action being played out

Woe Oracles

Rhetorical function:
- to create in the reader the effect of the utter destruction that awaits them; a warning to escape destruction through change and transformation

Legal Disputes

Rhetorical function:
- to create the effect of a legal dispute between God and the reader; a case God brings against the reader in which God is the plaintiff and the reader is the defendant

Proverbial Sayings

Rhetorical function:
- to impart wisdom that would lead to the proper relationship with God

Funeral Songs

Rhetorical function:
- to create the mood of a funeral anticipated by the prophet because the judgment of destruction is upon the reader

Parables

Rhetorical function:
- to interact with the people and involve them in the story, through which the readers see themselves as playing a part in the story being told

Refer to Resource 12-3 in the Student Guide.

Guidelines for Interpreting the Prophets

1. Prophetic words originate in specific, historical context. One must pay careful attention to the political, social, cultural, and religious setting in which the prophet announced the message from God. This understanding of the historical setting would lead the reader to recognize the specific human crisis, which prompted God to speak through the prophet.

Ask the class to look up the following passages and identify the genre of each passage:

Amos 1:3-5
Amos 3:3-6
Amos 5:1-2
Amos 5:14-15
Amos 5:18-20
Isaiah 5:1-7
Amos 7:1-3
Amos 3:1-2
Jeremiah 13:1-7

2. Identify the literary type—genre—of the prophetic passage. Look for the literary devices with which the prophet communicates the message. Pay careful attention to metaphors and symbolic language, and attempt to find their meaning within the literary context of the text.

   Avoid the temptation to decipher symbolic language and to look for hidden meanings to the text. Make assessment of the effect the literary type intended to produce in the listening audience.

3. Listen to what God is saying to His people in the context of human crisis. Discover the nature of the divine word and identify it as a word of indictment and judgment, admonition and exhortation, or a word of hope and salvation for the future, etc.

4. Evaluate the response of the community to the divine word. What lessons do we learn—positive or

negative—from the response of the original listening community?

Ask the class to read Isaiah 40:3-4 and see how this text is interpreted in the NT in the Gospels. Compare the historical context of Isaiah 40 with the setting in which the Gospel writers utilize this text.

5. Check to see if the text is quoted in the New Testament. What light do we receive on the meaning of the text based on its New Testament use? New Testament use and interpretation of the text should guide us in the assessment of the meaning of the text.

6. If the text contains reference to the life and work of the messianic king, attempt to evaluate its significance to the prophet's immediate listening audience, before a direct link is made with Jesus Christ and His life and ministry.

7. If the text contains a prediction, a reference to a future event, was that word fulfilled or does it remain unfulfilled? Make assessment of the unfulfilled prediction in the light of the message of the New Testament.

8. What are the enduring theological lessons and challenges we find in the text, principles with universal applications?

9. Relate the message of the text to contemporary human life situations.

Lecture: Interpreting Daniel

(20 minutes)

Refer to Resource 12-4 in the Student Guide.

Define apocalyptic.

In addition to Daniel—where we find a full-blown apocalyptic book—other Old Testament sections also reflect the influence of apocalyptic thinking:

- Isaiah 24-27
- Ezekiel 38-39, 40-48
- Zechariah 9-14

Apocalyptic eschatology differs from prophetic eschatology in that the former visualizes the establishment of God's kingdom through sudden and cataclysmic events that result in the end of the universe and the judgment of the wicked.

Prophetic eschatology emphasizes the reign of God through transformation of evil, and the righteous kingship of the Davidic kings.

Refer to Resource 12-5 in the Student Guide.

Characteristics of the Apocalyptic Writings

Dualism—the idea of two opposing powers, the forces of God vs. the forces of evil—is a common feature of apocalyptic writings. Some scholars think dualism in Israel's apocalyptic thinking is a borrowed element from other world religions, particularly the Persian religions.

A dramatic end of the universe—the forces of evil dominate the present world and oppress the faithful. God will come at an unexpected time with His angels, to bring an end to the evil conditions and to usher in His righteous Kingdom; this will result in a catastrophic end of the universe.

Visions of God's sovereign rule over the world—the apocalyptic visionaries saw God's ultimate triumph over the world, though the present history is filled with hardships for the people of God.

Pseudonymous authorship—authorship of apocalyptic books is ascribed to well-known and exemplified people who symbolize faithfulness, courage, and perseverance.

Other less commonly found features:

Messianic figure as the agent of God's redemptive actions

Angels and demons—forces of God and forces of evil

Symbolic language—use of symbols to convey spiritual realities

Mysterious numbers—use of numbers to differentiate between good and evil

Refer to Resource 12-6 in the Student Guide.

Hermeneutical Issues

The text of Daniel has *two languages*

- 1:1-2:4*a* and 8-14 in Hebrew
- 2:4*b*-7:28 in Aramaic

The question of why the author chose two languages is still debated.

- Was the book originally in Aramaic or was it in Hebrew?

- Did another generation translate the beginning and the end from Aramaic into Hebrew to ensure its acceptance into the canon?
- Does the Aramaic section give the book a Babylonian context, a literary device to cast these stories in the sixth-century context?

Identity of the *four kingdoms*—chapters 2 and 7 refer to four kingdoms.

- Some evangelicals think these kingdoms were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, and the heavenly kingdom as the Kingdom established through the coming of Jesus.
- Others think the four kingdoms refer to Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. The kingdom of heaven would then be the Hasmonean state established by the descendants of the Maccabee family. This view assumes a second-century origin of the book.

Seventy weeks—problems in the interpretation of the 70 weeks. What do these weeks mean? Is this a reinterpretation of Jeremiah's 70 years? Or, does 70 simply means completeness or totality of an event.

Abomination of desolation—which historical event? Or an event yet to come? Does it refer to a Babylonian situation, or the desecration of the Temple by the forces of Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BC, or a prediction about the desecration of the Temple by the Romans, or a future event to take place?

Nebuchadnezzars's madness—is there confusion here with the madness of Nabonidus?

Belshazzer—chapters 5, 7, 8—was he a "king" or co-regent with his father Nabonidus; his kingship is debatable since he never assumed kingship. He was not Nebuchadnezzar's son; rather he was the son of Nabonidus.

Darius the Mede—5:31—the Babylonian empire was conquered by Cyrus the Persian. Who is Darius? Is this another name for Cyrus or a person who took the city of Babylon in the name of Cyrus?

Refer to Resource 12-7 in the Student Guide.

Hermeneutical Principles

1. Understand the *historical* context and crisis. Who is being addressed? Why? When? Where? By whom? Apocalyptic writings usually address three groups of people: the *oppressed* and the faithful, the *oppressors* who are the wicked, and the wavering/unbelieving, not fully loyal to God.

2. Recognize the difficulty in interpreting the *symbolic* language of the book. Also, *numbers* such as 7 and 70, etc., should not be taken literally. *Seven* is a complete number in the Hebrew thinking; it may simply denote a set, or completed period.

3. Understand the overall *theological* concerns of the Bible and translate them into the context of the history dealt with in the apocalyptic writings, such as God's care for His *creation*, His determination to exercise His *sovereign* rule, His will to carry out His *justice* and righteousness, His wish and desire for the *healing* and prosperity of the entire creation.

4. Attempt to relate the message of Daniel to the *apocalyptic* visions in the New Testament. What was the Christian understanding of the *end time* and the establishment of God's perfect kingdom? Is there a *re-visioning* of Daniel's visions in the New Testament?

5. What is the *message* inherent in the text; what is the text saying about God and His response to those living in a world that continues to be hostile to God and His people? This is the message we need to relate to the contemporary church.

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on the students.

Do you have any questions or comments concerning this lesson?

Look Ahead

In the next lesson, we will review the principles for interpreting the Gospels and the Book of Acts.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

Complete Resource 12-8.

Bring your journals to the next lesson.

Write in your journal. Read Isaiah 40:1-11. Write down what you observe as the “facts” the prophetic writer states in this passage. Then reflect on what is being said about God by the prophetic writer. Describe the portrait of God found in this text. How does this portrait help shape the way you think about God?

Lesson 13

Interpreting the Gospels and the Book of Acts

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Isaiah	Small Groups	Resource 12-8
0:30	Interpreting the Gospels	Lecture/Discussion	Resources 13-1—13-8
1:00	Interpreting the Book of Acts	Lecture	Resource 13-9 Resource 13-10
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Fee, Gordon, and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, 94-148.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 323-51.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

Call on the students to read a short portion from their journal.

Return homework.

Orientation

We now move from interpreting the Old Testament to interpreting the New Testament. In this lesson, we will look at the Gospels and Acts, two major types of literature in the New Testament. Though Gospels themselves belong to a particular genre, we have added the study of Acts to this lesson to keep the course within the prescribed length of the modular courses.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- describe the principles for interpreting the Gospels
- discuss parables as a distinct genre in the Gospels
- describe the guidelines for interpreting the Book of Acts

Lesson Body

Small Groups: Isaiah

(20 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of about 3 each.

In your group share with each other your work from the homework assignment on Resource 12-8.

Collect homework.

Challenge each other on statements and reasoning.

Lecture / Discussion: Interpreting the Gospels

(30 minutes)

Refer to Resource 13-1 in the Student Guide.

Guidelines for Interpretation

The Gospels are not just simple *biographical* books; rather they constitute a unique literary *genre,* developed within the early Christian communities.

In the Gospels we find a variety of types of materials:

- *Pronouncement stories*—other designations: conflict story (*apoph-thegm*), paradigm (*chreia*), or narratives, which center on a particular saying of Jesus; see examples in Mk 2, 11, and 12.
- *Miracle stories* describe the need, the act of healing, and the effect of healing.
- *Discourses* focus on particular themes such as the kingdom of God, the end-times, forgiveness, humility, or other human and divine qualities.
- *Parables* illustrate different aspects of the kingdom of God, human character and response, etc.
- *Passion narratives* focus on the suffering and death of Jesus. The passion narratives provided impetus and encouragement to the church during trials and tribulations in the first century.

Each individual unit of material—pericope—should be the subject of the study.

The Synoptic Problem

- The reader should take into account the synoptic problem—similarities and differences between the Gospels—and the question of the sources behind the Synoptic Gospels. Most scholars today believe **Mark** and **Q** provide much of the materials for Matthew and Luke.
- In addition, **Matthew** and **Luke** present independent materials, materials found only in their respective Gospels.

- **John** uses a substantial amount of independent materials.
- **John** focuses more on the theological discourses of Jesus than on the biographical narratives.

Refer to Resource 13-2 in the Student Guide.

Historical Record

The Gospels preserve an historical record of the life and ministry of Jesus; however, these historical records do not follow the modern scheme of history writing, such as clear and strict chronological sequence, balanced selection of materials, verbatim quotations, etc. The Gospel writers present a *comprehensive history* of the life and ministry of Jesus. In this effort, each writer was guided by his own particular purpose in writing. Materials are arranged in the Gospels, not necessarily to follow a *chronological scheme,* but to elaborate certain truths the writers wished to communicate to their readers.

Theology

The Gospels contain both history and theology. The Gospel writers were both historians and theologians. They interpreted for the Church what they understood as the purpose of Jesus' deeds and words. When discrepancies are found in the synoptic accounts, look for the central theological truth or claim common to all three accounts. Discrepancies may be due to different versions of the same account or due to one writer's own inspired interpretation of the account.

Refer to Resource 13-3 in the Student Guide.

Culture

Understand the overall context of first-century Judaism and the Greco-Roman cultural and political setting of Palestine. This means a good understanding of the political, cultural, social, and religious forces that shaped the life of first-century Jews. Most New Testament surveys will provide introductory chapters on the setting of the New Testament. Two excellent sources for our understanding first-century Palestine are:

- Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*
- Eduard Lohse, *The New Testament Environment*

We need to know

- The Jewish attitude toward Rome
- The Roman attitude toward the Jews
- The influence of Greek culture on the Jews
- The religious convictions, influences, practices of Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, and other religious sects

- Social conditions
- The place of the Temple, the Law, the synagogue, and the Sanhedrin in Jewish life

Context

As far as possible, attempt to establish the specific context of a particular teaching, or story about Jesus. This is more difficult to do since the Gospel writers have put together the stories and sayings of Jesus to accomplish their own particular objectives. However, the literary context—passages that precede and follow the text—provide an important clue to our understanding of the particular theological perspective of the writer.

Lead the students in a discussion of the scripture passages.

Compare Mt 10—the sending of the disciples—with Lk 9:2-5; 10:3; 21:12-17; 12:11-12; 6:40; 12:2-9; 12:51-53; 14:25-27; 17:33; 10:16. Most of the statements in Matthew are found scattered throughout Luke's Gospel.

Refer to Resource 13-4 in the Student Guide.

Historical Context

We also need to evaluate the historical context of the writers of the Gospels and the communities they address through their writings. The Gospels address particular Christian communities and their particular needs:

- evangelism
- teaching
- worship
- discipleship
- persecution
- tension with Judaism
- political zealousness
- intense expectation of the imminent return of Jesus
- frustration with delay in the Second Coming
- false prophets and teachers
- influence of Gnosticism

The stories and teachings of Jesus reflect the conditions and concerns of the contemporary church in the second half of the first century. For example:

- Matthew addresses the emerging Church as the true Israel established on the teachings of Jesus the Messiah. The Gospel shows a particular concern about the Judaism of His day that rejected the gospel. The Gospel also is a challenge to the New Israel to preach the gospel to all nations.
- Mark presents Jesus as the Suffering Servant and the exalted Lord, to address the issue of true

discipleship in the context of persecution carried out by emperor Nero.
- Luke attempts to present the gospel as a gospel for all humankind, the gospel of joy and peace God initiated through the coming of Jesus.
- John deals with the context of Jewish rejection of the Messiah, the growing influence of the disciples of John the Baptist, and the threat of the Gnostic heresy in the Church.

Refer to Resource 13-5 in the Student Guide.

Because of the unique ways in which the various Gospel writers present the story of Jesus, we must "think horizontally and think vertically" as we read and interpret the Gospels.

Terms used by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth *(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 121-26.*

Think horizontally means reading and interpreting a Gospel in light of the other Gospels, by noticing both similarities and differences. Two benefits:

See Gospel Parallels: A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels, *ed. Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr. (New York: Nelson, 1957) or* Synopsis of the Four Gospels, *ed. Kurt Aland (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1989), or consult a good study Bible that gives the parallel text reference.*

- *First,* the parallel passages will give us an understanding of the uniqueness of each Gospel account/writer—compare Mt 24:15-16; Mk 13:14; and Lk 21:20-21.
- *Second*, parallel reading will help us understand how the same material was used by the church in different contexts/settings—compare the setting of the Lord's Prayer in My 6:7-13 and Lk 11:2-4.

Lead the students in a discussion of these passages of scripture.

Think vertically means to read and interpret a Gospel taking into account only that Gospel and interpreting the text in light of the historical context of the writer and the literary context of the Gospel. Understanding the historical context of the text involves the setting in which Jesus spoke the words as well as the setting in which the Gospel writer utilized the words of Jesus to address his readers.

Have students look at this parable with you.

- What could be the historical context of Jesus saying the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16)?
- What could be the context of the church in which the church heard this parable as it was reported by Matthew in his Gospel? See the connection in Mt 10:27, 30; 20:16.

In this parable, Jesus spoke about rewards in the Kingdom bestowed upon us by a God who is gracious to all who enter the Kingdom; God's grace is the standard of His fairness and He does not measure out grace by what we do or what we deserve. We are not saved by our works!

This must have been a shocking message to the Pharisees and the average person influenced by the teaching of the Pharisees. Now Matthew inserts this

parable in the context of discipleship and the question of Peter, “We have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?” The Church of Matthew’s time was made up of people who had literally left everything to follow Jesus and His gospel.

It was a Church rejected, persecuted, in trial and tribulation, and most of all poor. The parable as well as Jesus’ saying in 19:23-30 shows those considered by the rich and the powerful of that day as the “last” will indeed be “first” in God’s kingdom—a message of comfort. Whereas the religious authorities and the powerful in the society who claim to have the “first” place will be the last.

Refer to Resource 13-6 in the Student Guide.

Gospel Commands

Imperatives/commands in the Gospels are not laws in the same way the Old Testament laws functioned in the Old Testament times. Look for the instructions, principles, or ideals for Christian life in the New Testament commands.

Let us look at Matthew 5:27-32.

- Verses 27-30 focus on disciplining the members of our body as instruments of righteousness and holiness rather than yielding them to be instruments of wickedness; compare to Rom 6:13-19.
- Though divorce should not be considered a valid option in the Christian marriage, one should not interpret Matthew 5:31-32 without taking into account the redemptive grace of God that overcomes human sinfulness.

While using the text to promote the ideals of Christian marriage and its sanctity, we must also let the text speak redemptively to those who have been divorced and remarried in the church.

Eschatology

We must keep in mind the eschatological expectation of the Early Church and its understanding of the kingdom of God. The Church believed the coming of Jesus, His ministry, death, and resurrection inaugurated the beginning of the end, the *eschaton,* God’s rule characterized by peace, justice, and righteousness.

All the work of Jesus pointed to the beginning of this new era of God’s reign, the kingdom of God, or the sovereign rule of God on earth. However, the church

also recognized the Kingdom has not yet fully come. This tension between realized eschatology and futuristic eschatology—*already*, but not yet—is a reality we find in the Gospels. The early Christians thus lived between the beginning of the end and the consummation of the end—between the times—between His death, resurrection, and ascension, and His second coming.

This eschatological existence of the Church is very clearly evident in the New Testament writings. The Church looked forward with anticipation to "the coming"—*parousia*—of Jesus while living life in the Kingdom following its ethical mandate and under the Lordship of Jesus. The eschatological discourses in the Gospels attest to this coming of the Son of Man with His holy angels to consummate the Kingdom.

Parables

Refer to Resource 13-7 in the Student Guide.

Parables in the Gospels are a favorite way of teaching for Jesus. Over 50 parables deal with a number of themes.

- The overall subject of the parables is the kingdom of God.
- Some introduce a new idea or a new perspective about the Kingdom.
- Some introduce an alternative way of thinking about a familiar issue or relationship.
- Some parables introduce the theme of grace, which comes as a surprise not only to the recipients but also to the readers.
- Some parables remind the readers of the Judgment and their accountability to God.

Refer to Resource 13-8 in the Student Guide.

When dealing with the parables, keep in mind:

- Jesus did *not* speak in parables so He would not be fully understood; He was not speaking in allegorical mysteries understood only by those inside the church. Parables (literally means, "something thrown alongside") are for the most part illustrations to clarify something that is taught. Jesus intended the parables to be understood by all who heard Him.

- Not all parables are alike
  - Some are parables in the true sense of the term, stories created to convey truth. Examples: the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, the Prodigal Son, the Great Supper, the Laborers in the Vineyard, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Ten Virgins.

  - Some parables are more illustrations than true parables. The parable of the Leaven and the parable of the Sower are illustrations from everyday life.

- Jesus spoke in parables to elicit a response from His audience. Our interpretation of the parables by and large depends on our understanding of this function of the parable; what is the response elicited by this parable?

Ask the class to read the parable of the Sower in the literary context of Mark 3:31-5:20 and identify the rhetorical function of this parable.

Let us look at the parable of the Sower in the literary context of Mark 3:31-5:20. Various issues: the urgency of the hour, the need to hear and respond to the gospel; the need to produce; the need to proclaim the Good News. The parable does not aim to show that there are four kinds of people and four kinds of soil; rather, the call is to be the soil that produces fruit.

- Each writer focuses on certain themes or kinds of relationships. Matthew focuses on the parables where the analogy of Master-Servant relationship is found, whereas in Luke, parables focus on other dimensions of human relationships.

Look at Luke 15:1-2; what does this introduction serve? In the setting of the Church, is Luke using it to critique those who were uneasy about the Gentiles coming into the Church?

- Attempt to isolate the editorial comments and place the parable in the original life setting. Some editorial comments help us to interpret the meaning and message of the parables properly.

- Follow the basic structure and form of the parable; avoid the temptation to allegorize or typologize the parables.

Ask the class to read Mt 24:45-51; 25:1-13; 25:14-30 and identify the common theme.

- Look for a common theme. Some parables are connected together by a common theme. Various parables in Luke 15 all have the common theme of joy in finding what is lost.

- In most cases, the last statement of the parable may give us the key to the proper interpretation of the function of the parable.

Lecture: Interpreting the Book of Acts

(25 minutes)

The Book of Acts is the second volume of Luke's history of the early Christian church. The first volume, the Gospel of Luke, narrates the story of Jesus; the second volume, Acts, narrates the story of the disciples and the beginning years of the Church and her growth in the Gentile world.

Acts follows methods of history writing popular in the ancient Hellenistic world. As in the case of Hellenistic historiography, Luke's writing also entertains the readers as well as informs the readers of actual events.

Luke interprets history in light of his theological understanding of what Jesus was doing in the Church through His Holy Spirit. He was not only a historian, but also a theologian in the Early Church, who understood not only the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, but also the missional nature of the Church, the Church's mandate to preach and evangelize the world.

Refer to Resource 13-9 in the Student Guide.

Outline of Acts

Understand the structure/outline of the book.

1. The book can be outlined based on the ministry of its leading apostles.
   - Peter in 1-12
   - Paul in 13-28
2. Or following the geographical expansion of the church
   - Jerusalem in chapters 1-7
   - Samaria and Judea in 8-10
   - Ends of the earth in 11-28
3. Or social/cultural expansion of the Church
   - The church in Jerusalem in 1:1-6:7
   - Expansion of the Church carried out by the Greek-speaking Jews in 6:8-9:31
   - Expansion to the Gentiles in 9:32-12:34
   - First expansion to the Gentile world in 12:25-16:5
   - Further westward expansion into the Gentile world in 16:6-19:20
   - Events that led to the journey of Paul to Rome in 19:21-28:30.

Luke's overall purpose is to show how the Christian faith, with its origin in Jerusalem, has moved beyond its borders into the Gentile world and has become a predominantly Gentile movement through the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Refer to Resource 13-10 in the Student Guide.

The significance of the events on the Day of Pentecost

In Acts the Day of Pentecost inaugurated a new era of the activity of the Holy Spirit. The empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit is available to all believers. The Holy Spirit not only empowers but also cleanses/purifies the heart of the believer (Acts 2; 15:9).

Luke also presents the ministry of the Holy Spirit in bringing unity not only in the church but also between Jews and Gentiles. The Spirit makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Also both Jews and Gentiles are free from the Law of Moses.

Ask the class to read Acts 2:38 and compare with 10:44-48.

Historical

Luke does not show much interest in biographies of the apostles or church organization or growth of the church in other areas. It was not written primarily as a history book.

The speeches in the Book of Acts—sermons of Peter, Stephen, and Paul—convey the content of the early Christian *kerygma* or proclamation of the gospel. These sermons show Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, and that God had inaugurated a new era of salvation through the coming of Jesus. The speeches call for repentance, acceptance of faith in the crucified Messiah, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Though Luke narrates religious experiences such as conversion or life of the early Christians, there is no attempt to set forth a pattern or model for Christian experience or church life. Conversions were followed by water baptism and the gift of the Spirit in that order, or in reverse order; Spirit baptism with or without the laying on of hands, with or without the mention of tongues, etc. No mention of the communal life among the Gentiles that was characteristic of the Jerusalem Christians.

The model Luke set forth is not a specific model of Christian experience or church life, but rather *a model for the Church to be a forward-moving phenomenon,* boldly and joyously proclaiming the gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and changing personal lives and community life.

Interpretation

Specific narratives or accounts of what happened and how an event happened should not be taken as a biblical precedent or norm—what must happen—in the life of the ongoing Church; this happened in Acts, therefore, this must happen today. We must ask first of all “why” Luke narrates the event, the intent or purpose of Luke. Is it to report an event or to establish a norm for the later communities of faith? Does Acts teach a specific mode of baptism? Does Acts teach a specific way of selecting leaders? Does Acts teach the

gift of tongues always accompanying the baptism with the Spirit? Does Acts teach how often the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated?

Ask the class to read Acts 1:15-26 and identify the various parts of this narrative. What is the relationship of this story to 1:1-11 and chapter 2?

When dealing with specific narratives, ask what is being said? What is the point of what is being said? How does it function in the total narrative—its relationship to the preceding and following narrative—and why has Luke included the narrative in that particular place in the book?

Finally, look for similarities and parallels between the Gospel of Luke and Acts to show the thematic and structural continuity between the two books. Examples: the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the theme of joy, the theme of prayer, care and concern for the poor and the marginal in society, Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and Paul's journey to Rome, etc.

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on the students..

What are the principles for interpreting the Gospels?

What are the distinct genres in the Gospels?

What are the guidelines for interpreting the Book of Acts?

Look Ahead

In our next lesson, we will review the principles for interpreting the Epistles and the Revelation.

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

Read Matthew 18. Identify the various stories in this chapter. Describe the theme that is common to all these stories. Discuss how the literary context—passages that precede and follow—informs your understanding and interpretation of verses 15-20?

Copy down the story of the Triumphal Entry in parallel columns and make note of the similarities and differences between the Gospels of Matthew (21:1-11), Mark (11:1-11), Luke (19:29-44), and John (12:12-19).

Write in your journal. Read the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12). List the qualities Jesus describes as essential to one's entrance in the kingdom of God. How would you describe your life in light of these essential Kingdom qualities? How are these qualities at work in your life? Describe the areas where you need to seek God's help to be like Jesus in your world.

[This page intentionally blank]

Lesson 14

Interpreting the Epistles and Revelation

Lesson Overview

Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Triumphal Entry	Small Groups	Homework
0:25	Interpreting the Epistles	Lecture/Discussion	Resources 14-1—14-4
1:00	Interpreting Revelation	Lecture/Discussion	Resource 14-5 Resource 14-6
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

Suggested Reading for Instructor

Fee, Gordon, and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, 61-77, 231-45.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 352-66, 370-74.

Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

Accountability

Call on at least two students to read his or her paper on Matthew.

Return and collect homework. Make arrangements for returning the last homework assignments to the students.

Orientation

Epistles constitute a major literary type in the New Testament. This type of material includes Epistles or letters attributed to the apostle Paul and letters written by various leaders of the Early Church to different Christian communities. We will mostly deal with the interpretive guidelines for the Pauline letters.

Also, in this lesson we will review the apocalyptic genre in the New Testament. We have already discussed this genre in the Old Testament in Daniel. The Revelation in the New Testament, though it has much in common with the book of Daniel, presents some unique interpretive issues, which are important for us to consider in this lesson.

Learner Objectives

Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.

Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- describe the principles for interpreting the Epistles in the NT
- describe the interpretive issues and problems associated with the book of Revelation

Lesson Body

Small Groups: Triumphal Entry

(15 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of about three each.

Collect homework.

In your group share with each other the work you did in comparing and contrasting the passages on Jesus' triumphal entry.

Lecture: Interpreting the Epistles

(35 minutes)

Refer to Resource 14-1 in the Student Guide.

The Epistles in the New Testament are not all alike. Some are more personal in nature, such as Philemon; others are letters written for a wider audience. Most of the letters have six parts:

- the name of the writer
- name of the recipient/addressees
- greeting, prayer/thanksgiving
- main body of the letter
- final greeting
- farewell

In this regard the New Testament letters are very similar to ancient letters in the Greco-Roman world. These various parts may be found either as a whole or in part in most letters in the New Testament.

The New Testament Epistles are "occasional" documents, arising out of and intended for specific occasions. They were written out of the context of the writer to the context of the original recipients. They were occasional in that they originated out of special circumstances, and most New Testament letters—except perhaps Romans, James, and Philemon—were occasioned by circumstances on the part of the recipients. We need to attempt to reconstruct the occasion that prompted the letter.

Epistles in the New Testament not attributed to Paul are called General Epistles or Catholic Letters. These are "Catholic" in the sense that these letters do not address a specific audience but perhaps churches in a larger geographical area or churches in general.

The Epistles are not theological treatises, though we find theological insights and themes occasioned by the particular need or the context of the writing. Theology

in these letters is thus theology at the service of a particular need.

Refer to Resource 14-2 in the Student Guide.

When reading the Epistles, we must attempt to reconstruct the most likely situation or the context the writer is writing to, or dealing with in the letter. Placing the Epistles in the historical context is extremely crucial understanding the message of the Epistles. Places such as Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, Colosse, and the province of Galatia are important places in the Pauline letters.

- What was going on in these cities during Paul's days?
- What were the religious movements and influences of this period in these cities?
- What were the social conditions in these cities?

However, we cannot adequately reconstruct the historical context of a number of Pauline letters, such as Ephesians, Colossians, and the Pastoral Letters. This is true of the General Epistles also, though attempts have been made to establish the context based on the content of these letters.

Ask the class to identify the various paragraphs in Gal 3, following the major themes or arguments in this chapter.

Read the entire letter before attempting to do exegesis of a selected text. Attempt to gather as much knowledge as possible about the theme(s) of the letter. At this point, the reading is first and foremost informational reading.

Outline the letter following the major parts of the letter, and then further divide these parts into paragraphs or verse units following the themes or arguments. This working outline will help you see the literary and theological relationship between various units, or lack thereof.

Ask students to read 1 Cor 11:10; 1 Cor 15:29; 1 Pet 3:18; 2 Thess 2:3. Ask them to discuss why these passages are problematic.

Recognize the fact that some passages in the Epistles are difficult to understand because we do not know what the author meant by his statements. Let's look at a few: 1 Cor 11:10 and 15:29; 1 Pet 3:18; 2 Thess 2:3. It is very likely the original audience may have understood the message. In some cases, such difficult texts may be part of previous conversations the writer had with the audience; see 2 Thess 2:5-6.

Refer to Resource 14-3 in the Student Guide.

Always attempt to establish what the text could have meant to its writer and original readers. This would also mean our assessment of what the text does not say. Read 1 Timothy 2:14-15 and attempt to understand what Paul could not have meant by this statement.

In texts where the writer deals with particular issues and problems of the first-century Christian Church, that may not have any corresponding modern-day counterparts, attempt to recognize the spiritual/theological principles underlying such texts that transcend the historical particularity of the first-century situation. Even then such theological principles cannot be applied as timeless/universally applicable principles to any given context.

Look at 1 Cor 8:7-13.

We must apply that principle only to genuinely comparable situations. What is the principle in 1 Cor 8:7-13? Does this text deal with an action that offends another believer, or does it deal with an action that encourages another believer who has a weak conscience to follow such action, though in good conscience he or she cannot do it? Compare this with 10:14-22 where there is absolute prohibition of a Christian's participation in Temple meals. Clearly Paul connects this activity with participation in a demonic activity.

Allow time for response.

What is considered a "demonic" activity today's Christians should abstain from?

First Corinthians 10:23—11:1 poses another issue. On the one hand Paul prohibits participation in the temple meal, but deals with eating in the market place in a different way. Look at this text and see what theological principle Paul is trying to convey. To him, such eating is a matter of indifference; it does not matter to him or to God. But it matters to some others.

Allow for response.

How do we distinguish between what does not matter and what does matter?

Some issues to consider:

- Matters of indifference here deal with food, drink, and observance of days; they are not moral issues but cultural issues. We need to distinguish these issues that are cultural from moral issues that are clearly stated as sinful matters: Rom 1:29-30; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:9-10; 2 Tim 3:2-4.

- On issues such as the place of women and their ministry in the church, we must honestly seek to see if Paul is dealing with specific issues and problems that existed in specific contexts: 1 Tim 5:11-15; 2 Tim 3:6-9. If we take 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-12 at face value ,without evaluating these texts in light of Paul's teaching and theology as a whole, we should then be

prepared to say women have no authority to teach, preach, or even write books on biblical matters at any level at all.

These passages need to be treated as culturally conditioned texts that do not deal with moral issues. We also need to consider these in light of the vast difference in the way women were viewed in the first century and in our time, their educational opportunities, their freedom, their social standing, etc.

Paul's letters need to be understood in light of his own cultural and religious heritage, his Hebrew ancestry and heritage, and Hellenistic cultural background.

Paul's writings need to be evaluated in light of the overall context of Paul's life and thought. His call, conversion, his conviction that his call was a call to apostleship, a call to preach the gospel among the Gentiles, all of these have impacted his writings.

Refer to Resource 14-4 in the Student Guide.

Keep in mind theological concepts that are central to Paul's thinking, such as

- justification by faith
- freedom of a Christian from the Law
- the power of the gospel
- grace
- union with Christ
- unity of the believers
- life in the Spirit
- equality of all before the gospel
- the sharing of God's glory by all believers

Notice in particular Paul's emphasis on faith, hope, and love, the three essential qualities of the Christian life.

Lecture / Discussion: Interpreting Revelation

(25 minutes)

Refer to Resource 14-5 in the Student Guide.

New Testament apocalyptic writing has its root in Old Testament apocalyptic writings such as Isa 24-27, Ez 38-39, Zech 7-14, and the book of Daniel. Persecution and oppression of God's people gave rise to apocalyptic visions about the coming of God and the deliverance of God's people. Cataclysmic events and a catastrophic end to the present history and the universe, the end of evil, the triumph of God's people, and the final Judgment are all part of this mode of thinking.

Though Revelation belongs to the apocalyptic genre, it also contains elements of prophecy and letters. The visionary author introduces the content of this book as

Ask the class to read Revelation 2:1-3:22 and identify/discuss how John describes each church addressed in these chapters.

what he saw and as prophecy (ch. 1). The book also contains seven letters written to specific churches, to meet specific needs that existed in these churches.

Understand the historical context: who is being addressed, by whom, in what setting, for what reason. Generally speaking, apocalyptic books address three groups:

- the oppressed
- the oppressor
- the wavering/unbelieving

Attempt to discover what the author—John the visionary—intended to convey as his message from God to his readers. What they have understood is important for us to recognize.

We must refrain from the attempt to unlock the mysteries of the Revelation by reading into this book other scripture texts such as Ezekiel, Daniel, Matthew, or 1 Thessalonians, as if these books hold the hermeneutical key to our understanding of Revelation. We may find parallel imageries, or phrases, but unless the texts specifically interpret a previous biblical text for us, we must look for meaning intrinsic to the text of the Revelation itself.

Refer to Resource 14-6 in the Student Guide.

Imageries in the Revelation: some may be easily identified; some are difficult to identify because they represent general human conditions or other matters. Look for John's own interpretation of the imageries as key to our understanding of these imageries. In our attempt to understand the imagery, we must consider the visions as a whole, and not in parts. Avoid the temptation to find allegorical meaning. The allegorical method—as we saw earlier in this module—proposes meaning neither intended by the author nor understood by the original readers.

Ask the class to read Revelation 4 and 5 and identify a common theme in these chapters.

The Revelation does not give a systematic, detailed, and chronological sequence of the end time events. The concern of the author *is* for the Church and God's sovereign control over human history. The sequence of events in general moves from suffering and persecution to the coming of the triumphant Christ, judgment of the enemy, and the establishment of His heavenly kingdom for His people.

Understand the overall theological concerns of the Scriptures and attempt to place the text in the setting of the concerns of biblical theology.

- God's care for and authority over His creation

- His will to exercise His Lordship over history, kingdoms, and rulers of this universe
- His will to establish justice and righteousness in the world
- His desire to bring healing to the broken world

Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

Review

Call on the students.

What has been the most helpful to you in this module?

How has it helped you?

What did you hope to learn that was not covered?

Assign Homework

Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.

Read the letter to the Ephesians and identify the various parts of this letter, the six parts of the Pauline letters.

Make arrangements for receiving these last homework assignments and for returning them to the students.

Read the letter to the Philippians and identify the occasion of this letter. Why did Paul write this letter? Identify the text that indicates the occasion of this letter.

Read 1 Thess 5:1-11 and 2 Thess 2:1-12. In what ways does Paul clarify or expand in 2 Thess 2 what he has already stated in 1 Thess 5? What prompted Paul to write his statements in 2 Thess2:1-12—your assessment of the reasons that prompted him to clarify the issue already presented in his previous letter?

Write in your journal. Read Philippians 2:1-11. Write down what Paul says about unity and humility in this text. How are these two themes connected together? How does Paul show Jesus as an example to believers today? What does it mean for you to imitate Christ? What are the implications of being imitators of Christ?

Close in prayer for each of the students and his or her ministry.

[This page intentionally blank]