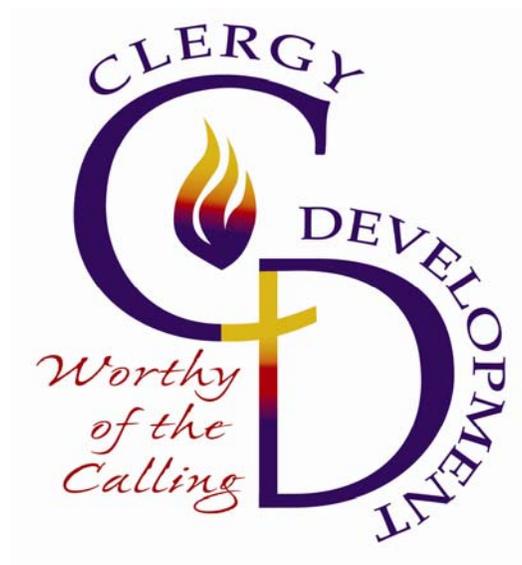


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Student Guide

# Interpreting Scripture



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

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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.

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## 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, <sup>8</sup>but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, <sup>9</sup>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.

## 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 no 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

he 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 the University 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. Huffman'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.

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# Syllabus

## Interpreting Scripture

**Educational Institution, Setting, or Educational Provider:**

**Location of the Course:**

**Course Dates:**

**Name of the Instructor:**

**Instructor's Address, Telephone, and E-mail Address:**

### **Module Vision Statement:**

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.

### **Educational Assumptions**

1. The work of the Holy Spirit is essential to any process of Christian education at any level. We will consistently request and expect the Spirit's presence within and among us.
2. Christian teaching and learning is best done in the context of community (people being and working together). Community is the gift of the Spirit but may be enhanced or hindered by human effort. Communities have common values, stories, practices, and goals. Explicit effort will be invested to enhance community within the class. Group work will take place in every lesson.
3. Every adult student has knowledge and experiences to contribute to the class. We learn not only from the instructor and the reading assignments, but also from each other. Each student is valued not only as a learner but also as a teacher. That is one reason so many exercises in this course are cooperative and collaborative in nature.
4. Journaling is an ideal way to bring theory and practice together as students synthesize the principles and content of the lessons with their own experiences, preferences, and ideas.

## Outcome Statements

This module contributes to the development of the following abilities as defined in the *U.S. Sourcebook for Ministerial Development*.

### 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 Reading

Any one or all of these textbooks would be good additions to your library:

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.

## Course Requirements

1. **Class attendance, attention, and participation** are especially important. Students are responsible for **all** assignments and in-class work. Much of the work in this course is small-group work. Cooperative, small-group work cannot be made up. That makes attendance imperative. Even if one does extra reading or writing, the values of discussion, dialogue, and learning from each other are thwarted. If one lesson is missed, the instructor will require extra work before completion can be acknowledged. If two or more classes are missed, the student will be required to repeat the whole module.

**Small-Group Work.** Nothing is more important in this course than small-group work. The class members will be assigned to groups of two to four students each. The group members will serve as study partners for explorations and discussion.

2. **Assignments**

**Journaling:** The only ongoing assignment for this module is your journal. It is to be used regularly, if not daily. On at least one occasion during the term, the instructor will check the journals. In each lesson a journal assignment is included.

The journal should become the student’s friend and treasury of insights, devotions, and ideas. Here the integration of theory and practice occurs. The spiritual life

nature of the journal helps guard against the course of study being merely academic as you are repeatedly called upon to apply the principles studied to your own heart and your own ministry situation.

This journal is not a diary, not a catchall. It is, rather, a guided journal or a focused journal in which the educational experience and its implications are selected for reflection and writing.

The framers of this curriculum are concerned about the way that students fall into learning “about” the Bible, or “about” the spiritual life rather than learning—that is coming to know and internalize the Bible and spiritual principles. The journaling experience ensures that the “Be” component of “Be, Know, and Do” is present in the course of study. Be faithful with all journaling assignments.

**Daily Work:** This module has regular homework assignments. It is called daily work because even though the class may only meet once a week, the student should be working on the module on a “daily” basis. Sometimes the homework assignments are quite heavy. The assignments are important. Even if homework is not discussed in class every session, the work is to be handed in. This gives the instructor regular information about the student’s progress in the course. The normal time for homework to be handed in is at the beginning of each class session. **All** assignments are to be completed.

## Course Outline and Schedule

The lessons will be 90 minutes for a total of 21 hours according to the following schedule:

Session Date	Session Time	
		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 the Old Testament Narratives and Law
		11. Interpreting the 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

## Course Evaluation

The instructor, the course itself, and the student's progress will be evaluated. These evaluations will be made in several ways.

The progress of students will be evaluated with an eye for enhancing the learning experience by:

1. Carefully observing the small-group work, noting the competence of reports, the balance of discussion, the quality of the relationships, the cooperation level, and the achievement of assigned tasks
2. Careful reading of homework assignments
3. Completion of all homework assignments
4. Journal checks

The course materials and the teacher will be evaluated by frequently asking and discussing the effectiveness and relevance of a certain method, experience, story, lecture, or other activity.

Some evaluation cannot be made during the class itself. Some objectives will not be measurable for years to come. If students encounter the transforming power of God at deeper levels than ever before, learn devotional skills and practice them with discipline, and incorporate the best of this course into their own ministries, the fruit of this educational endeavor could go on for a long time. In truth, that is what we expect.

## Additional Information

A reasonable effort to assist every student will be made. Any student who has handicaps, learning disabilities, or other conditions that make the achievement of the class requirements exceedingly difficult should make an appointment with the instructor as soon as possible to see what special arrangements can be made. Any student who is having trouble understanding the assignments, lectures, or other learning activities should talk to the instructor to see what can be done to help.

## Instructor's Availability

Good faith efforts to serve the students both in and beyond the classroom will be made.

## 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!

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# Lesson 1: Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction

## Due This Lesson

None

## Learner Objectives

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

## Homework Assignments

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.

## Definitions

*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**—the science and art of interpretation/principles of interpretation—in biblical studies the term applies to biblical interpretation.

It is important to recognize 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

**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.

**Application**—The development of a contemporary significance of a biblical text(s).

**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.

**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 of the Christian Church

- Catholic position—revelation testified to in the Bible can only be understood in light of the tradition presented by the Church.
- Protestant position—the doctrine of *sola scriptura*—Scripture has its own illuminating power.

## **Context of Communication**

Words have meaning and the meaning is often shaped by the context of communication.

- The context of time—biblical times; not only a gap in time between our time and the time of biblical events but also between events and the time when these events were written down
- The context of language—biblical languages; the meaning of idioms and phrases in biblical languages, and the nature of biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek)
- The context of geography—biblical lands
- The context of culture—biblical culture

## Pre-understanding

Ferguson defines ***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.*<sup>1</sup>

Various categories of pre-understanding:

- Informational—prior knowledge or information about the text
- Attitudinal—basic disposition one brings to the text, prejudice, bias, predisposition etc.
- Ideological—worldview, life-attitude, frame of reference, framework
- Methodological—actual approach one takes in understanding a given subject

Four factors that determine an appropriate pre-understanding:

1. Correct information about the text; do we know all that we need to know about the text?
2. Open and receptive attitude to the text to be interpreted; willing to encounter the text as if we are reading it for the first time
3. Flexible and adaptable ideological structure to treat the text objectively
4. Methodological approach suitable to the text

## Small Groups

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.

### Exercise 1

Group 1: You should imagine you are a group of poor plantation laborers on a large coffee plantation in Central America. You are poorly paid, have no health benefits, and work long hours at back-breaking work. However, this is the only employment available within two days journey, walking from your home.

Group 2: You should imagine you are upper-level managers in a large coffee production and distribution company based in the United States. Profits have been dropping due to increased shipping costs, and you've heard the workers on the coffee plantations in Central America are agitating for higher pay.

Each group should now read Isaiah 3:13-15.

1. Identify your feelings as you read this passage from the perspective of your group.
2. What perspective of God arises from this passage for you?
3. How do you want to interpret this passage?
4. In what ways can you identify the impact of your group's (imagined) social context on your reading of the passage?
5. Discuss with the class as a whole the impact of the reader's perspective on interpretation.

## Exercise 2

Group 1: Imagine you are a group of traditional, older men who have thought all your lives that a woman's place is in the home, a wife should not work outside the home, and the husband is the head of the house.

Group 2: Imagine you are a group of young women who have been called by God to pastoral ministry. You know there are people—both men and women—who oppose your calling.

Each group should now read 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

1. Identify your feelings as you read this passage from the perspective of your group.
2. What perspective of God arises from this passage for you?
3. How do you want to interpret this passage?
4. In what ways can you identify the impact of your group's (imagined) social context on your reading of the passage?
5. Discuss with the class as a whole the impact of the reader's perspective on interpretation.

# The Source of Meaning

by Roger Hahn

## Contemporary Discussion of the Locus of Meaning

In the last half of the 20th century considerable discussion regarding the location of meaning for a biblical text emerged. Hermeneutical theorists have identified three primary locations for meaning. Many such theorists are committed to only one location for the meaning of the text. These three locations are:

- the author
- the text
- the reader

They are often referred to as

- author-centered meaning
- text-centered meaning
- reader-centered meaning

**Author-centered meaning**—The approach to hermeneutics called “author-centered meaning” argues that the (original) meaning of a biblical text is to be found in the intention of the author of the text. This has been the primary approach to biblical exegesis for the past two centuries and is commonly assumed in many circles to be the only way meaning is found.

The strength of an author-centered meaning approach is the way it reflects a commonsense approach to communication. When we write a letter we assume the meaning of that letter is determined by what we, the letter writer, intended to communicate.

When we speak to someone we assume the meaning of our oral communication is determined by the message we, the speaker, intended to communicate.

It is counter-intuitive in most contexts of communication to assume the meaning is to be found anywhere other than in the purpose of the person who speaks or writes. For this reason modern exegesis—the exegesis of the 19th and 20th centuries—has assumed the meaning of a biblical text is to be found in the intention of the author.

One of the results of an author-centered approach to meaning is that modern exegesis has usually assumed there is only one meaning for a biblical text, the so-called original meaning. The analogy of ordinary contemporary communication suggests this. When we write something or speak something we usually have a specific meaning and only one meaning we are trying to communicate.

The only exceptions to the single—original—meaning would be circumstances in which the author intended his or her words to communicate at two or more levels. This is often affirmed of the author of the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, in the author-centered approach to meaning, an interpreter would have to show evidence that the author intended more than one meaning before making such an affirmation.

However, in the final part of the 20th century a number of problems with an author-centered approach to meaning have been noted, leading a number of hermeneutical theorists to seek other locations for the meaning of biblical texts. The chief problem is the great distance between the author of a biblical text and contemporary readers/listeners of that text.

The analogy of letter writing and speaking used in the paragraph above assume the writer and the reader of the letter share a common time and place in human history. It assumes an oral communication in which the speaker and the listener are at the same place at the same time, or are connected through electronic means of communication that transmit the voice almost instantly from the speaker to the listener.

However, in the best-case scenario the author of a biblical text writes almost 2000 years before the contemporary reader reads the text. This “chronological gap” creates such distance between the author and the reader that many hermeneutical theorists question whether we can really discover the meaning intended by the biblical authors.

Furthermore, the biblical authors are separated from contemporary readers by a “cultural gap.” There are vast cultural differences between the culture of a biblical author and the culture of almost any contemporary reader of the Bible. For most contemporary readers of the Bible there is also a “language gap” between them and the biblical authors. The authors of the Old Testament wrote almost completely in Biblical Hebrew; a few chapters were written in Aramaic. The New Testament authors wrote in what is often called Koine Greek, which was quite different even from modern Greek. Biblical Hebrew is different from modern Hebrew, although modern Hebrew came into being as a reconstruction of biblical Hebrew.

Is it really possible to cross over the chronological gap, the cultural gap, and the language gap to understand the intention of a biblical author? Modern exegesis has attempted to access the mind of the biblical author by identifying the author’s name, the date at which he or she wrote, the place of writing, the nature of the audience, the nature of the writing, and the purpose of the writing.

However, for many biblical books the author’s name is unknown or disputed by various interpreters, the date is uncertain, and the places of both the writing and the reading are debated. After 200 years of the techniques of modern exegesis there is still considerable debate over these basic issues for much of the Bible.

At the end of the 200 years scholars are not as optimistic that all these disagreements will be resolved as they were at the beginning of modern exegesis. As a result many interpreters are concluding we will never be able to gather sufficient information to know with confidence what a biblical author intended. Because of this it is difficult to claim with certainty that the interpreter has discovered the single—original—meaning of the author. This has led to increased attention to the text and to the reader as the place to find the meaning of the biblical text.

**Text-centered meaning**—In contrast to the biblical author whose intention is so difficult to find, the actual text of the Bible is always present and available for analysis. This has led many hermeneutical theorists in recent years to argue that the written text itself is the place to find meaning. There is a certain commonsense appeal to this approach. When we write a letter, we assume the meaning we intend will be

expressed in the words we write. When we speak to a group of people, we assume the meaning of what we intend to communicate will be contained in the words we speak.

This means the text-centered approach to meaning has focused on what are often called literary analyses of the text. This approach has become very widespread in the final quarter of the 20th century in biblical interpretation. The interpreter asks about the literary genre of the work the author produced. The interpreter asks about the literary forms used by the author. Issues of context, grammar, syntax, and word meaning are all explored in the process of literary analysis of the text. These sources of information provide clues about the meaning the text yields to the interpreter.

A text-centered approach to meaning does not assume there is only one meaning to a text. That assumption is closely tied to an author-centered approach to the meaning of texts. However, a text-centered approach to meaning does not believe there are an infinite number of possible meanings to the biblical text. The significance of literary genre, literary form, syntax, grammar, and word meanings place certain limits on the range of possible meanings. Only meanings consistent with the common usage of language are possible meanings of the text.

The chief strength of the text-centered approach to meaning is that the biblical text is available for us to interpret. Though the biblical text was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, sufficient understanding of those languages is available to establish the patterns of meaning the grammar, syntax, and words of those languages convey.

The primary weakness of the text-centered approach to meaning occurs when this approach is pursued in isolation from author-centered and reader-centered approaches. As implied above, the text or actual words of a communication are usually designed to express the intended purpose of the author. To separate the text from the author is an artificial separation.

Likewise, no text—or author—exists in isolation from the reader(s) or the audience. To focus only on the text as the location for meaning ignores the dynamic, inter-relational aspect of communication.

**Reader-centered meaning**—Though a text-centered approach to meaning solved the basic problem of an author-centered approach to meaning—that of distance from the author—it fails to engage the total process of communication. In the final quarter of the 20th century there has been an increasing focus on the reader as a location for meaning.

The primary strength of the reader-centered approach to meaning is that meaning in the intention of the author and/or in the structures of the text is only hypothetical until a reader actually engages the text and “discovers” meaning there. The communication of meaning always requires two parties, the sender and the receiver. As many people have discovered, the simple intention of a speaker or writer does not result in communication until the audience or reader receives and decodes the message. Thus readers always participate in the meaning.

A reader-centered approach to meaning is sometimes criticized as hopelessly subjective. In its most extreme forms a reader-centered approach to meaning argues that no meaning exists in a text until the reader “creates” that meaning. Further, since

meaning is “created” by the reader, every reader “creates” meaning and there are as many meanings to a text as there are readers.

While one might argue that there are as many understandings of a message as there are hearers or readers, very few of us who speak or write are willing to leave all responsibility—and privilege—for meaning with the hearer or reader. This is a primary critique of a reader-centered approach to meaning. This approach also tends to run together the distinction made above between meaning and significance or application.

### **Evaluation of Centers of Meaning**

It should be clear at this point that there are strengths and weaknesses to each of the three approaches to meaning popular among hermeneutical theorists in the last quarter of the 20th century. A reasonable approach to meaning will attempt to take advantage of the strengths of each approach and will try to compensate for the weaknesses of each approach.

There are sections of the Bible in which access to the intention of the author is more likely to be possible than others. In such passages we should not neglect the effort to seek the author’s intention. However, even in such passages there is much to be learned from analysis of the text. In fact, it is the text that will always be the primary witness to whatever meaning an author may have intended.

Especially in texts where it is now impossible to learn much about the author, it is important to follow the procedures of a text-centered approach to meaning. In those cases, one can almost say, “The text is all we have.” It is also foolish to ignore the role of the reader in the construction of meaning. Meaning never exists in isolation from the reader.

Every passage in the Bible—as well as the Bible as a whole—is an act of communication. To interpret it well one needs to remember the dynamics of communication. All communication involves a

- sender—author or speaker
- who sends a message—text or speech
- to a receiver(s)—reader or listener

Recognizing this dynamic of communication should lead the biblical interpreter to pursue the strengths and advantages of author-centered, text-centered, and reader-centered approaches to meaning.

## Lesson 2: Biblical Text, Canon, and Translations

### Due This Lesson

Two 1- to 2-page papers  
Reading *Manual* on The Holy Scriptures  
Reading Resource 1-6  
Journaling

### Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will 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

### Homework Assignments

Read and reflect on 2 Tim 3:16-17 and 1 Pet 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.

## The Old Testament

- Long and complex process of development
- Beginning of writing—date not known
- “Moses wrote”—in Exodus
- “The Book of the Law”—a written source? See Dt 31:24-26; 2 Kgs 22:8-10
- Other sources: Num 21:14, the Book of the Wars of the LORD; Josh 10:13, the Book of Jashar; 2 Chr 33:18, the Records of the Kings of Israel
- Oral traditions and written records

Writing—ongoing activity in the 10th to 5th centuries BC

Most OT books—product of 800-400 BC

Autographs—not in existence

Palestine, Babylon, Egypt—three locations of writing and copying

Destruction of the “worn out” manuscripts

Qumran scrolls/Dead Sea scrolls—oldest available copies of the OT—100 BC

100 BC—the beginning of collecting and examining the OT manuscripts by the temple authorities in Jerusalem

AD 100—the recognition/establishment of a “Standard” manuscript

## Old Testament Manuscripts

No vowels, no verse divisions, no chapter divisions

AD 500—the beginning of the scribal activity of adding vowels and marginal notes—*masora*; these scribes are known as masoretic scribes.

Two leading masoretic families: Ben Asher and Ben Naphthali

- Ben Asher family completed a manuscript of the OT, AD 900, known today as the Ben Asher manuscript. The Hebrew Bible is also known as the Masoretic Text, abbreviated as MT.

Important OT Manuscripts

- Cairo Codex of the Prophets, dated to AD 895
- Aleppo Codex of the entire OT, dated to AD 930
- Leningrad Codex, 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 not added to the Hebrew Bible until the 14th century.

### Canonization of the OT books

- No attempt until 400 BC
- Torah—Books of Moses—400 BC
- Prophets—200 BC
- Writings—AD 95
- Final approval by the Council of Jamnia—AD 95  
39 books approved

## The New Testament

Places of writing: Syria/Palestine, Greece, Asia Minor, Rome

Date of writing: AD 49-95

No autographs in existence

Copying—popular activity; circulation of the writings and reading in various churches

Papyrus copies—replaced by leather parchments

Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, Carthage, Rome—centers where copying and preservation of the manuscripts took place

4500 complete or partial manuscripts of the NT

Scrolls were replaced by Codex—book—in the second century AD.

Two basic styles of writing

- cursive in small script—"minuscule"
- formal or capital letters—"uncial"

Thousands of minuscule manuscripts, but only fewer uncials; uncials are the earliest and the most reliable sources of the original text.

## Early New Testament

Two papyri collections—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 NT books

Key uncials—all on leather parchments in codex form:

- Sinaiticus—4th century, all 27 books
  - Vaticanus—4th century, missing the section after Hebrews 9:13
  - Alexandrinus—5th century, missing the Gospel of Matthew
- 
- Erasmus of Rotterdam—published the first NT in Greek in 1516, based on a manuscript type from Antioch, Syria; dated to the 4th century.
  - Robert Stephanus—*published four editions: 1546, 1549, 1550, 1551; all based on the Byzantine text.*
  - Theodore Beza published nine editions of the Greek New Testament between 1565 and 1604; following the same text tradition.
  - Elzevir brothers—two Dutch printers—published the same text with the claim it was the “received text” *textus receptus*; became the basis of all English translations until the 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 NT; based on their study of thousands of manuscripts and New Testament quotations in the writings of the Early Fathers.

## **Canonization of the New Testament Books**

No effort until AD 150

Marcion's heresy: rejected the Old Testament and most of the New Testament books

Muratorian Canon—discovered in 1740 by L. A. Muratori—a list of New Testament books dated to AD 190; all 4 Gospels, 13 letters of Paul, Jude, 1 and 2 John, and the Revelation.

AD 250—the Church had rejected some books (New Testament apocrypha); accepted some and continued to debate about some others: Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and the Revelation.

Bishop Athanasius—lists 27 books in a letter dated to AD 367. Formal adoption of the 27 books by the Council of Hippo in AD 393 and by the Council of Carthage in 397.

## Translations

### Ancient Versions

- **Targums**—Oral paraphrases and renderings of the Hebrew text; first started in the synagogues for the benefit of the Aramaic-speaking Jews.
- **Septuagint**—the first real attempt to translate the biblical text into another language. The beginning of the translation of the Law—Torah—around 250 BC in Alexandria, Egypt.
- **The Old Latin version**—AD 180—revised by Bishop Jerome around AD 385. Known as the Vulgate.

### English Translations

- Several attempts to translate portions or sections of the Latin Bible into English; key names: Caedmon in 670, Aldhelm in 700, the Venerable Bede in 735, King Alfred in 871.
- **John Wycliffe** (1380)—the complete New Testament from Latin; the complete Bible in 1382; a revision appeared in 1397, after Wycliffe's death.
- **William Tyndale** (1526)—first New Testament from Greek; became the basis of many later translations.
- **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 King James Version** (1611)—commissioned by King James I in 1604 to produce a translation as close as can be to the original languages to be used in all churches of England during worship. Fifty-four scholars worked in six groups to complete the work.

## Theories of Translation

- ◆ **Formal equivalence** method—a word-for-word, literal translation that preserves the original word order and structure as much as possible.
  - *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) is the closest modern translation that follows this method.
  
- ◆ **Dynamic Equivalence** method—thought-for-thought 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 New Living Translation* (NLT, Tyndale Publishing Company, 1996) example of dynamic equivalence.
  
- ◆ *New International Version* (NIV), and *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), utilize both “formal” and “dynamic” equivalence methods.
  
- ◆ **Paraphrases**—free rendering of the text in English
  - *The Living Bible*
  - *The Message*

Resource 2-8

2 Timothy 3:16-17

KJV	NIV	NRSV	NASB	NLT
<p>All scripture <i>is</i> given by inspiration of God, and <i>is</i> profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.</p>	<p>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.</p>	<p>All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.</p>	<p>All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.</p>	<p>All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.</p>

1 Peter 1:10-12

<p>Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently who prophesied of the grace <i>that should come</i> unto you; Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom is was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.</p>	<p>Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.</p>	<p>Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.</p>	<p>As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that <i>would come</i> to you made careful searches and inquires, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angel long to look.</p>	<p>This salvation was something the prophets wanted to know more about. They prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you, even though they had many questions as to what it all could mean. They wondered what the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. They wondered when and to whom all this could happen. They were told that these things would not happen during their lifetime, but many years later, during yours. And now this Good News has been announced by those who preached to you in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.</p>
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## **Lesson 3: The History of Interpretation: Inner Biblical and Jewish Interpretation**

### **Due This Lesson**

Report  
Journaling

### **Learner Objectives**

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- 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

### **Homework Assignments**

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.

## Small Groups

Work together and discuss the following. Be prepared to report to the class.

Compare Ex 21:2 with Dt 15:12-18; Deuteronomic writer interprets and expands the law in the Covenant Code.

How are they different?

How are they similar?

Compare the Exodus/Numbers stories with Jer 2:2.

Compare the Jacob traditions with Hos 12:2-6.

Compare 1 Sam 31 with 1 Chr 10.

Read Rom 3:9-18. Locate OT references—book, chapter, verse—found in this text. Discuss what Paul is doing with these OT passages.

## Jewish Methods of Interpreting the Scriptures

### Targums

- Free and extemporaneous oral renderings in Aramaic
- Two significant works:
  - Targum of Onkelos—Torah
  - Targum of Jonathan—Prophets

### **Qumran community, the Essenes:** 150 BC-AD 70

- The community was characterized by its intense messianic and eschatological/apocalyptic expectations.
- They attempted to apply the biblical prophecies directly to their existence and saw themselves living in the end time.
- The commentaries followed the ***peshar*** method of interpretation; *pashar* in Aramaic means to interpret.

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

- Change in the biblical text—textual emendation—to support an interpretation
- Contemporary application of Old Testament prophecy
- Atomization of the text

## Rabbinic Interpretation-Pharisaic Tradition

Two periods of rabbinic exegesis:

### 1. **Tannaim**—Teachers, 150 BC to 200 AD

- Two rival schools of thought
  - 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
- Tannaim were the interpreters or scholars who composed the ***Mishnah***.
- Mishnah—the written work of the oral teachings of leading rabbis of early Judaism arranged under six topics. Contains the whole of the Jewish religious and legal system.
  - seeds/*zeraim*
  - festivals/*moed*
  - women/*nashim*
  - injuries/*nezikim*
  - holy things/*kodashim*
  - clean things/*toharot*

### 2. **Amoraim**—AD 200 to 500

- Interpreters of the interpretations of ***Tannaim***
- Comments on the Mishnah—known as ***Gemara*** or commentary
- ***Talmud***—Palestinian and Babylonian—commentary on the Mishnah by later rabbis, produced between AD 450 and 550
- ***Midrash*** or ***Midrashim***—running commentaries on the biblical text from the Amoraic period

The Jewish Rabbinic materials cover two types of content:

- ***Halakah***—“rule to go by”—matters of behavior and conduct or principles and regulations for human conduct derived from Old Testament legal materials.
- ***Haggadah***—“telling”—scriptural texts to edify the reader, the goal of which was to inspire religious devotion.

## Characteristics of Rabbinic Jewish Interpretation

A foundational assumption of the rabbis: 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.

- Dependence on the **previous interpretive tradition** established by leading rabbis
- **Literal** meaning of the text
- The practice of ***midrash***—the practice of uncovering the deeper meaning of the text by looking at analogous words, phrases, or verses from biblical cross-references to illumine the text under study

Goal of Midrash—explain the meaning of the text, search for its significance, deduce from it new laws and principles, and establish religious doctrines and practices

## Hillel's Seven Exegetical Rules

**Hillel** listed seven exegetical rules of *midrash—middot*—by which an interpreter might draw inference from a passage. They are:

1. *Inference from **the lighter meaning** to the heavier meaning*—what is applicable to less important cases will also apply to more important cases as well.  
Example: The rules that relate to a festival also apply to the Sabbath since the Sabbath has greater significance.
2. ***Analogy of expressions***—explaining difficult or ambiguous words in one context by the meaning of the same word in other contexts.  
Example: Lev 16:29, "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves [literally, 'afflict your souls'] and not do any work—whether native-born or an alien living among you." In Deuteronomy the Hebrew word for "afflict" means "go hungry," so the law in Lev 16:29 refers to fasting on the tenth day of the seventh month.
3. *Application by **analogy with one provision**, or the extension from specific to the general*—a provision made in one context is applicable to all other contexts.  
Example: The provision in Dt 19:4-5—accidental death in one context—applies to all other contexts.
4. *Application by analogy with **two provisions***—a general principle made on the basis of a law that included two provisions or conditions.  
Example: Two provisions for the release of a slave in Ex 21:26-27 applies to all other parts of a body.
5. *Inference from a **general principle to a specific case**.*  
Example: The rule about paying double restitution in Ex 22:9 applies to anything that is lost.
6. *Explanation from **another passage**.* Difficulty in one passage may be resolved by comparing it with another passage.  
Example: What about the killing of the Passover lamb if the first day of the Passover falls on the Sabbath? Num 28:10—this is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular—or "daily"—burnt offering and its drink offering. The word "daily" permits the killing of the lamb on the Sabbath.
7. *Application from self-evident **inferences from the text**.*  
Example: Ex 16:29: "That is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." The rabbis concluded this rule applied only to the wilderness period.

## Biblical Hermeneutics

Considering the following definitions of methods of Jewish exegesis, what methods are being used in each of the New Testament passages given below?

- A. *Literalistic*—taking the words of Scripture exactly as they were written in a simple, straightforward way.
- B. *Pesher*—states the meaning of an Old Testament text in light of the eschatological perspective of the contemporary (Jewish) audience.
- C. *Qal wahomer*—what applies in a less important case will apply in a more important case.
- D. *Gezerah shawah*—the use of the same word (or phrase) in different contexts means the same considerations apply to each context and each passage helps interpret the other.
- E. *Charaz*—“pearl stringing”—bringing together passages from various parts of the Old Testament to support a single point of an argument.

\_\_\_\_\_ Jn 7:22-23—Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man’s whole body on the sabbath?

\_\_\_\_\_ Mt 4:2-4—He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”<sup>1</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ Rom 15:8-12—For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name”<sup>2</sup>; and again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;<sup>3</sup> and again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”<sup>4</sup>; and again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dt 8:3

<sup>2</sup> Ps 18:49

<sup>3</sup> Dt 32:43

<sup>4</sup> Ps 117:1

<sup>5</sup> Isa 11:10

\_\_\_\_\_ Mt 15:6-9—So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.”<sup>6</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ Gal 3:10-13—For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.”<sup>7</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”<sup>8</sup> But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, “Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.”<sup>9</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”<sup>10</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ 2 Cor 3:7-11—Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses’ face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 Pet 1:24-25—For  
“All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
but the word of the Lord endures forever.”<sup>11</sup>  
That word is the good news that was announced to you.

\_\_\_\_\_ Rom 11:8-10—As it is written, “God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.”<sup>12</sup> And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and keep their backs forever bent.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Isa 29:13

<sup>7</sup> Dt 27:26

<sup>8</sup> Hab 2:4

<sup>9</sup> Lev 18:5

<sup>10</sup> Dt 21:23

<sup>11</sup> Isa 40:6-8

<sup>12</sup> Dt 29:4

<sup>13</sup> Ps 69:22-23

## Lesson 4: The History of Interpretation: Early Christian Period

### Due This Lesson

Resource 3-6  
Journaling

### Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

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

### Homework Assignments

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.

## Bible Study

### Compare:

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

## **Basic Theological Assumptions of the New Testament Writers**

- Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah; Christological reading of the Old Testament.
- 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; 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.

## Typology

The attempt to show historical correspondences between Old Testament and New Testament events, persons, and ideas. Popular understanding: certain Old Testament events foreshadowed the 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.

- 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

## Literal Interpretation

The literal meaning applied to the New Testament context and the life of the Church

- 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

## Midrash

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

- 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 Prov 1:16; Isa 59:7-8; 3:18 with Ps 36:1.
- 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. This illustrates the practice of *midrash* by Paul.

## Hillel's Middot and Peshar

### Hillel's Middot

- 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—Gals 3: 8ff joining Gen 12: 3 and 22: 18
- Rule 7—Rom 4: 10; Gal 3: 17

### Peshar

This method is most prominent in Matthew and John.

- 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 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude.

## **Allegory**

Allegory is the extended comparison between two different levels of meanings of the text, the literal level and the spiritual level. Allegorical method—interpretive practice influenced by the philosophical thought of Plato that reality lay behind what was visible—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

## The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament

Mt 2: 18 quotes from Jer 31: 15: "Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'"

Examine the larger context of Jer 31: 13-17 and underline elements that may shed light on Matthew's use of verse 15.

Jer 31: 15-17

Thus says the LORD:

A voice is heard in Ramah,  
lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children;  
she refuses to be comforted for her children,  
because they are no more.

Thus says the LORD:

Keep your voice from weeping,  
and your eyes from tears;  
for there is a reward for your work,

says the LORD:  
they shall come back from the land of the enemy;  
there is hope for your future,

says the LORD:  
your children shall come back to their own country.

Following Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples, Mt 26:30 states, "When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives," where he would be arrested later that night. Passover practices suggest that "the hymn" was Psalms 116-118. Consider the text of Psalm 118 and underline phrases that seem especially meaningful in light of Jesus' coming death and resurrection.

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!  
Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."  
Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever."  
Let those who fear the LORD say, "His steadfast love endures forever."  
Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me in a  
broad place.  
With the LORD on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me?  
The LORD is on my side to help me; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.  
It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in mortals.  
It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.  
All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!  
They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the LORD I cut  
them off!  
They surrounded me like bees; they blazed like a fire of thorns;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!  
I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me.  
The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.  
There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:  
"The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;  
the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly."  
I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.  
The LORD has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.  
Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the LORD.  
This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.  
I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.  
The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.  
This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.  
This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.  
We bless you from the house of the LORD.  
The LORD is God, and he has given us light.  
Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.  
You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.  
O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

## **Lesson 5: The History of Interpretation: Patristic and Medieval Period**

### **Due This Lesson**

Resource 4-8  
Journaling

### **Learner Objectives**

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- 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

### **Homework Assignments**

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.

## The Apostolic Fathers: AD 100-150

**Sources**—Writings of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Barnabas (anonymous), and important writings such as *Didache*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Epistle to Diognetus*.

Contexts in which interpretation took place:

- The need to provide instruction and pastoral care to the Christian communities—Letters of Ignatius
- Missionary activities and Christian apologetics against pagan attack; interpretation focused on gaining intellectual respectability; use of Greek philosophical methods/allegorical method
- Christian writers' attempt to compare 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 that the old covenant had been superseded by a new covenant
- Disputes within the Christian Church; attack against heresies; Irenaeus' (130-200) *Against All Heresies*

Early Christian writings show the use of typology and allegory in the interpretation of the Bible:

- Typological interpretation—The Epistle of Barnabas 12:1-7; 1 Clement 12:7
- Allegorical interpretation—The Epistle of Barnabas 8

### Midrash

Occasionally, we find the Fathers utilizing the Jewish rabbinic method of interpretation.

The Fathers established the authority of the tradition handed down by the apostles—traditional interpretation—as a new interpretive principle for the church.

- **Tertullian** was the first to argue for the authority of the apostolic church in the interpretation of the Bible.

## 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.

- Clement of Alexandria (AD 190-203)—twofold understanding of Scripture analogous to a human beings' body (literal) and soul (spiritual).
- Origen (AD 184-254)—greatest biblical scholar of early Christian period. Created the Hexapla, Old Testament arranged in six parallel columns:
  - Hebrew text
  - Transliteration into Greek letters
  - Septuagint translation
  - Three ancient versions of the Septuagint: Aquilla, Symmachus, and Theodotian

His most important work on biblical interpretation: *De Principiis*. Wrote a number of commentaries, exegetical notes, and homilies.

Origen argued Scripture has threefold meaning: literal, moral, and spiritual. Interpretation moves from the events (literal), to the hidden principles for Christian living (moral), to the doctrinal truth (spiritual).

## Antiochian School

- Founded in reaction to Origen's allegorical system.
- The Antiochian school 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.

## Western School

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. The study of Hebrew and Greek ceased; the Church depended on the Vulgate for all doctrinal discussions.

**Augustine** (AD 354-430)—his theory of biblical interpretation in his treatise on Christian doctrine, *De Doctrina Christiana*. Mainly followed the literal interpretation; he also emphasized the authority of the tradition.

## Middle Ages: AD 590-1500

### Three Interpretive Methods

#### Traditional

Heavy dependence on the traditions handed down from the church fathers.

- ***catena***—the chain of interpretation compiled from the commentaries of the Early Church Fathers; key source for the traditional interpretation.
- ***interpretive gloss***—compilation of scripture annotations or commentaries from the Fathers written in the margins or between the lines of the Bible.
- ***Glossa Ordinaria***—in the 12th century, Anselm, with the help of several other scholars, compiled a gloss of the entire Bible; the standard medieval Bible commentary.

#### Allegorical

The dominant method—four senses: literal, allegorical, moral, analogical.

An example of allegorical method is:

City of Jerusalem

- Literal sense—the earthly city
- Allegorical—the Church
- Moral—the human soul
- Analogical—the heavenly city

#### Literal

Focus on 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

**Venerable Bede** (673-725)—Produced commentaries and biblical aids.

**Hugo of St. Victor** (1096-1141)—Interpretation had to adapt itself to the traditions and doctrines of the church.

**Stephen Langdon** (1150-1228)—Archbishop of Canterbury; divided the Bible into its present chapters; preferred the spiritual meaning over the literal meaning.

**Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274)—Most influential proponent of scholasticism; author of *Summa Theologica*, the rational, systematic expression of the Christian faith. Proponent of the literal sense of the Scriptures.

**Nicholas of Lyra** (1270-1340)—A Jewish convert to Christianity. He insisted only the literal sense should be used to prove any doctrine.

**John Wycliffe** (1329-1384)—One of the most outstanding biblical scholars of his day. Argued for the authority of the Bible over against that of the Church. Defended the literal sense of the Bible. Undertook the task of translating the Bible from Latin into English.

## Small Groups

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

## Patristic Interpretation

### ***Dialogue with Trypho* by Justin Martyr, Chapter 90**

Read the following section from Justin Martyr and identify the method of interpretation he is using. Underline or circle the specific texts that help you make that identification.

“Bring us on, then,” said [Trypho], “by the Scriptures, that we may also be persuaded by you; for we know that He should suffer and be led as a sheep. But prove to us whether He must be crucified and die so disgracefully and so dishonorably by the death cursed in the law. For we cannot bring ourselves even to think of this.”

“You know,” said I, “that what the prophets said and did they veiled by parables and types, as you admitted to us; so that it was not easy for all to understand the most [of what they said], since they concealed the truth by these means, that those who are eager to find out and learn it might do so with much labor.”

They answered, “We admitted this.”

“Listen, therefore,” say I, “to what follows; for Moses first exhibited this seeming curse of Christ’s by the signs which he made.”

“Of what [signs] do you speak?” said he.

“When the people,” replied I, “waged war with Amalek, and the son of Nave (Nun) by name Jesus (Joshua), led the fight, Moses himself prayed to God, stretching out both hands, and Hur with Aaron supported them during the whole day, so that they might not hang down when he got wearied. For if he gave up any part of this sign, which was an imitation of the cross, the people were beaten, as is recorded in the writings of Moses; but if he remained in this form, Amalek was proportionally defeated, and he who prevailed prevailed by the cross. For it was not because Moses so prayed that the people were stronger, but because, while one who bore the name of Jesus (Joshua) was in the forefront of the battle, he himself made the sign of the cross. For who of you knows not that the prayer of one who accompanies it with lamentation and tears, with the body prostrate, or with bended knees, propitiates God most of all? But in such a manner neither he nor any other one, while sitting on a stone, prayed. Nor even the stone symbolized Christ, as I have shown.

Method: \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Irenaeus—Against Heresies, Book IV Chapter 26***

Read the following section from Irenaeus and identify the method of interpretation he is using. Underline or circle the specific texts that help you make that identification.

1. If any one, therefore, reads the Scriptures with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ, and a foreshadowing of the new calling (vocationis). For Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field, that is, in this world (for “the field is the world”); but the treasure hid in the Scriptures is Christ, since He was pointed out by

means of types and parables. Hence His human nature could not be understood, prior to the consummation of those things which had been predicted, that is, the advent of Christ. And therefore it was said to Daniel the prophet: "Shut up the words, and seal the book even to the time of consummation, until many learn, and knowledge be completed. For at that time, when the dispersion shall be accomplished, they shall know all these things." But Jeremiah also says, "In the last days they shall understand these things." For every prophecy, before its fulfillment, is to men [full of] enigmas and ambiguities. But when the time has arrived, and the prediction has come to pass, then the prophecies have a clear and certain exposition. And for this reason, indeed, when at this present time the law is read to the Jews, it is like a fable; for they do not possess the explanation of all things pertaining to the advent of the Son of God, which took place in human nature; but when it is read by the Christians, it is a treasure, hid indeed in a field, but brought to light by the cross of Christ, and explained, both enriching the understanding of men, and showing forth the wisdom of God and declaring His dispensations with regard to man, and forming the kingdom of Christ beforehand, and preaching by anticipation the inheritance of the holy Jerusalem, and proclaiming beforehand that the man who loves God shall arrive at such excellency as even to see God, and hear His word, and from the hearing of His discourse be glorified to such an extent, that others cannot behold the glory of his countenance, as was said by Daniel: "Those who do understand, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and many of the righteous as the stars for ever and ever." Thus, then, I have shown it to be, if any one read the Scriptures. For thus it was that the Lord discoursed with, the disciples after His resurrection from the dead, proving to them from the Scriptures themselves "that Christ must suffer, and enter into His glory, and that remission of sins should be preached in His name throughout all the world." And the disciple will be perfected, and [rendered] like the householder, "who bringeth forth from his treasure things new and old."

2. Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father. But [it is also incumbent] to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession, and assemble themselves together in any place whatsoever, [looking upon them] either as heretics of perverse minds, or as schismaries puffed up and self-pleasing, or again as hypocrites, acting thus for the sake of lucre and vainglory. For all these have fallen from the truth. And the heretics, indeed, who bring strange fire to the altar of God—namely, strange doctrines—shall be burned up by the fire from heaven, as were Nadab and Abiud. But such as rise up in opposition to the truth, and exhort others against the Church of God, [shall] remain among those in hell (apud inferos), being swallowed up by an earthquake, even as those who were with Chore, Dathan, and Abiron. But those who cleave asunder, and separate the unity of the Church, [shall] receive from God the same punishment as Jeroboam did.

Method: \_\_\_\_\_

## Origen—*First Principles*

Read the following selections from Origen and from Chrysostom. In your words compare and contrast their methods of interpreting Scripture.

9. Now the reason of the erroneous apprehension of all these points on the part of those whom we have mentioned above, is no other than this, that holy Scripture is not understood by them according to its spiritual, but according to its literal meaning. And therefore we shall endeavor, so far as our moderate capacity will permit, to point out to those who believe the holy Scriptures to be no human compositions, but to be written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and to be transmitted and entrusted to us by the will of God the Father, through His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, what appears to us, who observe things by a right way of understanding, to be the standard and discipline delivered to the apostles by Jesus Christ, and which they handed down in succession to their posterity, the teachers of the holy Church. Now, that there are certain mystical economies indicated in holy Scripture, is admitted by all, I think, even the simplest of believers. But what these are, or of what kind they are, he who is rightly minded, and not overcome with the vice of boasting, will scrupulously acknowledge himself to be ignorant. For if any one, e.g., were to adduce the case of the daughters of Lot, who seem, contrary to the law of God, to have had intercourse with their father, or that of the two wives of Abraham, or of the two sisters who were married to Jacob, or of the two hand-maids who increased the number of his sons, what other answer could be returned than that these were certain mysteries, and forms of spiritual things, but that we are ignorant of what nature they are? Nay, even when we read of the construction of the tabernacle, we deem it certain that the written descriptions are the figures of certain hidden things; but to adapt these to their appropriate standards, and to open up and discuss every individual point, I consider to be exceedingly difficult, not to say impossible. That that description, however, is, as I have said, full of mysteries, does not escape even the common understanding. But all the narrative portion, relating either to the marriages, or to the begetting of the children, or to battles of different kinds, or to any other histories whatever, what else can they be supposed to be, save the forms and figures of hidden and sacred things? As men, however, make little effort to exercise their intellect, or imagine that they possess knowledge before they really learn, the consequence is that they never begin to have knowledge; or if there be no want of a desire, at least, nor of an instructor, and if divine knowledge be sought after, as it ought to be, in a religious and Holy Spirit, and in the hope that many points will be opened up by the revelation of God—since to human sense they are exceedingly difficult and obscure—then, perhaps, he who seeks in such a manner will find what it is lawful to discover.

10. But lest this difficulty perhaps should be supposed to exist only in the language of the prophets, seeing the prophetic style is allowed by all to abound in figures and enigmas, what do we find when we come to the Gospels? Is there not hidden there also an inner, namely a divine sense, which is revealed by that grace alone which he had received who said, "But we have the mind of Christ, that we might know the things freely given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Spirit teacheth?" And if one now were to read the revelations which were made to John, how amazed would he not be that there should be contained within them so great an amount of hidden, ineffable mysteries, in which it is clearly understood, even by those who cannot comprehend what is concealed, that something certainly is concealed. And yet are not the Epistles of the Apostles, which seem to some to be plainer, filled with meanings so profound, that by means of them, as by some small receptacle, the clearness of incalculable light

appears to be poured into those who are capable of understanding the meaning of divine wisdom? And therefore, because this is the case, and because there are many who go wrong in this life, I do not consider that it is easy to pronounce, without danger, that any one knows or understands those things, which, in order to be opened up, need the key of knowledge; which key, the Savior declared, lay with those who were skilled in the law. And here, although it is a digression, I think we should inquire of those who assert that before the advent of the Savior there was no truth among those who were engaged in the study of the law, how it could be said by our Lord Jesus Christ that the keys of knowledge were with them, who had the books of the prophets and of the law in their hands. For thus did He speak: "Woe unto you, ye teachers of the law, who have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them who wished to enter in ye hindered."

### **Chrysostom—Homilies on Matthew, Homily X**

Matthew 3:1, 2

*"In those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand."*

How "in those days"? For not then, surely, when He was a child, and came to Nazareth, but thirty years after, John cometh; as Luke also testifies. How then is it said, "in those days"? The Scripture is always wont to use this manner of speech, not only when it is mentioning what occurs in the time immediately after, but also of things which are to come to pass many years later. Thus also, for example, when His disciples came unto Him as He sat on the Mount of Olives, and sought to learn about His coming, and the taking of Jerusalem: and yet ye know how great is the interval between those several periods. I mean, that having spoken of the subversion of the mother city, and completed His discourse on that subject, and being about to pass to that on the consummation, he inserted, "*Then* shall these things also come to pass;" not bringing together the times by the word *then*, but indicating that time only in which these things were to happen. And this sort of thing he doth now also, saying, "In those days." For this is not put to signify the days that come immediately after, but those in which these things were to take place, which he was preparing to relate.

"But why was it after thirty years," it may be said, "that Jesus came unto His baptism"? After this baptism He was thenceforth to do away with the law: wherefore even until this age, which admits of all sins, He continues fulfilling it all; that no one might say, that because He Himself could not fulfill it, He did it away. For neither do all passions assail us at all times; but while in the first age of life there is much thoughtlessness and timidity, in that which comes after it, pleasure is more vehement, and after this again the desire of wealth. For this cause he awaits the fullness of His adult age, and throughout it all fulfills the law, and so comes to His baptism, adding it as something which follows upon the complete keeping of all the other commandments.

To prove that this was to Him the last good work of those enjoined by the law, hear His own words: "For thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." Now what He saith is like this: "We have performed all the duties of the law, we have not transgressed so much as one commandment. Since therefore this only remains, this too must be added, and so shall we "fulfill all righteousness." For He here calls by the name of "righteousness" the full performance of all the commandments.

Now that on this account Christ came to His baptism, is from this evident. But wherefore was this baptism devised for Him. For that not of himself did the son of Zacharias proceed to this, but of God who moved him—this Luke also declares, when he saith, “The word of the Lord came unto him,” that is, His commandment. And he himself too saith, “He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said to me, upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending like a dove, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.” Wherefore then was he sent to baptize? The Baptist again makes this also plain to us, saying, “I knew Him not, but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.”

In your words compare and contrast Origen’s and Chrysostom’s methods of interpreting Scripture.

## Lesson 6: The History of Interpretation: Reformation and Post-Reformation Period

### Due This Lesson

Resource 5-8  
Journaling

### Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- 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

### Homework Assignments

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.

## Reformation

Several factors directly contributing

- Invention of printing by Gutenberg and the first printed Bible in Latin (1456)
- Crisis in the papacy in the 14th century
- Renaissance of learning and culture in the 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

- At the University of Wittenberg he discovered the truth that justification came by faith through his study of Rom 1: 17.
- Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle church on October 31, 1517.

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

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
- Calvinists in 1618-19

## The Reformation Period, 1500-1650

The groundwork for the Reformation was laid by:

- Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522)—grammatical interpretation of the seven penitential psalms.
- Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)—first critical edition of the Greek New Testament (1516)

Both Reuchlin and Erasmus were opposed to Luther's reformation.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)—Important hermeneutical assumptions:

- Importance of faith and illumination of the Spirit
- Scripture should determine what the church teaches—*sola scriptura*
- Emphasis on the literal understanding of the text
- Christocentric interpretation
- The distinction between the Law and the gospel

William Tyndale (1494-1536)—translation of the New Testament from Greek (1526).

Zwingli (1484-1531)—did not make a distinction between the Law and the gospel.

John Calvin (1509-1564)—the greatest biblical exegete of that time.

- Emphasis on a personal encounter with God and His message through the Scriptures.
- Focused on the literal sense of the text.
- Scripture interprets Scripture.
- Emphasis on the author's intention.
- Christological interpretation of Scripture must be historical as well as theological.

## The Post-Reformation, 1650-1800

Two opposing products of Renaissance and Reformation and their approach to the Bible:

- Pietism—the spiritual offspring of the Reformation movement; stood in stark opposition to rationalism.
- Rationalism—the intellectual offspring of the Renaissance movement.

Pietism—Focus on Bible study, prayer, and cultivation of personal morality.

Jacob Spener (1635-1705)—Use of grammatical study with focus on devotional application.

John Wesley (1703-91)—Personal piety through Bible study and prayer.

### Wesley's Hermeneutical Rules

- Scriptures speak “as the oracles of God.” Use the very words of the Scriptures to understand the meaning of Scripture.
- 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 scriptures.
- Interpret the text with regard to its literary context: surrounding verses and parallel passages help determine the true meaning of the text.
- Scripture interprets Scripture, according 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.”
- Commandments are covered promises—agreement between Law and gospel.
- Interpret literary devices appropriately.
- Seek the most original text and the best translation.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58)—Typological interpretation to draw out practical application.

## Post-Reformation

Basic assumptions of rationalism:

- Capacity of human reason to study and make judgments about the natural world
  - Rational principles or scientific laws govern the universe.
  - Universe has a maker—the Supreme being—but his identity is not known.
  - One's conformity to the moral laws is important.
  - The Bible contains irrational and immoral elements.
- 
- Early rationalists began to question the authorship of some biblical books.
  - Thomas Hobbs questioned the authorship of the Pentateuch.
  - Richard Simon argued that the OT is made up of different documents.
  - Astruc laid the foundations of documentary hypothesis.

# Historical Exegesis

## Passages for Research:

Dt 7:1-11  
Mt 23:1-12  
Jer 7:1-15  
1 Pe 2:13-25  
Gal 3:1-14

1. Who wrote the passage you are studying?
  - The name of the author if known or opinions of possibilities
  
  - What characteristics are known about the author? From what perspective does the author write? (educational, cultural, social, theological, etc.)
  
  - Was the original author of the individual passage different from the author of the book? If so, what can we learn about that original author?
  
2. When was the passage written?
  - Date or range of dates suggested
  
  - If there is a range of dates, what impact does one's decision about the date have on understanding the passage?
  
  - What is the significance of those dates in terms of other events of biblical and/or secular history?
  
3. To whom is the book written and to whom is the individual passage addressed?
  - Who were the recipients of the book?
  
  - What do we know about those recipients that might affect our understanding of individual passages in the book?
  
  - What does our knowledge of the recipients of the book contribute to our understanding of the individual passage?
  
  - Does the passage itself identify an audience? If so, whom? What is the significance of that audience for our understanding and application of the passage?

4. What geographical locations are significant for understanding this passage?
  - Where was the book written? What does that contribute to our understanding of its historical background?
  
  - Was the audience located at a significant distance from the author? If so, where was the audience? What information was provided to help us understand the audience?
  
  - What geographical places or features are mentioned in the individual passage? What other biblical events are associated with those places or features? What memories or concepts would have come to the audience's mind because of the other biblical events associated with that place?
  
5. Why was the book written and how does the passage relate to the book's purpose?
  - Does the author state a purpose or purposes for the book? If so, what are they?
  
  - What purpose(s) are suggested by the content of the book?
  
  - How do the answers to the last two questions contribute to your understanding of your individual passage?

## Biblical Hermeneutics

Read the following material from Calvin's Commentary on Hebrews. Describe Calvin's method of interpretation. What did you find that you expected from Calvin? What did you find that you did not expect from Calvin?

### Calvin, Commentary on Hebrews Chapter 6

*6: 1-2. Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

**6:1.** *Therefore leaving, etc.* To his reproof he joins this exhortation, — that leaving first principles they were to proceed forward to the goal. For by *the word of beginning* he understands the first rudiments, taught to the ignorant when received into the Church. Now, he bids them to leave these rudiments, not that the faithful are ever to forget them, but that they are not to remain in them; and this idea appears more clear from what follows, the comparison of a *foundation*; for in building a house we must never leave the foundation; and yet to be always engaged in laying it, would be ridiculous. For as the foundation is laid for the sake of what is built on it, he who is occupied in laying it and proceeds not to the superstruction, wearies himself with foolish and useless labor. In short, as the builder must begin with the foundation, so must he go on with his work that the house may be built. Similar is the case as to Christianity; we have the first principles as the foundation, but the higher doctrine ought immediately to follow which is to complete the building. They then act most unreasonably who remain in the first elements, for they propose to themselves no end, as though a builder spent all his labor on the foundation, and neglected to build up the house. So then he would have our faith to be at first so founded as afterwards to rise upwards, until by daily progress it be at length completed.

*Of repentance from dead works, etc.* He here refers to a catechism commonly used. It is hence a probable conjecture that this Epistle was written, not immediately after the promulgation of the Gospel, but when they had some kind of polity established in the Churches; such as this, that the catechumen made a confession of his faith before he was admitted to baptism. And there were certain primary points on which the pastor questioned the catechumen, as it appears from the various testimonies of the fathers; there was an examination had especially on the creed called the Apostles' Creed. This was the first entrance, as it were, into the church to those who were adults and enlisted under Christ, as they were before alienated from faith in him. This custom the Apostle mentions, because there was a short time fixed for catechumens, during which they were taught the doctrine of religion, as a master instructs his children in the alphabet, in order that he may afterwards advance them to higher things.

But let us examine what he says. He mentions *repentance* and *faith*, which include the fullness of the Gospel; for what else does Christ command his Apostles to preach, but repentance and faith? When, therefore, Paul wished to show that he had faithfully performed his duty, he alleged his care and assiduity in teaching these two things. It seems then (as it may be said) unreasonable that the Apostle should bid repentance

and faith to be omitted, when we ought to make progress in both through the whole course of our life. But when he adds, *from dead works*, he intimates that he speaks of first repentance; for though every sin is a dead work, either as it leads to death, or as it proceeds from the spiritual death of the soul; yet the faithful, already born again of the Spirit of God, cannot be said properly to repent from dead works. Regeneration is not indeed made perfect in them; but because of the seed of new life which is in them, however small it may be, this at least may be said of them that they cannot be deemed dead before God. The Apostle then does not include in general the whole of repentance, the practice of which ought to continue to the end; but he refers only to the beginning of repentance, when they who were lately and for the first time consecrated to the faith, commenced a new life. So also the word, *faith*, means that brief summary of godly doctrine, commonly called the Articles of Faith.

To these are added, *the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment*. These are some of the highest mysteries of celestial wisdom; nay, the very end of all religion, which we ought to bear in mind through the whole course of our life. But as the very same truth is taught in one way to the ignorant, and in another way to those who have made some proficiency, the Apostle seems here to refer to the common mode of questioning, "Dost thou believe the resurrection of the dead? Dost thou believe eternal life?" These things were suitable to children, and that only once; therefore to turn back to them again was nothing else but to retrograde.

**6:2.** *Of the doctrine of baptisms, etc.* Some read them separately, "of baptisms and of doctrine;" but I prefer to connect them, though I explain them differently from others; for I regard the words as being in apposition, as grammarians say, according to this form, "Not laying again the foundation of repentance, of faith in God, of the resurrection of the dead, which is the doctrine of baptisms and of the laying on of hands." If therefore these two clauses, the doctrine of baptisms and of the laying on of hands, be included in a parenthesis, the passage would run better; for except you read them as in apposition, there would be the absurdity of a repetition. For what is the doctrine of baptism but what he mentions here, faith in God, repentance, judgment, and the like?

Chrysostom thinks that he uses "baptisms" in the plural number, because they who returned to first principles, in a measure abrogated their first baptism: but I cannot agree with him, for the doctrine had no reference to many baptisms, but by baptisms are meant the solemn rites, or the stated days of baptizing.

With baptism he connects the *laying on of hands*; for as there were two sorts of catechumens, so there were two rites. There were heathens who came not to baptism until they made a profession of their faith. Then as to these, these, the catechizing was wont to precede baptism. But the children of the faithful, as they were adopted from the womb, and belonged to the body of the Church by right of the promise, were baptized in infancy; but after the time of infancy, they having been instructed in the faith, presented themselves as catechumens, which as to them took place after baptism; but another symbol was then added, the laying on of hands.

# Lesson 7: The History of Interpretation: Modern Period

## Due This Lesson

Resource 6-5  
Resource 6-6  
Journaling

## Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- 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

## Homework Assignments

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.

## Modern Period—19th Century

Objective, scientific approach to the study of the Bible in German universities; the rise of the **historical-critical method**

### Underlying assumptions:

- Reason—the best tool with which to study the Bible
- Rejected the idea of supernaturalism; everything can be explained in terms of natural laws
- Emphasis on a naturalistic worldview
- Evolutionary view of history
- No timeless truth, but time-bound truth
- The Bible—a record of moral and ethical values

## Schools of Thought

**The Tübingen School—F. C. Baur** (1826-60)—dating of the NT books based on the conflict between Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity reflected in the books. Baur's views were promoted by his students, the Tübingen school.

**Julius Wellhausen** in his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1878)—documentary hypothesis of the sources underlying the Pentateuch—**JEDP** theory.

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

19th-century historical-critical method focused on the sources and the historical reliability of the biblical text that dominates modern biblical study—Source Criticism.

## 19th-Century Interpretive Approaches

Two interpretive approaches that grew out of the late 19th-century period:

- ***History of religion approach***—Study of biblical texts in light of all ancient Near Eastern religions.
- ***Form Criticism***—Focus on the specific religious, cultural setting in which the oral sources of biblical text—*Sitz im Leben* or life-setting—originated. Pioneering work by **Hermann Gunkel** on the Psalms.

## Twentieth Century

### Post-World War I

**Archaeological discoveries**—information on the history, culture, and religions of the Ancient Near East.

- Key archaeologists: Flinders Petrie, William Foxwell Albright, and Nelson Gluck.
- Some scholars used this information to support the biblical data, while others used it to challenge the biblical records.

Influence of **existential thinking** on biblical scholarship and interpretation.

- One must make decisions by one's own choice and personally decide on questions of morality and truth; truth has thus a subjective element.
- Key figures: Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche.

### **Karl Barth** (1886-1968)

- Emphasized the authority of the Bible as the word of God; necessity of a personal encounter with the living God.
- His multi-volume *Church Dogmatics*—systematic theology of the Christian faith—was shaped by biblical interpretation.

**Rudolph Bultmann** (1884-1976)—Two important issues in Bultmann's approach to the interpretation of the New Testament:

- **Form critical study of the Gospels**; classified the individual stories into various literary types and suggested original life-setting for each story, which led him to distinguish between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith."
- The view that New Testament stories are cast in pre-scientific/mythological worldviews, and mythical categories. These stories contain the message of the Christian faith—*kerygma*; one can arrive at this *kerygma* by **demythologizing** or removing the mythological language from these narratives. It is a religious story that provides the basis for a specific theological teaching or faith. He proposed the process of demythologization is necessary to make the content of the *kerygma* relevant to modern listeners.

## Twentieth Century Neo-orthodoxy

The work of Barth and Bultmann introduced a new theological movement known as ***neo-orthodoxy*** or dialectical theology. Three basic presuppositions of neo-orthodox biblical interpretation:

- God is a subject and one can know Him only through a personal encounter.
- The element of mythological language to bridge the gulf that separates God and the fallen humanity
- The paradoxical nature of biblical truth and ideas

# Twentieth Century

## Post World War II

**Biblical Theology Movement**—new emphasis on the theology and message of biblical books over against the previous emphasis on historical-critical matters.

“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.”<sup>2</sup>

**New hermeneutic**—the language of the text and its intention controls interpretation, and not the interpreter and his or her questions addressed to the text.

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.

## Historical Criticism

“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.

### Historical Criticism

Historical critical method—investigates the history *in* the text as well as the history *of* the text—historical, cultural context in which the text was produced. 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.).

Historical criticism also seeks to understand the context in which the text was written. The task here is to investigate the particular context in which the text came into its present form, the audience to whom the text was addressed, etc.

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.

## Source Criticism

This method focuses on 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 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

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

## **Form Criticism and Redaction Criticism**

### **Form Criticism**

Hermann Gunkel (OT) and Martin Dibelius (NT); focuses on identifying the literary genres or forms of the biblical texts, and their specific life settings—*Sitz im Leben*.

Gunkel identified the genre of the book of Psalms, a work later expanded by his student Sigmund Mowinckel. Martin Dibelius identified paradigm as the most important genre in the Gospels. Paradigm: a concise, self-contained, and edifying story that focused on a significant saying and deed of Jesus.

### **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.

## Other Methods

**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**—focuses on the social setting of the biblical text; focus on the social, religious institutions and roles played by individuals who occupy the society.

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

**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. 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.

## Source and Redaction Analysis

On the assumption Matthew used Mark's Gospel as a source, analyze the "redaction" of Mk 9:2-8 that appears in Mt 17:1-8. In particular note additions, omissions, and changes in order. Seek a theological rationale where possible.

On the assumption Chronicles used Samuel and Kings as a source, compare the treatment of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 18:1-20:21 with that in 2 Chr 29:1-32:33. In particular note additions, omissions, and any changes in order or emphasis. Seek a theological rationale where possible.

## Genre and Form

**Genre** refers to the kind of literature of the various books of the Bible: prophecy, law, wisdom, gospel, letter, narrative, etc. The word **form** refers to the specific literary form of individual paragraphs: biographical account, oracles of judgment, pronouncement stories, instruction, parable, etc.

Major genres of the Old Testament include narratives, law, wisdom, poetry, prophecy, and apocalyptic. Substantial sections of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, 1,2 Samuel, 1,2 Kings, Ruth, Esther, 1,2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah in the Old Testament contain narratives. Forms within the narratives include simple accounts that deal with historical events (historical narratives), or biographical accounts, or autobiographical accounts, or accounts which explain the origin of the name of a place or a custom (etiological narratives), or family or tribal history. The Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy contain large amount of law or legal materials. These may be in the form of prohibitions, prescriptions, instructions, or commands.

Approximately one-third of the Old Testament is in poetry. Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Lamentations are some of the Old Testament books that are completely in poetry. Within the Book of Psalms, we find hymns, laments, thanksgiving psalms, royal psalms, psalms of confidence, liturgical psalms, and prophetic psalms. The books of the Prophets contain prophetic speeches—prophecy—given by Israel’s prophets. Prophecy is given in the form of messenger-style speeches, legal disputes, vision accounts, Torah instructions, wisdom sayings, funeral songs, parables, hymns, and woe sayings. Wisdom teachings utilize discourses or dialogues and proverbial statements are found in the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The book of Daniel is known as apocalyptic literature because it contains visions about the sudden and catastrophic end of history, and the establishment of God’s kingdom through His direct intervention in human affairs.

It is clear the New Testament makes use of several different literary genres. Narrative, letter, and prophecy are the primary literary structures used by New Testament authors. Within each genre a variety of literary forms are used. These forms include: admonitions, benedictions or blessings, call narratives, chronicles or historical accounts of events, farewell speeches, brief letters, miracles, parables, prayers, sermons, and many others.

Lk 5: 17-26  
1 Sam 3: 1-18  
Acts 13: 16-41  
Ps 2  
2 Cor 3: 7-18

1. What is the genre of the book in which your passage is found? What general information does that provide you?
2. What is the literary form of the passage with which you are working? What insight do you gain from identifying the literary form?

## The Inductive Method

“In truth thou canst not read the scriptures too much;  
And what thou readest, thou canst not read too well;  
And what thou readest well, thou canst not too well understand;  
And what thou understandest well, thou canst not too well teach;  
And what thou teachest well, thou canst not too well live.”

Martin Luther

It is the privilege of every believer to go directly to the Word and find there the clear-cut message of truth. The practice of running to a commentary before studying the Bible itself gives a definite direction to one's study and a cast to his or her thinking that may lead him or her to conclusions never intended by the Holy Spirit. Further, that individual deprives himself of the blessing of discovering eternal verities for himself or herself. After all, those who wrote the commentaries had to get their material in the same way any present-day Bible student can get it. It should not be necessary for the Christian to depend consistently only on the biblical research of another; he or she should seek a spiritual maturity that will enable him or her to get beyond this stage. The inductive method is in a peculiar way designed to enable one to develop rapidly in the ability to do independent Bible study.

The inductive method proceeds from the circumference to the center, from fact to principle, from details to a synthesis, from factual evidence to conclusions, from the specific to the general, from the concrete to the abstract. It is zealous to gather all the pertinent evidence before drawing conclusions; it believes no explanation is preferable to the wrong one; it prefers to defer a final decision until all the evidence is gathered rather than hazard a decision on slender evidence.

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.

### Seven Characteristics of the Inductive Method

1. The inductive method proceeds from the specific to the general, from observation to interpretation, from sight to insight, from analysis to synthesis, from letter to spirit, from literature to life.
2. It does not insist the Bible is a scientific book, nor concede it is unscientific; it regards it as nonscientific.
3. It seeks to discover the individuality of the book as a whole.
4. It is intensive, unwilling to exchange extent for depth and accuracy.
5. It is direct, unwilling to substitute secondary knowledge for primary knowledge.
6. It is literary, recognizing the content is cradled in literary forms.
7. It is patient, persistent, expectant, creative, reflective, and prayerful in approach.

# Lesson 8: Inductive Method of Biblical Exegesis

## Due This Lesson

Resource 7-11  
Resource 7-12  
Reading Resource 7-13  
Journaling

## Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

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

## Homework Assignments

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.

## Inductive Method

**Exegesis** is the actual process of bringing the meaning out of a biblical text by its modern reader. Evangelical scholars support an inductive approach to the study of the Bible, which attempts to draw out the meaning of the text by making observations and conclusions about the details presented in the text. Inductive method presupposes a methodical and systematic study of the text. Here you will find a 10-step approach to an inductive study of the biblical text. These steps will be illustrated using **Amos 5:21-24** as the text of our study.

### 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 in which the text is located. 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?

#### Example from Amos 5:21-24

Amos' book belongs to the 8th-century period in the history of Israel. Your careful reading of the book will show that God's judgment of Israel (Northern Kingdom) is the primary theme of this book. The book of Amos 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

## Inductive Method

### Step 2

*Identify the literary unit that is the focus of exegesis.*

A literary unit is a passage of scripture with 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.

Example:

#### Chapter 5

- begins with a lament (vv 1-3)
- 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)
- 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 (vv 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).

## Inductive Method

### Step 3

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

Example from Amos:

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 form; Yahweh himself is the speaker.

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 the alternative to the present form of worship.

## Inductive Method

### Step 4

*Discuss the immediate setting of the biblical passage. Key questions to ask:*

- 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?

Example from Amos 5:21-24

Historical and political setting

- Amos' ministry took place during the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 BC), great-grandson of Jehu.
- Jehu's massacre of the Omri dynasty led to serious political instability in the Northern Kingdom.
- Jeroboam II brought remarkable recovery of economic and political strength to his kingdom.
- The Northern Kingdom saw the rise of Assyria as an empire.

Cultural, social, and religious setting

- The economic and political prosperity of Israel under Jeroboam II did not benefit the entire nation.
- 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.

## Inductive Method

### 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. 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.

Example from Amos 5:21-24

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.

## Inductive Method

### 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. Key questions to ask:

- 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?

Example from Amos 5:21-24

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

## Inductive Method

### 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. 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 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.

Example from Amos 5:21-24

#### Grammatical Structure

- The first part of this text 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 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

- Begins with a strong and shocking expression—"I hate" in verse 21.

- “I despise”—*ma’as*—emphasizes Yahweh’s hatred, but 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).
- 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.
- Verses 21-23 contain a list of various expressions of Israel’s worship rejected by Yahweh.
  - **Feasts**—*hag*—is an umbrella term for all the major festivals of Israel in the Old Testament period.
  - In verse 22, Amos announces Yahweh’s rejection of the three most important **offerings** of Israel’s worship.
    - Burnt offerings—*’ola*—indicate “sending up” in smoke the odor of the sacrificial animal, completely burnt on the altar.
    - Cereal offerings or grain offerings—*minha*—were mostly a tribute or a gift by the worshiper to God.
    - Peace offerings—*selem*, literally offerings of fatlings—in Israel was a communion sacrifice offered by the believer for the purpose of maintaining the alliance and fellowship between a believer and Yahweh.
  - In verse 23, Amos deals with music, an integral part of worship in Israel.
- Verse 24 begins with a conjunction—but—which describes what kind of worship is acceptable to Yahweh.
  - Justice and righteousness—the most basic and fundamental requirements for maintaining a relationship with God.
  - 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. Frequently, this term is applied to the right attitude one must have for God.

## Inductive Method

### Step 8

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

Our attempt here is to discover how God speaks or acts in response to human needs.

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?"

Example from Amos 5:21-24

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 life.

- God rejects empty and meaningless religious rituals that lack any connection between worship and public life.
- God rejects those forms of worship and practices that focus on self-satisfaction and personal enjoyment, rather than repentance and contriteness.
- Rituals have no inherent power to coerce God or manipulate Him to be pleased with the worshiper.
- The worshiping community must forcefully and persistently carry out the call to establish justice in society.
- The worshiping community must forcefully and persistently maintain uprightness in their conduct toward each other and with God.
- Obedience to God is the key prerequisite to worship.
- Worship that is acceptable to God is worship that results in the transformation of the individual, which further leads to the transformation of society.

## Inductive Method

### 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?

Example from Amos 5:21-24

- Leviticus 1-7 summarize the appropriate conditions for the various offerings in ancient Israel. Whole burnt offerings, peace offerings, and cereal 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.
- Similar to Isa 1:10-17, Hos 6:6, and Mic 6:6-8.
- 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 also found in Ps 15, 24, and 51.
- 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).
- James also defines true religion in terms of social justice and righteousness in the society (Jas 1:26-27).

## Inductive Method

### Step 10

*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.

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.

Example from Amos 5:21-24

- How we worship God is a matter of great concern to God. Self-righteous attitude and self-righteous worship are an abomination to God.
- 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. 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.
- Worship is an act of obedience.
- God calls us to be agents of change and transformation in the society.

## Various Forms of Prophetic Speech

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**—narratives of historical events—see Isa 36-39 and Jer 39-41
- **biographical or autobiographical narratives**—see Hos 1:2-9; 3:1-5; Amos 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 Amos 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 them

## **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**—Amos 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**—Amos 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 being told

**Hymns**—Amos 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**—Amos 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

Prophetic speech that outlines the ritual for worship; see Amos 4: 4-5 for a satirical variation of the priestly call to worship

*Rhetorical function:* to give instruction for true worship

**Oracles against foreign nations**—Isa 13-23; Jer 46-51; Ezi 25-32; Amos 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

## Grammatical Analysis

Consider Isaiah 1:10-11 (NASB), "Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah.

'What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?' says the LORD.

'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed cattle.

And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats.' "

These two verses are in poetry. Who is speaking? Who is addressed? What is the mood (indicative, subjunctive, imperative) of the speeches? These verses illustrate a unique feature of Hebrew poetry. Can you describe this characteristic feature of Hebrew poetry? You may need to read about Hebrew poetry in Varughese (ed.), *Discovering the Old Testament*.

Consider Eph 5:18-21 (NASB, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

Identify the main verbs of this passage and their subjects. Identify the participles. What is the relationship between the participles and the main verbs? What is the most significant grammatical information in this passage and why?





## Lesson 9: Inductive Method, Part 2

### Due This Lesson

Resource 8-12  
Resource 8-13  
Journaling

### Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- do exegesis of a biblical text using the inductive method

### Homework Assignments

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?"

# Lesson 10: Interpreting Old Testament Narratives and Law

## Due This Lesson

3- to 5-page paper  
Journal  
Journaling

## Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- describe the guidelines for reading and interpreting narratives in the OT
- describe the guidelines for reading and interpreting legal materials in the OT

## Homework Assignments

Complete Resource 10-3.

Complete Resource 10-4.

Write in your journal. Read Gen 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”?

## History and Narratives

More than 40 percent of the Old Testament is narrative. Narratives fall into different categories, such as

- 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.

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.

3. Follow the plot of the story, its movement from beginning to end.

4. Biblical stories convey the reality of divine revelation.  
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 His people?
  
5. Revelation presupposes supernatural events. When miracles are part of the story; focus on what God is doing for the people in the narrative to elicit faith, obedience, etc.?
  
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.
  - 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.
  
8. Not every narrative has a moral to the story; 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 an 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.

## Interpreting Old Testament Law

Before interpreting the Old Testament law, attempt to understand the specific nature/character of the legal statement.

Biblical laws fall into three categories.

- Casuistic laws—Case laws with an “if . . . then” clause; contain specific case illustration and consequence/penalty statement.
- 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 Law also deals with different dimensions of human life and relationships, including worship, sacrifice, social conduct, social order, family life, and hygiene.

- Prohibits criminal behavior—criminal laws
- Provides judicial principles and standards for maintaining justice in 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.

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.

The Ten Commandments are the non-negotiable standards of spirituality, morality, and ethics for all humankind.

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.

## Composition and Narrative Analysis

Read 1 Sam 1:1-27.

What are the events, who are the characters, and what are the settings used to develop the story narrated in this passage? In particular, how are characters, events, and settings used to develop the unfolding plot? What compositional/narrative techniques does the author use to move the story toward its intended purpose? What is the goal the author has for the reader as he develops this story? How successful was he in achieving that goal?

## Context and Book Reading

Ruth 1: 15-18

1 Sam 8: 1-22

Jon 2: 1-10

Isa 39: 1-8

Dt 5: 6-21

1. How does your passage fit in the
  - immediate context
  - context of the book
  - context of the entire Bible
  
2. How would the flow of the thought—the logic—of the book be changed if the passage was omitted? What difference would it make if your passage did not appear in the Bible?

# Lesson 11: Interpreting Wisdom Literature and Psalms

## Due This Lesson

Resource 10-3  
Resource 10-4  
Journaling

## Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- 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

## Homework Assignments

Complete Resource 11-11.

Write in your journal. Read Psalm 51. Write down your evaluation of the inner agony of the psalmist. What descriptions do you find in the psalm for sin? 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?

## Wisdom Literature

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.

Wisdom books are divided into two categories, based on our understanding that in Israel wisdom was promoted in two different ways.

1. Reflective wisdom/speculative wisdom/philosophical wisdom/higher wisdom
  - In the form of dialogue or extended discourses such as Job and Ecclesiastes
2. Proverbial/practical wisdom
  - Short, pithy, meaningful statements and instructions found in the book of Proverbs

### Crucial theological concerns

- 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 in 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.

## Wisdom Book: 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. The book was *not* written as part of Israel's history.

Threefold structure of the book

- Prologue
- Dialogue
- Epilogue

As a wisdom book, this book does not speak for God to humankind—as prophets do; rather it contains expressions of human concerns and theological thinking—what we think about God—directed to God.

The friends of Job argued from a traditional, orthodox concept of God and the theology of just retribution, whereas Job spoke also on 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 greatest paradox in the book.

Another paradox in the book is Job's undying faith that God will not reject a blameless individual. Caught in this paradox, God has become 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 rejects the claim that traditional doctrine has answers to all of life's issues; the book also promotes the view that human wisdom has its limit; true wisdom is with God and the fear of the Lord is the path to that wisdom.

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.

The book of Job is well known for its difficult Hebrew text.

The book of Job does not promote mythological concepts or beliefs. References to mythological creatures are incidental to the speeches. 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.

## **Wisdom Literature: Ecclesiastes and Proverbs**

### **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.

## Interpreting the Psalms

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/phrases in the second line.

- Synonymous—repetition of same idea
- Antithetic—opposite meaning
- Synthetic—extension or expansion of ideas

Each psalm is a literary unit; should not take one verse and try to interpret or apply it without studying the context.

## Literary Type

### 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 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.

## Literary Type 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.

### 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?

### 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.

## **Literary Type** **Trust/Confidence, Thanksgiving, Royal**

### **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**

Psalms that deal with God's choice of the Davidic kings and the establishment of His kingdom as an everlasting kingdom. These psalms make reference to the anointed one, the Davidic king.

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.

## **Literary Type** **Liturgical, Wisdom**

### **Liturgical Psalms**

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.

## **Literary Type** **Historical**

### **Historical Psalms**

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

Study carefully the *structure* of the psalm and the development of the thought of the psalmist. Attempt to understand the primary objective.

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.
- Second, 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.

## Application

Prov 11:2  
Prov 16:8  
Ps 100  
Ecc 12:1-8  
Job 38:4-15

For each of the passages list the truths and commands that are eternally valid simply as stated.

For the Psalm passage identify any truths or life applications stated using figures of speech. Translate those truths and/or life applications into more literally descriptive terms. (Explain what the figures of speech mean!)

For the Psalm passage identify truths, insights, and life applications expressed in culturally conditioned terms. Check the appropriate resources to discover what was meant and/or called for by those cultural conditioned terms. Identify the principle they express and give a possible application of that principle in our contemporary cultural context. (Identify the resources you used.)

For the Psalm passage select what seems to be the most significant pattern of human need (then), nature and activity of God (then), and human response (then). Create a "Thompson Dyad" showing the correspondence of human need then with human need now, nature and activity of God then with the nature and activity of God now, and the human response then with the appropriate human response now.

Identify the two most important truths or life applications you think should be made by a person preaching or teaching the Psalm passage.

# Lesson 12: Interpreting the Prophets and Daniel

## Due This Lesson

Resource 11-11  
Journaling

## Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- 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

## Homework Assignments

Complete Resource 12-8.

Bring your journals to the next lesson.

Journal writing: Read Isa 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?

## Interpreting the Prophets

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—proclamation/preaching function.
- 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*.

The rhetorical function of a literary feature is the effect that literary feature intended to produce in the reader or the listening audience . . . The sermon should be aimed to bring about the effect the text intended to produce in its original setting.

## **Literary Forms-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 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 to involve them in the story, through which the readers see themselves as playing a part in the story being told

## 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.

2. Identify the literary type—genre—of the prophetic passage. Look for the literary devices with which the prophet communicates the message.

Avoid the temptation to decipher symbolic language and to look for hidden meanings to the text.

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 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?

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, reference to a future event, was that word fulfilled or does it remain unfulfilled? Make assessment of the unfulfilled prediction in light of the message of the New Testament.

8. What are the enduring theological lessons and challenges we find in the text, principles that have universal applications?

9. Relate the message of the text to contemporary human life situations.

## Apocalyptic Eschatology

In addition to Daniel—where we find a full-blown apocalyptic book—other Old Testament sections also reflect 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.

## Characteristics of the Apocalyptic Writings

**Dualism**—two opposing powers, the forces of God vs. the forces of evil

**A dramatic end of the universe.** The forces of evil dominate the present world and oppress the faithful. God will come at the unexpected time with His angels to bring an end to the evil conditions and to usher in His righteous kingdom; a catastrophic end of the universe accompanied by cataclysmic events.

**Visions of God's sovereign rule over the world,** though the present history is filled with hardships for the people of God

**Pseudonymous authorship;** authorship ascribed to well-known and exemplified people who symbolize faithfulness, courage, and perseverance.

**Messianic figure** as the agent of God's redemptive actions

**Angels and demons**

**Symbolic language**

**Mysterious numbers**

## Hermeneutical Issues

- The text of Daniel has *two languages*
  - 1:1-2:4a and chapters 8-14 in Hebrew
  - 2:4b-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.
  
- *Abomination of desolation*—which historical event? or event yet to come?
  
- *Nebuchadnezzar's madness*—confused with Nabonidus?
  
- *Belshazzar*—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?

## 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 being 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.

## Homework Assignment

Read Isa 7:10-17 and answer the following questions.

Who are the main characters in this text? What are the issues clearly found in this text? What are the issues that are unclear?

Read 7:1-9 and describe how these verses help your understanding of the context of 7:10-17.

Read 7:18-25 and describe how these verses help to make clear the issues not clear in verses 10-17.

What is the primary political and theological crisis in these verses?

What is the solution Isaiah offers to resolve the political and theological crisis?

How did King Ahaz respond to the prophet's counsel?

Consult Bible commentaries and summarize various proposals to identify the "woman" in this passage.

What does the name Immanuel mean in this context?

Compare these verses with Mt 1:23. How did Matthew read Isa 7:14?

Based on your understanding of the historical setting of Isa 7:10-17, describe how the message of this prophetic speech speaks to us today about doubt, faith, and God's faithful presence in the midst of human unfaithfulness.

# Lesson 13: Interpreting the Gospels and the Book of Acts

## Due This Lesson

Resource 12-8  
Journals  
Journaling

## Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- 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

## Homework Assignments

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).

Journal writing: 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 the 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.

## Guidelines for Interpretation

### Genre

In the Gospels we find a variety of types of materials:

- *Pronouncement stories*—other designations: conflict story (*apophthegm*), paradigm (*chreia*), or narratives that 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.

### Similarities and Differences between the Gospels

- The synoptic problem and the question of the sources; 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.

## Guidelines for Interpretation

### Historical Record

The Gospels preserve a historical record of the life and ministry of Jesus; however, these historical records do not follow the modern scheme of history writing.

- No clear and strict chronological sequence
- A comprehensive history of the life and ministry of Jesus
- Arranged to elaborate certain truths the writers wished to communicate to their readers

### Theology

The Gospel writers interpret for the Church what they have 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 the three accounts.

## Guidelines for Interpretation

### Culture

Understand the overall context of first-century Judaism and the Greco-Roman, cultural and political setting of Palestine. Most New Testament surveys will provide introductory chapters on the setting of the New Testament. Good sources:

- 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 and influences and 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

### Specific Context

As far as possible, attempt to establish the specific context of a particular teaching, or story about Jesus.

Compare Mt 10 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.

## Guidelines for Interpretation

### Historical Context

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
- 
- **Matthew** addresses the emerging Church as the New Israel established on the teachings of Jesus the Messiah. 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.

## Thinking Horizontally and Vertically

Think horizontally means reading the parallel passages in the other Gospels. Two benefits:

- *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 Mt 6:7-13 and Lk 11:2-4.

Think vertically means understanding the historical context of the text; that of Jesus when He spoke the words, and that of the Gospel writer. Consider Mt 20:1-16. Compare to Mt 19:16-30 and 20:20-28.

## Guidelines for Interpretation

### New Testament 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.

### 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.

The church also recognized the Kingdom has not yet fully come—*already*, but not yet—realized eschatology vs. futuristic eschatology. 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.

## Parables

Parables in the Gospels are a favorite way 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.

## Parables

When dealing with the parables, keep in mind the following:

- 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; rather, He intended by 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; 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.
  - There are parables that 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?
- 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.
- 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.
- Look for a common theme.
- In most cases, the last statement of the parable may give us the key to the proper interpretation of the function of the parable.

## The Book 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.

## **Considerations for Interpretation**

### **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.

### **Historical**

It was not written primarily as a history book.

There is no attempt to set forth a pattern or model for Christian experience or church life; rather a model for the church to be a forward-moving phenomenon, boldly and joyously proclaiming the gospel, being 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.

When dealing with specific narratives, ask what is being said, what is the point of what is being said, how it functions 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?

Look for similarities and parallels between the Gospel of Luke and Acts to show the thematic and structural continuity.

# Lesson 14: Interpreting the Epistles and Revelation

## Due This Lesson

Matthew paper  
Triumphal Entry paper  
Journaling

## Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- describe the principles for interpreting the epistles in the NT
- describe the interpretive issues and problems associated with the book of Revelation

## Homework Assignments

Read the letter to the Ephesians and identify the various parts of this letter, the six parts of the Pauline letters.

Read the letter to the Philippians and identify the occasion of this letter. Why did Paul write this letter? Identify the text, which 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 Thess 2:1-12—your assessment of the reasons that prompted him to clarify the issue already presented in his previous letter?

Write in your journal. Read Phil 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?

## The Epistles

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.

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.

The Epistles are not theological treatises, though we find theological insights and themes occasioned by the particular need.

## The Epistles

When reading the Epistles, we must attempt as much as possible 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 to the understanding of the message of the Epistles.

- 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?

Read the entire letter before attempting to do exegesis of a selected text. Attempt to gather as much knowledge as possible; at this point the reading is first and foremost informational reading.

Outline the letter following the major parts of the letter, and then following the themes in each of these major sections.

Recognize the fact that there are difficult passages in which we may not understand completely what was intended by the writer.

Always attempt to establish what the text could have meant to its writer and original readers. Set the guidelines as to what the text could have meant and what it cannot mean.

## The Epistles

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.

Example: 1 Cor 10:23—11:1

Some issues to consider:

- Determine if Paul is dealing with matters of indifference here, such as eating food, 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.

Paul's letters need to be understood in the light of his own cultural and religious heritage: Hebrew ancestry and heritage and Hellenistic cultural background.

Paul's writings need to be evaluated in the 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.

## Paul's Thinking

Keep in mind theological concepts 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.

## Interpreting Revelation

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.

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, and 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, or 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 interprets for us a previous biblical text, we must look for meaning intrinsic to the text of the Revelation itself.

## Interpreting Revelation

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 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 is general in that it 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

# Appendix

## Resources for Biblical Interpretation

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**

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 6-22.

<sup>2</sup> Brevard S. Child, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: A Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 78.