

# Making the Most of Your Biblical Studies

A Guide for Understanding and Interpreting God's Word



Prepared for the Equipping the Saints, Ministry of the Word  
by Pastor David Braden

Foundations of the Faith 202

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# Making the Most of Your Biblical Studies

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## **Session #1: Introduction to the Course**

Outline of Session #1:

- I. Introduction to the Course
- II. An Introduction to Literary Types
- III. An Introduction to the Bible
- IV. The three languages of the Bible
- V. General Hermeneutical Principles

### **I. An Introduction to the Course**

This workbook provides basic materials and assignments for basic principles for studying and interpreting Scripture. It is a helpful prerequisite for studying any part of the Bible.

The goal of this course is to provide the student of the Bible an introduction to understanding and interpreting God's Word.

The primary focus will be to provide:

- a. general characteristics of the major literary styles/types of the Bible, and
- b. to provide general guidelines for interpreting passages written in each of these major literary styles.

### **II. An Introduction to Literary Types**

Literature is a body of writings in prose or verse in which the authors choose words and forms to communicate what they are thinking or what they have experienced. (Note that our 3 principle forms of activity are thinking, speaking and acting.) In the case of literature, we write instead of speak.

The two principle literary forms in which the Bible is written are narrative and poetry. The primary form of the Bible is that it is an anthology, a collection of books. In fact, the name "Bible" comes from the Greek "Biblia" which means "little books."

There are a number of general literary styles utilized by the biblical authors in addition to narrative and poetry; e.g. prophecy, wisdom, apocalyptic, parables, allegories, figures of speech, doctrinal treatise, to mention a few. Even these styles often have a secondary tier such as "hero story," "love story" and "tragedy" which are sub-categories to the narrative form. In all, there are more than 100 literary forms if one counts the sub-categories. This course of study will focus on 8 of the most common literary styles.

It is important to recognize that the content of a literary work is communicated through its form and it is the form that provides the meaning. Without an appropriate recognition of the literary form, the meaning cannot be properly determined.

For example, there is a great deal of difference between how one interprets the narratives of the Old Testament and the Apocalyptic writings of the book of Revelation.

A parable is interpreted differently than an allegory. (One has a principle theme while the other may focus on the symbolism of the details in the story.)

The wisdom literature of Proverbs is interpreted much differently than the lament Psalms which are filled with images, figures of speech and symbols.

Each literary style has its own guidelines for proper interpretation.

So, understanding the literary type of a passage and the rules for its interpretation become an important part of the biblical interpretation process, i.e. determining the meaning of a passage and its appropriate application.

#### Abstract versus real life experience:

Another important element in the literary field is that the Bible presents both abstract information in the form of principles and then demonstrates that information in the terms of real life human experience. For example, one of the 10 commandments is "You shall not commit adultery." This command is the abstract principle. The account of David and Bathsheba is a real-life human experience which shows the results of failing to keep this command. In this story, we see the physical actions and the verbal exchanges as David eventually is confronted with his sin and then accepts the consequences for breaking the law of God.

We see a similar illustration with the command: "You shall have no other gods before me." Idolatry is the abstract forbidden practice. And the Old Testament is filled with real life situations both on an individual and national level where idolatry was embraced. We then see the results of violating a commandment of God.

#### A goal of literature:

One of the goals of literature is to enable the reader to share in the experience of the story. The truths of scripture are not just ideas that are true but that they are true for human experience. We are not simply learning to store up "nice-to-know" facts of knowledge. The goal of all of the Biblical learning process is the application of the truths of scripture to our real-life experiences. And as we do, depending on our faithfulness to the biblical revelation, we will experience the fruitfulness and formation that true scriptural behavior yields.

At this point it is important to note that it is Scripture “rightly interpreted” that has life and power.

The uniqueness of biblical language:

One final area of comment: The Scriptures utilize distinct literary features that set it apart from the ordinary literature that we peruse, e.g. the use of images, figures of speech and idioms that are unique to the culture at the time they were written. Some of these figures of speech are metaphors, similes, hyperbole, euphemisms, irony, personification and word play to mention a few.

A good example of hyperbole is used by Jesus in his sermon on the mount when he exhorts his listeners that “if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.” Obviously, cutting off my hand will not change my heart which is the root of the problem of sin. I might even become more embittered because my drastic action did not achieve the desired result.

He is using exaggeration for effect to demonstrate the importance of getting sin out of your life. (This also demonstrates the importance of the appropriate handling of the Scriptures.) If we believed this passage was literal, there would be a number of one-handed Christians in the church today.

### **III. Introduction to the Bible:**

The Bible: The Bible without a doubt, without a challenge, is the greatest, most significant work of literature, history and theology that has ever been written. In its initial formation, its preservation and transmittal, in its translation, proclamation and in its effects (impact on history and effect of life changes), it is the most profound and impactful document of all time.

Its remarkable unity with a diverse selection of authors, the time span over which it was recorded (~ 1500 years) and diverse literary forms blend smoothly to traverse time from the beginning to the end of time as we know it.

In the pages of this book, we discover the roots of our past, we come to know and understand our present and our present dilemma, and we secure an immovable vision and hope for the future.

The Old Testament lays the foundation of God’s redemptive history bridging into the New Testament consummation of God’s plan in the work of Christ.

The theme of the entire Bible from cover to cover is: “Jesus Christ and the salvation that God offers through Him.” It presents God’s plan and His actions to restore “Immanuel” (God with us) in our lives.

Looking inside:

The Bible contains 66 books that were written by approximately 40 authors over a period of about 1500 years. (The authorship of some books or segments is unknown; e.g. the writers of approximately 50 Psalms are yet unknown.)

The authors were from many diverse positions in life...shepherd, doctor, warrior, king, fisherman, a tax collector, a prime minister, a cattleman, to name a few. And, the authors, for the most part, lived in different eras and did not communicate with each other as they were writing their manuscripts.

It was written in many different places...the wilderness, prison, while on the road, on an island, during a military campaign, etc.

It was written in 3 different languages...Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek

It was written on 3 different continents...Asia, Africa and Europe.

The bible was written using many different literary forms, e.g. poetry, history, law, wisdom, prophecy, revelation, parables and allegories, etc.

#### Difficulties of the Bible:

In addition to the fact that it was written by many different authors over 1500 years, in different languages, locations and cultures, the Bible is not provided chronologically in many of its books.

For example, the prophets and writings are inserted after the historical accounts in which they occur and some of the prophetic writings do not indicate the situation to which they were speaking. There are now a few chronological Bibles available in which the authors have placed all passages in their chronological sequence.

Additionally, there are many sub-plots and self-contained stories. (e.g. Abraham's trip to Egypt) making it difficult to follow the main themes of the Bible; e.g. What does the story of Dinah have to do with the main theme of God's salvation history?

Finally, the Bible contains text which provides stories and information soliciting a response in several categories:

1. that which is instructional and applicable for all Christians for all time (normative), e.g. salvation by grace through faith,
2. stories or information which occurred in the Bible times but are not expected to be normative for all generations (e.g. the early Christians selling their properties and giving it all to the church),
3. stories and instructions which are not applicable for our life and practice (e.g. the counsel of Job's 3 friends, Jephthah's rash vow to

give the first thing that came out of his house when he returned from victory)

#### **IV. The Three Languages of the Bible**

##### **1. Biblical Hebrew**

a. Hebrew was the primary language in which the Old Testament was written. Because the Old Testament consists mainly of the biography of a people and God's dealings with them, Hebrew was particularly suitable for communicating God's truth for at least two reasons:

I. Hebrew is a pictorial language that speaks with colorful and memorable metaphors that challenge and dramatize the events. The language possesses the ability to present pictures of the events being narrated.

The Hebrew people thought in picture form, and, as a result, their nouns are concrete and vivid.

This language has vast powers of association and of imagination. But some of this is lost in the translation into English. e.g. Jacob on his trip to Haran when Esau wanted to kill him: literally, the Hebrew says: "He picked up his feet and went to Haran." Even so, much of the vivid, concrete, and forthright character of the English Old Testament is a direct carry over of some of the genius of the Hebrew language.

As a pictorial language, Hebrew presents a vivid picture of the acts of God among a people who became examples and illustrations for all future generations as they lived out their "Immanuel" lives.

II. Secondly, Hebrew is a very personal language. It addresses itself to the heart and to the emotions rather than to the mind or reason. The appeal is always to the person in the midst of the difficult realities of life and not to the abstract or theoretical. It is a language through which the message was felt rather than thought. As such, it is highly qualified to convey to the individual believer as well as to the worshiping community as a whole the revelation of a living God in the life and events of the Jewish nation.



The Hebrew language does not deal with the abstract but with experience. It is the appropriate language for the record of the self-revelation of a God who does not make Himself known by philosophical propositions but by His actions in the course of human history.

## **2. Aramaic**

When the Assyrians took the 10 northern tribes captive and ultimately into dispersion in 722 B.C., they replaced the captives of the northern tribes with their own people who spoke Aramaic. This occurred initially in Galilee and the northern regions around Samaria.

By the time of Christ, Aramaic was the common language spoken by the people in all parts of Palestine.

Jesus spoke and taught in Aramaic. As he taught his disciples during his ministry on the earth, he spoke Aramaic.

To this day, the Eastern Christian church centered in the regions surrounding Syria, maintain that the original manuscripts (autographs) of the New Testament were written in Aramaic.

They maintain that they possess the original documents referred to as the "Peshitta."

Later, to satisfy the needs of the non-Aramaic but Greek-speaking population, the NT documents were translated into Greek.

## **3. New Testament Greek.**

- a. New Testament Greek was appropriate for the spreading of the gospel truths about Christ to all nations for two primary reasons:
  - I. New Testament Greek (Koine) was an intellectual language. It was more a language of the mind than of the heart, a fact to which the great Greek philosophers gave abundant evidence. It was suitable for recording a revelation and putting it into a communicable form. It was for this reason that New Testament Greek was a most useful language for expressing the truths of the Old Testament, as it had a technical precision that was not available in Hebrew. The theological truths that were more generally expressed in the language of the Old Testament could be and were more precisely formulated in the Greek language of the New Testament.

- II. Secondly, it was the common international language of the first century Mediterranean world. The truth of God revealed in the Old Testament, which was initially revealed to one nation, the nation of Israel, was now recorded in the language of that nation, Hebrew. However, the fuller revelation given by God in the New Testament was not to be limited in that way. The message was to be proclaimed in His name to all nations.

### **3. Conclusion about the languages.**

It is reasonable to say that God chose these very languages. They would effectively communicate the truths which He desired to reveal at particular times in the unfolding of His master plan. Hebrew with its pictorial and personal vividness expressed well the truths of the Old Testament. Aramaic was the language spoken by Jesus and his disciples. He preached and taught in Aramaic. Greek, with its intellectual abilities and universality, served well the doctrinal and evangelistic purposes of the New Testament.

### **V. General Hermeneutical Principles:**

Following are recommended general hermeneutical principles:

1. Always keep in mind the nature of Scripture:
  - divinely inspired – God-breathed
  - inerrant in all of its parts (original manuscripts)
2. Make Christ central in all interpretations.
3. Golden Rule:

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise.
4. Follow the customary grammatical forms of the languages of the Bible. (observe its grammar and syntax)
5. Search for the meaning intended by the author who wrote the original manuscript to the original audience.
6. A passage cannot mean something that it never could have meant to the original audience.

7. Observe the context of the passage.  
A text without its context is a pretext.
8. Let scripture interpret scripture.
9. Determine literary types and observe the general guidelines for interpreting each literary type.
10. Determine figurative (non-literal) passages and make a literal interpretation.
11. Give each passage of scripture one interpretation. (one interpretation with the potential for multiple applications)
12. Expanding inclusion – from individual or singular to group or plural
13. Review and compare what other related passages teach about the subject being addressed.
14. Don't build your doctrine on a single verse of scripture. (correlation) (e.g. baptizing for the dead) (This is also referred to as a hapax.)
15. Rule of non-contradiction: If your interpretation of a passage contradicts the teaching of another passage, then at least one of the interpretations is incorrect. God does not contradict Himself.
16. In matters of doctrine, there is no requirement that every key issue related to that doctrine be discussed in every passage relative to the doctrine. (e.g. Matt. 4:17 "repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." – no mention of faith) see also John 3:16...no mention of repentance
17. When doing word studies, look up the word in a word study Bible which identifies the specific word in the original language.

This is a very common error for people who are in the beginning stages of Bible study with limited understanding of the language background of the Bible. The temptation is to look up the English translated word in an English dictionary for further explanation.

18. Recognize the progressive nature of revelation.

## Session #2: Old Testament Narratives

Outline of Session #2:

- I. What is a narrative?
- II. The Structure of Narratives
- III. Principles for Interpreting Narratives
- IV. Determining the meaning of narratives

The most common type of literary form found in the Bible is the “narrative.” It has been estimated that approximately 40% of the Old Testament (OT) and better than 60% of the New Testament (NT) are narratives. A number of the OT books are mostly or entirely narrative, e.g. Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah.

Since the books of the Bible were inspired by God, it is appropriate that the principle of inspiration included the forms that were used. It is within the forms that we find the meaning of scripture.

The fact that the Holy Spirit inspired the writers to use narratives as a principle form indicates that the narrative is a very useful form for disclosing God’s revelations to man.

### **I. What is a narrative?**

Narratives are historical accounts that are literally true, having occurred in time and space.

They are not made up stories. They are factual accounts of events in history including the miracles. (As Sovereign Creator, God has the wisdom and power to intervene in the natural laws of our universe e.g. parting of the red sea, water to wine, raising of the dead, healing of a person who was crippled from birth. etc.)

The Bible narratives tell us about God’s people and how he has interacted with them in history. They help us to know about God, His character, His deeds and His grand plan of redemption for mankind. They tell us about His provision, His providence and His protection.

They provide many “life lessons” for those who are walking the Immanuel (God with us) life; e.g. Joseph serving faithfully in the midst of difficult circumstances.

It is important to note that narratives are not parables (a cultural story) or allegories (where the details may provide part of the instruction.) When studying a narrative, it is not necessary (or useful) to look for the hidden meaning in the text. The story text provides the lesson.

Narratives are real events with real people at real places and at real times.

Even though some of the stories are very captivating, the purpose of a biblical narrative is not entertainment or merely to tell what happened.

Part of our difficulty is that the film industry has reduced the Bible stories to entertainment.

But the purpose of the Biblical stories is to relate the real, recorded events to biblical faith, to God's plan of redemption.

- Abraham left his home land to go to a place God would show him based solely on his confidence in the word God spoken to him. (one of the early lessons of faith)
- David and Goliath (facing a problem too big for you)

David and Saul: two different sets of eyes

Saul (whose knees smote one another in the tent) saw Goliath with natural eyes and he knew he didn't have the strength or ability to defeat him. He would be toast if he confronted this giant enemy of God.

David saw Goliath with spiritual eyes and knew that Goliath was no match for his God.

- Fiery furnace – (faith in the midst of adversity)

Can you think of an earlier lesson in the Bible about faith? (Noah)

The story of the flood is an intensely interesting and captivating story. But it's more than that.

What can we learn about faith from the historical narrative about the flood?

For example:

God's long-suffering towards a rebellious people.

There is a limit to God's mercy and grace, a time when judgment becomes necessary.

God is faithful to His children.

God will do what He says he will do.

### The Three Levels of Biblical Narratives:

Each OT narrative is part of three stories that are being told simultaneously:

1. the individual level which can be determined by reading the verses (or chapters) before and after the present story,

2. the national level which tells what God is doing with Israel,
3. the highest level which addresses the development of God's plan of redemption for mankind.

An example: the Joseph story

1. On an individual level, God is preparing Joseph for the high calling which He has placed on his life. At the age of 17 (age at which he was sold into slavery by his brothers), he was not prepared to be the number 2 man in Egypt and lead Egypt through 7 years of famine. As a result, 13 years in God's school of preparation occurred.
2. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> level (national), God is preparing His servant who will be instrumental in saving Israel (the nation from whom the Messiah would come) from extinction during the time of the famine.

God, through Joseph, will move Israel from Canaan to Egypt where they will maintain their national identity. In Canaan, their sons and daughters were intermarrying with the Canaanites and they were moving into the idolatrous ways of the inhabitants of the land. If this had continued, they would have been assimilated into the Canaanite culture losing their Israelite identity.

3. At the top level (world), God was preparing a people and a tribe (Judah) who would ultimately father the Messiah who would be the Savior of the world. God chose Abraham and his successors to be the focal point of God's special revelation to the world.

## II. The structure of narratives:

The key elements of a narrative are the characters, the scenes, plots and dialogues (conversations).

Characters: are the major persons in the story being told. Generally, there are 2 main characters in a storyline : e.g. God and Cain, God and Noah, God and Abraham, God and Moses. When a group such as Joseph's brothers act together, they are considered as one; e.g.

- the people at the tower of Babel,
- the people during Noah's time who mocked his building project.

Scenes: The storyline is broken up into a sequence of scenes. Each scene, tells what happened at a particular place or time. The inspired writer uses the scenes to focus our attention on actions or words of the

characters that he wants us to examine. Often there is a gap in time between the scenes.

For example, in the stories of Joseph, there are five primary scenes that occur over a period of 13 years:

1. Joseph as a young man with his family,
2. the betrayal scene with the brothers in which he is sold as a slave,
3. in Potiphar's house,
4. in prison (baker and wine taster event), and
5. in Egypt with Pharaoh.

An important element in the biblical scenes is the "presence of Yahweh."

Plot: The plot tells the incidents or actions of the main characters and often centers on some sort of conflict; e.g. God with Adam and Eve, God with Cain, God and the people at the tower of Babel.

Often, the writer brings the plot to a conclusion or climax with an important speech or conversation (dialogue) by the main characters.

Dialogue: from the American Heritage Dictionary:

"dialogue" – a conversation between two or more people;  
a conversational passage in a play or narrative

Dialogues which are verbal transactions between characters are used by the writers to express the theme of the scene, summarize plots or points of view or to assist in displaying the character of the main participants; e.g. when Abraham tells Lot he has first choice of the lands to which he might settle, Abraham is displaying the qualities of humility and deference since he could have had first choice because he was Lot's uncle.

Dialogues help us to determine the meaning of a passage.

#### Explicit vs. Implicit:

Narratives generally do not teach directly but most often illustrate what is taught directly in some other portion of scripture. This is an implicit form of teaching, the lesson being taught is embedded in the scenes and conversations recorded.

Example: In the story of Ruth, it is not explicitly stated that Ruth was converted. However, close attention to her conversation with Naomi: "Your God will be my God; "the Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me." indicate that Ruth has left the Gods of Moab (repentance/turning) and has embraced (faith) the God of Israel.

### III. Principles for Interpreting Narratives:

1. The OT narrative does not often teach a doctrine directly but illustrates a doctrine that is specifically taught somewhere else in scripture.
2. Narratives are historical accounts that are literally true, having occurred with real people at real places and at real times. They are not made up stories. They are factual accounts of events in history including the miracles.
3. Narratives record what actually occurred, not what could have or should have happened according to biblical faith.
4. Because of item 3, we sometimes find that the actions of the leading characters are not examples for us, and may be just the opposite; e.g. Lot, Jephthah's vow in Judges 11, Jacob's methods for gaining the birthright and the blessing, Saul's decision to offer the sacrifice that only the priest was authorized to present to God.

God uses imperfect people in all of the narratives. He does not "sugarcoat" his leading characters but allows us to see their character, "warts and all."

The narratives don't always tell us if what happened in the story is good or bad. We are expected to judge for ourselves; e.g.

- Abraham's trip to Egypt in Genesis 12 where he referred to Sarai as his sister,
- Lot's decision in choosing the good pastureland.

By the way...what was wrong with Lot's choice?

5. Narratives don't tell us everything we want to know but just that which we need to know; e.g. What did the Israelites do during their 38 years of wandering in the desert? Or...how many total people wandered in the desert with Moses? We can speculate based upon the number of fighting men, but we don't know the real number. Another illustration: How did Nehemiah come to be such a courageous man of faith? Or: "What happened in Jesus' life between the ages of 12 and 30?"



6. Narratives may teach either explicitly or implicitly; e.g. in the story of Joseph, the narrative explicitly states the reason for Joseph's successes... "God was with him. In the story of Ruth, it is not specifically stated that Boaz was a righteous man. However, from the evidence of the story (his treatment of his servants, his concern for Ruth, his concern to follow the scripture regarding the kinsman redeemer, etc.,) we can deduce that he was a righteous man.
7. The conclusion of the matter in all narratives is that "God is the hero."
8. The ultimate purpose of narratives is to relate the real, recorded events to biblical faith, to God's plan of redemption.
  - Abraham left his home land to go to a place God would show him.

What can we learn about faith from the historical narrative about the following:

- the flood?

God's long-suffering towards a rebellious people.  
 There is a limit to God's mercy and grace, a time when judgment becomes necessary.  
 God is faithful to His children.  
 God will do what He says he will do.  
 God gives sufficient warning when judgment is coming.  
 God designs a plan of redemption for the righteous.

- Joseph?

13 years of slavery – how God takes an unlikely candidate and prepares him for service.  
 This narrative is a good example of a narrative not telling you all you would like to know.

In 13 years, there are only 5 brief scenes from Joseph's life:

- o the childhood dream and special coat,
- o the betrayal,
- o in Potiphar's house,
- o the baker and the wine taster,
- o He meets with Pharaoh.

What did he do during the rest of the 13 years?  
 What were his thoughts about the betrayal of his brothers and the treachery of Potiphar's wife?

- David and Goliath? (facing a problem too big for you)
- Fiery furnace (Daniel's 3 friends) – faith in the midst of adversity

9. Meaning: The meaning of a biblical narrative is to be found in what the author purposed to teach his readers by recalling the incident.

The meaning is not just: "What happened?" (the historical facts) but rather the interpretation of what happened in the eyes of biblical faith.

e.g. the Red Sea

What is the meaning of this narrative?

What can I learn from this historical account that will aid me in my spiritual walk?

What can I learn about God, who He is and what he does?

- the sovereignty and power of God
- God intervenes in history to rescue His people.
- the provision of God
- God is Lord over creation.
- Don't mess with God's children! (a good lesson for today's nations)
- God's protection.
- "the God who saves"

10. Interpret a particular narrative in the light of the theme and major purpose of the book in which it is located.

What are the difficulties of narratives?

In narratives, the author seldom says: "The point I'm going to make is..."

Or...the reason I'm telling you this is...

The meaning is taught implicitly, within the text of the narrative.

Therefore, the meaning is more elusive for the reader.

We have to dig it out...mine for the gold.

You will have to stop and think and pray and study.

#### **IV. Determining the meaning of Narratives**

So...how do we determine the meaning?

1. Context –

- a. in the light of the overall meaning of the whole book – big picture (many OT quotes)

Matthew: Gospel to the Jews, who Jesus is (the Messiah)

a bridge from the OT spanning the gap of 400 silent years into the NT.

How about Mark – many references to power – Who was interested in power? – the Romans...hence many illustrations of power – healings and exorcisms

What, from a spiritual perspective, was happening when Jesus set someone free from their demonic bondage?

- b. immediate context

Mk. 1:1 “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

The gospel of Mark is all about Jesus.

All of the participants, incidents and conversations are designed to reveal Christ.

So, when reading Mark, ask yourself the question: “What does this passage teach about Jesus?”

- c. introductions and conclusions

e.g. 1: Joshua 1:1-2 “said to Joshua...the land that I am about to give them”

- the divinely appointed successor to Moses who would lead Israel into the promised land.

- The book of Joshua is about taking the land.

e.g. 2: John 20:30-31 “...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ...”

The book of John was written so that people could learn who Jesus was and, knowing who He was, could put their faith in Him as their Messiah.

2. Author comments

a. interpretative comments:

On many occasions, the authors intrude into accounts and give interpretative clues as to how a narrative should be interpreted.

e.g. “He did what was right in God’s eyes” I Kgs. 15:5 (David);  
22:43 (Jehoshaphat son of Asa)

b. insertions – Mk. 5:41 “the little girl who had died”  
Talitha cumi – He spoke in Aramaic  
- “which is translated...” “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”

Mk. 7:11 “that is, a gift of God” (Corban – a Hebrew word)  
“dedicated to God”

c. theological comments – Mk. 7:19 Jesus was talking about what goes into the mouth and what comes out of the heart.

“In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.”

This is a direct doctrinal statement.

3. Repetition of key themes

Judges – cycle of rebellion, retribution, repentance and restoration  
Sin leads to judgment but repentance leads to restoration

Luke: importance of the Holy Spirit

1:15; 1:35; 1:41-45; 3:22; 4:1; 4:14; 4:18

4. Authoritative speakers – key dialogues

Lk. 1:7 Zechariah and Elizabeth – childless – might be interpreted as a sign of judgment

The author had anticipated that some might interpret their childlessness as a judgment for sin and so in v.6 had said:

“They were upright in the sight of God” to preclude an erroneous judgment on the part of the readers.

5. Dialogue or direct discourse – conversation indicated by quotation marks

Mk. 4:41 Jesus calmed the sea.

“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him.”  
We learn – He is the Lord of creation. He is God.

The author intentionally conformed to the accepted forms of language that governed the literary form being used.  
This would allow a literal, grammatical exegesis of the text which would provide the meaning intended.

But, above all, when looking for the meaning of a narrative passage,

- pray,
- meditate,
- read the passage several times,
- and ask the Holy Spirit to guide to the truth.

## SESSION #3: The Law

### Outline of Session #3

- I. Background to the Old Testament
- II. Christians' Responsibility to the OT
- III. Dietary Laws
- IV. How to Get the most out of the OT laws that are not binding upon us
- V. Hermeneutical Guidelines

### **I. Background to the Old Testament**

#### "The Law"

The Old Testament (OT) contains 613 laws which God gave to the nation of Israel. These laws are the stipulations of the covenant that God made with Israel. These laws begin at Exodus 20 and continue to the end of Deuteronomy where Moses makes his farewell speeches.

In the Bible, the Law is spoken of in several ways:

It can refer specifically to the Laws contained in the Exodus 20 through Deuteronomy scriptures.

The other most common reference is to the first five books of the Bible. In Joshua 1, God, speaking to Joshua, tells him this "Book of the Law" is not to depart from his mouth.

In the majority of instances, "the Law" means the scriptures from Ex. 20 through Deuteronomy.

#### "A Covenant"

The OT Law is a covenant in which God, the Suzerain (or overlord), makes a binding agreement with Israel, a servant or vassal.

The vassal during this time showed their loyalty to the suzerain by keeping the stipulations of the covenant. In Israel's case it was the 613 laws.

The Old Testament is a covenant that was made specifically with Israel. It is not the covenant of the New Testament. (Testament is another word for covenant.)

#### Groups of the Law

The Laws of the OT can be categorized as follows:

1. Ceremonial, applying to the temple, to Israel's worship.

The primary purpose of these laws was to point forward to Jesus Christ, the sacrificial lamb of God.

After Jesus death and resurrection, these laws were no longer necessary because the sacrificial system has now been fulfilled once for all for all time in Christ.

2. Civil law applied to daily living in Israel. Examples of civil law are the observance of property boundaries, cities of refuge and the law of reaping your land and leaving the corners of your field unreaped.

Examples of civil laws in our culture are the laws governing our traffic system, paying of taxes and observance of property boundary lines.

3. Moral law (e.g. the Ten Commandments plus other laws) reveals the will and nature of God. The moral law as presented in the Torah of the Old Testament is no longer binding upon us but has been superceded by the new Law of the Spirit also known as the Law of the Messiah or the Law of Love. (See Rom. 8:2 and Gal. 6:2) (Note that some stipulations, e.g. most of the 10 commandments) are repeated in the New Covenant and are binding upon us as a way of life but not as a means of our salvation.)

#### The Purpose of the Law of Moses

1. To reveal the holiness of God.

The first purpose of the Law of Moses was to reveal the standard of righteousness which was required if one were to have a relationship with God. The Scriptures never taught that keeping the laws was a means of salvation, although this was a stance taken by many. Justification was always by faith through grace. (see Rom. 4 on Abraham, the father of our faith)

2. The Law provided the rule of life for the OT saints.

3. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3: 19-20) Man discovers his sinfulness and begins to realize his need for a Savior.

4. The Law also came to cause sin to increase. (Rom. 7:7) When we learn what we are to do, our human nature rises up to break the law and does what we are told we should not do. We see powerful, undeniable, evidence of our need for a Savior.

Through all of this, mankind comes to realize that he is a sinner and stands in the path of God's wrath unless God's wrath somehow is appeased or taken away.

The law therefore, should bring a sinner to his knees in repentance and ultimately to saving faith in Christ. The Law should show a sinner that "he is lost." (one of the first things needed when evangelizing those who are not saved)

## II. Christians' Responsibility to the OT

God gave Moses 613 commandments which served as Israel's rule of life. These commandments were relevant specifically for the Jewish people and were never obligatory for the Gentiles who were under the laws of the Adamic and Noahic covenants. While we can learn certain basic principles about the Lord from many of these commandments, they are not necessarily directly applicable to us personally.

II Cor. 3:2-11 teaches us that the tablets of stone (the 10 commandments) were the ministry of death and condemnation.

The Law of Moses with all of its laws is no longer in effect for us because this ministry of death has "passed away." We have been made ministers of the new covenant of the Spirit. (II Cor. 3:6) Note the contrast in this passage between the old and new covenants...letter – spirit, kills – gives life.

We are now under a new law. Gal. 6:2 refers to the new covenant as the law of Christ. And Rom. 8:2 calls it the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus which has set me free from the law of sin and death.

In essence, Christ inaugurated a new era in which the old covenant, of the law of the letter which kills, is now replaced with the new covenant, the law of the spirit of life in Christ.

This new law contains all of the commandments, instructions and guidance that are applicable to the believer for holy living. Laws from the OT are only applicable to us if they are repeated in the New Testament (covenant.)

The reason that some people may believe that the Law of Moses is still in effect is that the new law contains some of the old laws. (9 of the 10 commandments of stone are contained in the Law of Christ, but not the law of the Sabbath.)

And, the believer in Christ is free to keep certain OT laws if he chooses to (see Acts 10:9ff). But, in keeping any of the laws, he is not contributing to his salvation. This always was and continues to be by grace through faith.

In Acts 15:19-20, James, when addressing the issue of Judaizers who wanted all new believers to also keep the whole law, recommended that new believers abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled and from blood. (4 out of 613) This was not mandatory according to the Law of the Spirit but was a choice the believers made so as not to offend or cause a brother to stumble in his walk of faith. James did not recommend the imposition of any other OT laws on them.



### III. What about the dietary laws?

These laws are not binding upon us today because the Law of Moses has been replaced by the Law of the Spirit.

Should the Christian keep any of these laws for health or hygienic purposes?

When God gave His various laws and commandments, He never mentioned anything about keeping them for the sake of hygiene or for the sake of health issues. These are present-day interpretations but they are not based upon exegesis of the actual Scriptures.

One of the major purposes of these laws was to set the Jews apart as a distinct people. These laws applied to every area of their lives. They served to keep the Jews from participating in practices similar to the idolatrous practices of the surrounding nations and thereby, giving the appearance that they were participating in heathen worship.

As an example, the rule of “not boiling a kid in its mother’s milk”: The main purpose of that law was to avoid a common Canaanite practice in which the Canaanites would take the firstborn kid of the mother goat and then, boiling the baby goat in the milk of the mother as an act of first fruits, offer it as an act of worship to the god Baal. Here again the issue was not medicinal, hygienic or health. The issue was strictly avoiding idolatry and the Canaanite practice and the potential for causing a brother to stumble.

### IV. Hermeneutical Guidelines

1. The OT Law is God’s inspired Word for us but it does not contain commandments to be imposed upon us. (However, there is still much we can learn from them.)
2. The Law is the basis of the OT covenant but not of the new covenant, except where it is restated in the new covenant.
3. There is much about God that is revealed to us in the OT which doesn’t change...His love, mercy, covenant faithfulness, justice, etc.

Also, there is much revealed to us in the OT (e.g. creation, beginnings of sin, origin of nations, etc.) that is not included in the NT.

4. The OT provides principles for living in community. The examples cited are not intended to be all-encompassing but are representative. They provide the spirit of the law not the exact enactment of every conceivable case. (Note the difficulty we have in our law system today because no rule of law can be so exactly written that it addresses every conceivable related case that might occur. That’s why our lawmakers are constantly

writing new laws. As of this writing, our Congress has more than 20,000 laws...compare with Jewish 613 laws)

5. The OT laws do bring blessing when obeyed; e.g. wisdom literature. Even unbelievers can be blessed by ordering their choices in accordance with the book of Proverbs.

## **V. How to get the most out of the OT laws that are not binding upon us**

An illustration from Deut. 15:12-17: The Law Concerning Bondservants

As was noted earlier, this instruction regarding slaves is not a command for us. However, there is much that we can learn from it.

And, since slavery has been abolished in the U.S., we no longer experience it in our culture (except illegally).

So, what can we learn from this passage which is still the word of God to us?

1. God's treatment of slaves in the OT was not the harsh, often brutal practice that was recorded in the early history of our nation. In fact, God placed limitations on the time of slavery so that the practice would not be abused.
2. The freeing of slaves was to be accompanied by the generosity of the master from the flocks, herds, winepresses, etc. The slave was not to be sent away empty handed.
3. The slavery practiced in the OT was to be in such a manner that the slave, after their period of indenture was completed, might even want to stay in the home of the master because of the benefits it provided, which often were much greater than slaves could achieve by themselves.
4. God loved the slave. This love is seen in his provisions for them both materially and in the structure of the period of slavery. The master only owned the slave in accordance with the provisions and restrictions specified in the law. And these restrictions provided a "safe haven" for those forced to indenture themselves.

So, from this short section, we see a number of important lessons for us:

1. We see God's standards for fair treatment of people regardless of their "station" in life.
2. This instruction on slavery was to be a reminder to the Israelites and us that we were once slaves ourselves. God redeemed Israel from Egypt and us from our slavery to sin.

3. We also have another part of the background for the NT teaching on redemption illustrating God's provision for those who are destitute. (see Matt. 5: 1 – poor in spirit.)
4. In all of this, we see the love and watchful care of a loving God.

## SESSION #4: Poetry - Psalms

Outline:

- I. Introduction – anthology, lyric poem, man to God, “good vs. evil”
- II. Characteristics of the Psalms
- III. Kinds of Psalms
- IV. Guidelines for Interpretation

### I. Introduction:

The book of Psalms is an anthology, a collection of lyric poems designed to express the thoughts or feelings of the writer. These poems were designed to be sung. From this definition, we can see the evident characteristics of lyric poetry that they are musical, emotional, personal and mostly brief. (They average 16 verses per psalm.)

In this poetry, the writers interpret their personal experiences and describe them in artistic forms. The writers of the psalms are inspired by the Spirit and are lovers of God who used their God-given creative abilities to contribute to the greatest collection of poetry ever penned.

Psalms were a part of the every day life of the Hebrew. They had certain Psalms that they sang on certain days of the week as they were going to the temple. S – 24, M – 48, T – 82, W – 94, T – 81, F - 93, S – 92

They sang on special occasions:

- the song of Moses (Red Sea) (Exodus 15)
- the song of Deborah (Sisera) (Judges 5)
- the song of Mary (Luke 1)
- the song of David (I Chron. 29) not to mention about half of the book of Psalms

One author says that about half of the OT is poetry.

The psalms writers were not inclined to scientific accuracy but to evoking the emotions and creating certain impressions. In the Psalms, we find the full range of human emotion from desperate cries for help to ecstatic shouts of joy in the midst of every life situation.

There are two special places in the Bible where the author records a historical event both as a historical narrative and then as poetry.

The first is in Exodus and recounts the story of the crossing of the Red Sea and the subsequent drowning of the army of Pharaoh.



In the poetry of our culture, we often look for rhythm and rhyme. Repetition for instructional purposes is generally disdained. Some important features of Biblical poetry:

1. far more inclined to use “figurative language.”

e.g. the Psalms – are filled with vivid imagery and figures of speech

Ps 1 “like a tree, like chaff” = a simile, a comparison

Ps 2 “break them with a rod of iron”, “kiss the Son” = idiom for worship = act of bowing down before a ruler and kissing the ring on his hand – a demonstration of submission to his rule

Ps 3 “broken the teeth of the ungodly”

Some passages talk about those who bite and devour.

In this passage, God has dealt with them in such a way that they no longer have the ability to bite and devour.

Ps 23 “makes me lie down in green pastures”  
“walk through the valley of the shadow of death”

“my cup runneth over”

- fills my life with good things

- He blesses my socks off – modern paraphrase

So...part of our concern with Hebrew poetry will be to learn how to interpret figures of speech and imagery.

2. Hebrews were not so much interested in rhythm and rhyme as we find in our poetry but in expansion and explanation of wisdom and knowledge. As a result, the style of writing parallel thoughts became a key feature of their poetry.

Note also that the NT writers were Jewish and so were trained in the Hebrew poetry processes. We find particularly the style of parallelisms surfacing in the NT writings. Paul and even Jesus used parallelisms.

There are several kinds of parallelisms. I have included a brief description of five of the more common styles below.

- A. similarity (also called synonymous) – in which the theme of the second line is similar to the first, but is a variation of the same idea:

Ps. 3:1 “Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!  
Many are they who rise up against me.”

- B. contrast (also called “antithetic parallelism”) In this form of parallelism, the second line provides a contrast to the first line.

Ps. 1:6 “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked shall perish.”

Clue: Note the “but.”

- C. synthetic At times, the following lines add to the information of the first line:

Ps. 1:1 “Blessed is the man who walks not in the  
counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful.”

- D. completion (also called climactic) in which the second line partially repeats the first line and then completes the theme:

Ps. 96:7 “Give to the Lord, O families of the people,  
Give to the Lord glory and strength.

- E. metaphoric A fifth type of parallelism can be called metaphoric (sometimes called emblematic) in which the first line gives a figure of speech and the lines following explain the figure of speech.

In the following case, the metaphor is a simile:

Ps. 1:3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of  
water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf shall not wither;  
And whatever he does, shall prosper.

#### One final illustration of a parallelism

Ps 84 “...who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well;

the rain also fills it with pools.”

This is a parallelism in which two things are united in two lines of poetry:

: wells coming from the valley of Baca and rains which fill the land with pools

In order to understand this passage, we need to know:

What is the valley of Baca?

Baca is a plant that grows in the desert.

But is this a physical location?

A physical location called “the valley of Baca” has not been identified in the Palestine area.

We also know that Baca means “weeping.” So could this be a place of sorrow, of tears?

In fact, the earlier part of the Psalm we see a soul in search of God’s presence.

V. 5b is helpful. When translated literally it reads: “In whose heart the ways.”

“The road being traveled is a heart experience.”

The person of Ps 84 is on a spiritual pilgrimage and passes through this place or circumstance called “the valley of Baca.”

Also, the phrase “make it a spring or well” is a figure of speech. Our traveler does not dig a well or make a physical spring of water.

It is likely, therefore, that the valley of Baca is not a literal place but a figure of speech by the Psalmist describing his longing search for the place of God’s presence.

Could the valley of Baca be something like the valley of the shadow of death which we see in psalm 23?

Is there a correspondence between tears and rain? Is this the thought of the 2<sup>nd</sup> line?

Or...is this a contrast?



From the Psalm, we know that Ps 84 is the longing cry of one who wants to go to Jerusalem to be in God's presence.

The context gives us a strong clue that the parallelism is contrasting.

- tears from within a man
- rain that falls from heaven

So, we have a figure of speech of a dry, desert place (the valley of Baca) and a contrasting place of refreshing rains.

We have contrast, not similarity.

- the struggles of a person of faith
- the help of God

So what does all of this lead to?

My interpretation :

1. The valley of Baca is symbolic of a difficult time in a Christian's life, perhaps sorrow, separation, or dry and desert like.

When someone is going through hard times, dry times, desert times, perhaps even times of separation where God doesn't seem to be near or His voice heard, but has the heart determination to get to God, God gives experiences during the desert journey that are a refreshment that strengthens the traveler for the rest of their journey.

He sends rain until it stands in pools. This speaks of an overflow, an abundance, more than the land can immediately absorb.

Thus, He gives strength and enables one to reach Him.

It tells me that even in the midst of difficult times of reaching out to God, God sees the weary traveler and provides times of refreshment. God knows the length of the journey and provides the renewal needed and strengthening along the way.

To me, one of the remarkable things about this passage is that it also teaches that as a person is going through difficult times, they can, at the same time, be a well of refreshment to those around them. (v.6a: They make it a spring.)

In summary: Understanding the parallelism as contrasting and not similarity helps to open up the meaning of the passage.

If I had determined that the tears of the valley and the rain which makes pools were similar (a similarity and not a contrast), then the meaning of the Psalm would be something very different.

- emotional: One of the chief features of lyric poetry is its emotional nature. These musical poems are designed to appeal to the emotions and not to reasoned thinking. The author wants to evoke a response from the reader that goes beyond cognitive thinking and the knowing of facts. He is appealing to the heart and not the mind.

This is not easy to achieve. Hebrew writers made good use of such writing techniques as hyperbole, frequent use of emotional words and vivid descriptions of the emotional stimuli.

It should become obvious that the writer wants the reader to share in the emotion of the experience he is retelling.

It is important to note that the different types of Psalms (e.g. lament, praise, thanksgiving, enthronement) will have varying forms.

e.g. By comparing the lament psalms, scholars have been able to identify six elements that appear in nearly all of the lament psalms:

1. Address – to the Lord
2. His complaint – He identifies his trouble and why he is asking for God's help.
3. Trust – He very quickly expresses his trust in God.
4. Plea for deliverance from the difficulty
5. Confidence – He expresses his confidence that God will hear and answer him.
6. Praise – He expresses worship and praise honoring

So, when evaluating a psalm such as the lament psalm, it will be useful to identify the different elements as in the form above. This will facilitate your understanding of the psalm.

#### Additional Characteristics of the Psalms:

1. Psalms is both a prayer book and a song book. The Psalms were written for singing, for public worship in the temple.
2. The Psalms were also intended to have a given function in the life of Israel. e.g, Royal psalms were intended for use in celebrating Israel's kingship.

3. The Psalms are written in the language of the human spirit. They are not reasoned prose but deeply emotional responses filled with heart rending cries of anguish, exuberant expressions of praise and thanksgiving, dramatic language and numerous figures of speech.
4. The writings of the Psalms were spontaneous expressions of the life of the Israelites. They were written in the language of response. An individual surveys the wreckage of Jerusalem and pours out his heart in sorrow before God. Another witnesses the miraculous crossing of the sea and the drowning of the army of Pharaoh and breaks out into a song of celebration and great rejoicing.
  - In Ex. 15, Moses sings a song to the Lord.
  - Deborah, Hannah, David and Mary were others who also composed spontaneous songs to express their devotion and thankfulness to God or to celebrate a significant event in their life or the life of Israel.
5. The Psalms revolve around two vastly different poles: on one side is the desperate, human condition, fallen man, unable to help himself, unable to achieve redemption and life by his own abilities.

The opposite pole is the greatness and the glory and the majesty of the all-sufficient God who has no limit to his abilities. Plus...He has a willing heart that "none should perish."

The Psalms are a magnet in that their poetic forms coupled with their profound insight into the human condition draw them even to unbelievers.

The unparalleled way in which the psalms put into words the experiences of praise and worship, thanksgiving and adoration, grief over dire circumstances or happenings, repentance and sorrow over sin, make them available to everyone. The psalms give us words and expressions which we might never think of but can utilize given circumstances similar to that of a psalm.

In speaking of contrasts, I should also mention that the psalms often address the conflict between good and evil, the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the foolish.

6. The Psalms provide us a window into the heart of a person experiencing the Immanuel life. As such, they are useful for us as we make our way along the tortuous (twisting, bending) paths of life.

### III. Kinds of Psalms:

The following is a typical categorization of the Psalms according to the type of Psalm:

Ascent or pilgrimage – psalms which were sung by pilgrims while traveling to Jerusalem for Israel's feasts

Enthronement – celebrates the reign of God

Imprecatory – petitions God to execute a judgment against the enemies of God or Israel

Individual Lament – speaks with God about a desperate personal situation and requests His help

Messianic – contains prophetic language related to the coming Messiah

National Lament – speaks with God about a national emergency and request his intervention

Penitential – expresses sorrow and repentance over sin

Praise – exalts God for his works or character

Royal – describes and compares the reign of an earthly king with our heavenly king

Songs of Zion – songs which speak of Zion, the city of God

Thanksgiving – expresses a person's gratitude to God for His acts of kindness

Wisdom – provides wisdom for living a godly life

Worship – a psalm in which the individual bows in worship and adoration of God...does not necessarily include petition

### IV. Guidelines for Interpretation

#### 1. Determine the context of the Psalm

This should include the 3 levels of context (world, nation, individual), the cultural and physical setting and any information you can obtain describing the occasion for the psalm. (At times, the OT superscription will include a quick summary of the circumstances leading to the Psalm.

2. Determine the literary type of Psalm (e.g. lament, praise, enthronement, Songs of ascent, etc.)

Once you've determined the type, look for the elements in the psalm such as are described above.

3. Keep in mind that the Psalms are poetry which most often contain images, symbols, figures of speech and other emotive devices.

You will need to study these special literary devices and determine the literal meaning. e.g. Ps. 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God...their line has gone out into all the earth."

Interpretation: This is a personification where the author is ascribing to the creation the ability to communicate as humans do. A line in this instance is a sentence. Therefore, the heavens communicate the glory of God throughout the whole earth.

4. Research the author of the psalm to determine his frame of mind when he wrote the psalm. Often the superscription of a psalm will tell you what event had just happened in the life of the author. e.g. Ps. 3 "A psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom. Now you can review the historical events leading up to his flight and get a sense of the urgency, humiliation, disappointment and anxiety he must have felt when fleeing

5. Remember that the psalms are the writings from a believing heart.

6. Each psalm is a complete unit and therefore, should be studied as a unit.

Each of these is like a single piece in the puzzle of God's redemptive plan. Context should help you to see how a particular psalm contributes to God's overall plan of redemption.

7. Regarding the imprecatory psalms:
  - a. The Hebrew loves the concrete and sometimes encouches sin in the cloak of a sinner.
  - b. The imprecations of the psalm express the desire of the OT saint for the vindication of God's holiness.
  - c. They show us God's attitude towards those who are hostile towards Him and His kingdom.
8. Don't spend time looking for the hidden meaning in a psalm.

9. Some psalms are prophetic (e.g. 2, 22, 45, 110) and therefore, attention should be given to the quotations in the NT and the subsequent fulfillment of them in the NT. (e.g. Jesus on the cross...Ps 22)

## V. **Do's and don'ts for reading the Psalms** (from Literary Bible)

### 1. **Do's:**

- Anticipate a flow of feelings and reflections rather than narrative events.
- Anticipate that the poet will share more and more of his feelings as the psalm progresses.
- Accept that the poems are self-contained units and not chapters in an on-going saga.
- Be ready for sudden movement from one topic or feeling to another (C.S. Lewis spoke of the emotional rather than the logical connections in the psalms.)
- Begin with the premise that poets think in images rather than abstractions and that they prefer the figurative to literal language.
- slow down your speed of reading. Be meditative, thoughtful, imaginative.
- consider that the psalms are a chapter in the master story of the Bible. This master story is the record of what God and people do in history. The Psalms show us what God does in the three areas of creation, history and in the personal lives of people. The primary actions of God recorded by the Psalms are creation, providence, judgment and redemptions/rescue.

Additionally, many of the Psalms express messianic expectations.

### 2. **Don'ts:**

- Try to read the psalms as stories. (They are not narratives.)
- Speculate unduly about the details of the life situation that may be the context of the poem. Often, the context is unknown.
- Ignore the images and figures of speech. (You will need to make a literal interpretation of the figurative speech.

e.g. Ps 19 "Their line has gone out into all the world.")

PSALMS* by AUTHOR									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72-S	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88-H	89-E	90-M
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110
111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120
121	122	123	124	125	126	127-S	128	129	130
131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140
141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150

David		73
Asaph		12
Solomon	#-S	2
Sons of Korah		10
Heman	#-H	1
Ethan	#-E	1
Moses	#-M	1
Unknown		50

## SESSION #5: Wisdom Literature - Proverbs

### Outline of Session #5

- I. An Over view of wisdom literature
- II. Proverbs

#### I. An Overview of the Wisdom Literature:

Biblical wisdom literature provides principles for daily living for the community of God. These principles, given by a loving God, reveal God’s will for our lives and show us how to live harmoniously while here on earth.

In the wisdom books, God reveals patterns for living that help us gain an understanding of our own life, help us as we relate and work with others and ultimately learn about God Himself. These books give instructions for the three primary activities of our daily lives: thought, speech and action.

They teach us that the life we lead and the choices we make directly influence the quality of life that we will experience.

These books provide us a rich treasure of human experiences that reveal the wisdom and grace of God.

#### Comparison of the Wisdom Books with other OT books:

<b>Books</b>	<b>Central focus</b>	<b>Application</b>
The Law	Revelation and Guidance	A historical record of God’s revelations to man and legislation for the community of Israel
Prophets	Authority to speak for God	God gives messages to mankind for the present and future
Psalms	Worship	Simultaneously, a songbook and a prayer book
Proverbs	Wisdom; observation and reflections on personal experience	A guide for practical living
Job	A test; questions and reasonings	Answers from God and man
Ecclesiastes	Vanity, the meaning of life	We are shown the futility of pursuing a life style without God. Without God, life is meaningless, fleeting.

Three responses to sin and righteousness:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Prophet</b>	<b>Priest</b>	<b>Philosopher</b>
Sin	It is disobedience.	It is defilement.	It is folly.
Righteousness	It is just.	It is commanded.	It is wise/prudent.



There are three principle types of poetry in the OT, lyric, didactic and dramatic.

1. Lyric poetry is so-called because it was poetry originally accompanied by music played on the lyre.
2. Didactic (teaching) is, at times, referred to as gnomic because the unit of thought is a gnome or maxim. In this type of poetry (e.g. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes), observations and conclusions about life are shared.
3. Dramatic poetry employs the use of conversation or dialogue to convey the message being presented. Job is Hebrew drama.

## II. **Proverbs:** “Walking in the Fear of the Lord’

Definition: A proverb is a short, memorable saying about conduct and character.

The Hebrew word for proverb is “mashal” meaning “to be like” or to represent. This is very appropriate since many proverbs use comparison to teach simple life truths.

Proverbs are brief wisdom sayings that provide a generalized wisdom statement regarding a specific issue in life. They are designed to be concise, and picturesque to enhance a person’s ability to remember them. This creative way of providing wisdom is another illustration of God’s interest in the details of our lives.

Jesus used Proverbs at times to teach His disciples. But the relationship of Proverbs to Christ is much deeper than it appears. A fundamental connection between Proverbs and Christ is that the wisdom spoken in Proverbs is found completely in Christ. (see I Cor. 1:30; Col. 2:3)

Theme: The major theme of the Bible is the salvation of mankind, the restoration of mankind’s fellowship with God. This theme is especially prominent in certain books such as the gospels and the book of Romans.

The Bible was also written to show the restored person how to live now that they have entered the kingdom of God through the new birth. This instruction is found throughout the Scriptures but is especially prominent in certain books. Proverbs is one of them.

Proverbs teaches the righteous works of a saved person. It does not teach salvation by works. It doesn’t dwell on doctrine. It does emphasize application and practice.

A book from the New Testament, James, is sometimes referred to as “the Proverbs of the New Testament.”

## Literary Style:

Wisdom literature uses a variety of styles and forms as listed below:

### Devices:

1. Comparison – things that are similar are compared using “as” or “like”
2. Antithesis – comparing things that are opposite usually divided with the word “but.”
3. Imagery – using picture language
4. Personification – ascribing personality to an inanimate object.

Forms: poetry, parables, questions, short story (e.g. Pr. 7:6-27)

Teaching method: contrast and comparison

### Steps for evaluating a proverb:

Following are recommended steps for evaluating and interpreting a proverb:

#### A. Evaluating

1. Read through a chapter and identify individual proverbs and clusters.  
How? by identifying a common theme or character (e.g. the fool, the sluggard)
2. Read the first proverb or cluster.
3. What type of proverb is it?
  - a. synonymous
  - b. antithetical (“but”)
  - c. synthetic
  - d. other:
    - (1) climactic – builds on the same word e.g. Ps. 29:1-2 “ascribe”
    - (2) emblematic – use of simile or metaphor: Ps. 42:1 “as a deer”  
Prov. 25:25 “like cold water to a thirsty soul...”
4. Are there any figures of speech? If yes, make a literal translation.
5. Look up key words and determine appropriate definitions.
6. What action is on review? e.g. request to be surety,  
the prostitute beckons (see Ch-7),  
invitation to dine with a ruler

7. What is the theme of the proverb?
8. What character quality is displayed? e.g. wise, fool, glutton  
What is the resulting effect of this character quality?
9. What is the primary teaching of the proverb or cluster?
10. Determine real-life application  
What virtue does this proverb promote? (e.g. self-control)  
What vice does it denounce? (drunkenness)  
What value does it affirm? (humility)

To remember: Proverbs are snapshots in time of individual opportunities to display wisdom and moral character.

The author shows us the characters and the results of the choices they make.

B. Interpretation of Proverbs:

1. The Proverbs are instructions from God, not merely the collected wisdom of man.
2. Wisdom can be interpreted as righteousness or holiness since it describes the heart of the person who knows God.

A fool is also described as a person who is wicked.

3. Recognize that Proverbs uses the literary device of personification. For example, the foolish woman is not primarily a person but is spiritual wickedness. (Although, at times, it is used literally.)
4. Proverbs are practical, not primarily theological or doctrinal statements.
5. Proverbs are worded to be memorable but not technically precise. e.g. "A stitch in time saves nine." It most likely saves more or less but not exactly nine stitches...but nine rhymes with time and is therefore more memorable and the point is still made.
6. Proverbs are not promises or guarantees, but are, in general, the likely outcome of a given behavior.
7. Proverbs reflect an ancient culture and may need some translation to obtain an appropriate meaning. e.g. 25:24 "a corner of the roof" – will need to be culturally transferred or pictured to appreciate the meaning of this proverb.

8. Proverbs often use literary devices such as figures of speech (e.g. similes, metaphors and personifications.) Therefore, you will need to determine the literal meaning in terms of our present day culture. e.g. Ps. 19 “Their line has gone out into all the world.”
9. Reading Proverbs: With the exception of the first 9 chapters and chapter 31, the book is mainly a collection of individual proverbs and small clusters of proverbs.

The real context of a proverb is not its position within the book but our experiences in real life.

Once we understand the teaching of a proverb, we need to think of real-life applications or proofs which confirm its truth. In this way, each proverb becomes a snapshot of a true life situation.

10. Although the proverbs are not generally arranged by topics, it is possible to look for proverbs on a given subject and create your own topical cluster. e.g. “the fear of the Lord”
11. When meditating on a proverb, appropriate questions to ask are:
  - a. When in life do I encounter this experience or choice?
  - b. When have I seen or experienced this situation?
  - c. Whose life in my circle of acquaintances is an example of this type of wisdom or foolishness (folly)?
12. Proverbs tells a story.

Even though Proverbs has no narrative or “story-line,” it is possible to view the book of Proverbs as telling a story.

- o The plot = the quest for a righteous/good life  
The quest occurs in an implied context of a moment-in-time conflict between good and evil, wisdom and folly.
- o Leading characters: The person who is on a quest is the pupil or “my son.”

This “son” is representative of us, the readers. So, ultimately, we are the ones on a quest and therefore are being instructed.

Other members of the cast:

- the speaker or narrator who is the authoritative voice
- 2 personified women – wisdom and folly
- the virtuous wife (ch-31)

- a host of other players in our drama whose actions show them to be either wise or foolish, good or evil. (e.g. the sluggard, the drunkard)

So...while the book is an anthology of wise sayings, it is also a gallery of characters whose virtues or vices are displayed.

- The scene: the unique moment in time which is generated by the experience or choice

### 13. The speaking and writing skill of the wise man

In approaching the proverbs for understanding, we are interested in the “how” of a saying as well as the “what.” (how did he say what he said as opposed to what did he say.)

The composers of proverbs typically use the basic mode of poetry with an array of figures of speech such as metaphors and similes. They also tend toward the concrete rather than the abstract. The goal of a proverb is to convey wisdom in a striking and memorable way. So, a useful initial analysis would be to theorize about what makes a particular proverb different from our usual, ordinary, forgettable speaking. The fact that proverbs are encased in a format that sets them apart from every day language does not detract from the fact that they are consistently rooted in everyday experiences.

Once we take this into account, we can explore our own experiences and observations of life that are illustrated in a given proverb.

Example: “When the righteous increase, the people rejoice.  
When the wicked rule, the people groan.” 29:2

How has this been true in our own lives?

Also, take note when an element of humor enters into the picture. “A beautiful woman without discretion is like a fine gold ring in a pig’s snout.” 11:22

Examples:

1. “It is better to live on a corner of a roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.” 21:9
  - o Single or cluster – single
  - o Figures of speech/imagery – imagery : corner of a roof

Use of a thesaurus might amplify the predicament.

Quarrelsome: contentious, brawling, quick-tempered,  
on a short fuse, looking for trouble  
Look at a picture of a peasant home to amplify our assessment so  
as to appreciate the two choices of a place to reside.

- o What is contrasted? a small, quiet, but lonely place, vs.  
a home with a quarreling wife?
- o Core teaching – A quarrelsome wife does not a happy home make.  
She is difficult to live with.  
It's better to be alone than to dwell in the presence  
of a woman who is constantly quarreling.
- o Real-life application - A man has a wife who fits this description.  
  
This is a universal application since the demeanor of  
a woman is not limited to a culture or nationality but is  
personality based.  
  
The final application is to evaluate the options such  
an unfortunate man may have.

2. “Whether a tree falls to the north or south, in the place where it falls, there  
will it lie.” Eccl. 11:3b

- o Single or cluster – This verse is actually a cluster of verses 1-8 which  
will help provide context for the proverb in question.

v.11:2 refers to an evil that will be upon the earth.  
Leupold, in his exposition of Ecclesiastes, interprets this evil to be a  
judgment of God.

The picture is that of a storm that overthrows a mighty tree in the  
forest.

Referring to monarchs as trees is a common practice among  
prophets. (see Daniel)

The emphasis in the comparison is the thought that this tree, once  
overthrown, will remain overthrown. This nation can stage no  
comeback.

- o Figures of speech/imagery - a falling tree...What does it represent?

Referring to monarchs and nations as trees was a common practice  
among prophets.

The tree can also be a metaphor of the universal principle of finality that attends many events in life.

- o Core teaching - The principle of finality that attends many events in life...Once it's over, it's over.
- o Real-life application - Life does have a finality to it.

Recommendation: We should be prepared for the moment of finality.

3. "A beautiful woman without discretion is like a fine gold ring in a pig's snout." 11:22

- o Single or cluster – single
- o Figures of speech/imagery – picture of a pig with a fine gold ring in its snout. Note the use of humor in the imagery

Discretion: synonyms = considerate, prudence, wisdom, enlightened

antonym = folly

- o Core teaching – Just as a gold ring cannot dress up a pig and is therefore wasted, so also, physical beauty on a woman who is not wise nor discreet (tactful, tending not to put one's foot in one's mouth, diplomatic), is wasted.

Worth/usefulness is not based upon physical appearance.

- o Real-life application – a universal phenomenon  
Physical beauty alone is not enough to make a woman of value.

## SESSION #6: The Prophets/Prophecy

Outline of Session #6:

- I. Introduction
- II. What is a prophet?
- III. Messages of the prophets
- IV. Difficulties of the prophetic books
- V. What is the function of prophecy?
- VI. What are the forms of prophecy?
- VII. Recommendations for interpreting the prophets

### I. Introduction:

The calling of a prophet was one of five key positions in Israel, the others being judge, priest, king and wise man.

The fact that the word for a prophet in its different forms occurs more than 660 times in the OT and NT also gives us an indication of the importance of the role of a prophet. Approximately 2/3 of these occurrences are in the OT.

Although there were many prophets in Israel (e.g. Aaron, Gad, Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, Huldah, Agabas), only 16 were commissioned by the Holy Spirit to write prophetic books which would become part of the canon of scripture. And these were written in a very small period of time (~ 320 years) in the history of Israel.

There must be reasons why the messages of these 16 men were called by God when they were and why their messages were specifically recorded whereas, the messages of other prophets were not. Discuss in class.

### II. What is a prophet?

The Hebrew word for prophet signifies one who has been called or appointed to declare a message from God Himself. In essence, a prophet stands in God's presence, hears from God and then turns to give the message to the people designated for them by God. (What an awesome privilege and responsibility)

Prophets were, at times, called by different titles such as "a seer," "a man of God" and "a servant of Jehovah." They were also referred to as interpreters and spokesmen for God.

The prophets were God's covenant mediators to enforce the covenant with Israel. As such, they were God's spokes-persons.

Being a prophet was not to be taken lightly. The qualifications were very high:



1. Sovereign calling by God – God determined who would be his spokes-persons.
2. With the sovereign calling, God also gave special gifts enabling the prophet "to see" (hence the title "seer") the message and then to communicate it to the people.

Note the many "visual" passages in prophetic writings such as Ezekiel.

3. The personal qualifications were very high. These were persons of integrity, obedience to the visions of God, faithfulness to preach the whole message, love for the people, perseverance and long-suffering (note Jeremiah's sufferings), men of faith.
4. They were also those who would not be respecters of persons or show partiality. (see James 2) They would be required to give their prophetic oracles to whomever God had identified and could not allow benefit to themselves to be a governing factor.

### **III. Messages of the prophets:**

The messages of the prophets generally fall into the following categories:

- o Messages regarding the truth about God and man
- o Warnings and appeals to those living in sin
- o Comfort and encouragement to those who continued to trust and obey God during times of national apostasy.
- o Prediction of events to come

### **IV. Difficulties of prophetic books**

1. The Meaning of prophecy:

Definition of prophecy (first words I see in my dictionary):

"a prediction"

and then..."to prophesy is to predict" and therefore, to foretell what is to come.

However, this was not the primary focus of the OT prophet.

Consider the following statistics:

- a. less than 1% concerns future events yet unfulfilled,
- b. less than 5% looks ahead to the New Covenant age,

c. less than 2% addresses the coming of the Messiah

The prophets did announce the future (e.g. Jeremiah and the destruction of the temple), but their prophecies were usually fulfilled within the space of several decades (not millennia). Their words mostly addressed events that concerned Israel and the nations that surrounded them and not with our times.

So, one of the keys to understanding the prophets is to view their prophecies which were, for them, unfulfilled, but for us may be completed and past.

We must keep in mind also, the difference between an oral prophet and a writing prophet.

Generally, in the narrative books, we hear about the prophet and what they said is often included in the context of their time. (e.g. Nathan and David)

But, in the prophetic books, we hear from God and little about the prophets. In addition, the books of the prophets are collections of their oracles and are often out of sequence chronologically. Often, their context is not defined. And sometimes there is no indication as to when one oracle ends and another begins.

I think this might explain why people often have difficulty reading through one of the major prophets at one sitting. (Have you tried reading through the book of Isaiah lately?)

Another difficulty, one all of us 21<sup>st</sup> century dwellers face, is the historical distance of 2 millennia between us and the culture, the language, the customs, the idioms of a past culture, etc. that separate us. We simply don't talk the way they did and we often don't really understand the figures of speech or idioms that we read. (e.g. going aside, he knew his wife)

Also, there is a misconception by many that the Bible in all of its books can be read and understood without study or additional helps.

The reasoning is something like this:

“God wrote the Bible. He wants all of us to understand it regardless of our mental abilities or training. And since we have the Holy Spirit, we should be able to understand it quickly and easily without study or outside help, much like reading a novel.”

This misconception is simply not true.

Obviously, some passages can be understood the first time read. But some parts cannot be understood instantaneously. (Have you read Paul's doctrinal treatise in the book of Romans lately?) God's thoughts are much higher than our thoughts and some passages require careful study to be properly understood.

This is especially true of the prophets who make abundant use of figures of speech, visions, poetic devices, parables, allegories, etc. Patient, diligent study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit with the additional help of commentaries, dictionaries and Bible handbooks can be valuable aids in discovering the truths of prophetic oracles.

## **V. What is the function of prophecy?**

The fact that all of the major and minor prophets were written during the times of the divided kingdom to the end of the OT gives us a clue as to the function of the prophet.

Their principle function was related most specifically to the covenant that Israel had entered into with Yahweh on Mt. Sinai. He was their Suzerain (Lord) and they were His vassal.

Under the terms of the covenant, if they obeyed the covenant stipulations, there would be blessing. If they disobeyed, there would be punishments, judgment.

But God is loving, merciful and longsuffering towards His people. As a result he sent His prophets, his covenant enforcers, to speak to wandering Israel and call them to a repentance in which they would return to Him and obey the covenant stipulations

Hence, two major areas of prophetic messages were:

- A. Warnings and appeals to those living in sin who had abandoned the covenant. He did not bring judgment without appropriate warnings.
- B. Encouragement and comfort to those who had remained faithful to the covenant. He always had a remnant of the faithful.

Two other categories of prophetic messages were:

- C. General instructions:
  - about God, who He is and what He does, and
  - the condition of humanity (the sinfulness of man).
- D. Prediction of events to come.

The two major areas of predictions were:

- the first and second comings of the Messiah, and
- national and international events to come both near and distant.  
e.g. Daniel – the great image of Nebuchadnezzar

Regarding the elements of the prophetic oracles, it is important to keep in mind that the prophet did not make up the blessings or cursings of their oracles. They simply spoke what God had given them to speak.

Also, when God determined to speak to a nation, the blessings or cursings were spoken to the nation as a corporate entity, to the nation as a whole. This did not guarantee the good or demise of specific individuals. (meaning that one who was faithful during a time of national apostasy might not share in the cursings pronounced.) This is certainly an important lesson for us in the U.S. today.

And, during the period of the 8<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., the principle message of the prophets was one of repent and return or the curses (death, disease, drought, famine, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution and disgrace) would be their lot. During this period, both Judah and her idolatrous sister Israel were heading down the apostasy trail. The enforcement of the covenant stipulations in the way of cursings came to Israel in 722 B.C. at the hands of the Assyrians and in 587 B.C. to Judah at the hands of the Babylonians.

The fact that it took Judah about 135 years longer to get there, can be attributed to the fact that they, at times, had good kings that called the people to repentance and who tried to do right. But, these kings were usually followed by evil kings and the trek to destruction continued to spiral downward. The northern kingdom (Israel), on the other hand, had only wicked kings.

After the time when the judgment had fallen, the oracles of the prophets tended toward mercy and restoration.

## **VI. What are the forms of prophecy:**

Just as there are many different kinds of literary forms in the Bible, so also the prophets used a variety of literary forms to present their prophetic message.

Following are presented 3 of the more common forms utilized:

### **1. “the lawsuit”**

In the lawsuit, God is portrayed as court officials (judge, prosecuting attorney, etc.) in a court case in which Israel is the defendant. (for examples see Isa. 3:13-26; Hos. 3:3-17; 4:1-19).

This form will consist of a summons to appear in court, a charge against Israel (the defendant), the evidence and the verdict.

The court is convened, the indictment is spoken, the evidence is presented and the sentence pronounced. The punishments (curses) identified in the covenant will come upon the guilty party (Israel).

The lawsuit is a dramatic and effective way that God utilized to inform His covenant people that they had broken the terms of the covenant and the promised punishments will now come due to their disobedience.

## 2. “the woe”

Woe was the word used by the Israelites when facing a disaster, doom or when mourning at a funeral. The people of Israel would readily recognize the significance of the pronouncement of a “woe oracle.”

The form generally consisted of a declaration of the distress, the reason the distress is to occur and the ensuing foretelling of the imminent doom. (see Hab. 2:6-8 for an example of a woe oracle.

## 3. “the promise”

A “promise oracle” was another commonly used prophetic form. It generally contains the following elements:

- a reference to future events (“In that day...”)
- a declaration that significant changes are imminent
- a declaration of blessing to occur

See Amo 9:11-15 for a typical example.

Note, in this example, that the blessing focused on agricultural abundance. The crops will be so fruitful that the harvesters will not have finished their reaping when it is time to sow again.

As an example, using the 3 forms above:

If you recognize a law suit form, you know that God is confronting His rebellious, guilty people and that punishment is about to occur.

A “woe oracle” is an immediate signal that disaster or doom is imminent.

A promise oracle indicates that blessing and change are on the way.

So, from this brief example, we can identify parameters that will guide our interpretive process.

These are just a few of the prophetic forms used in the OT. Consulting a good commentary is one way to identify other prophetic forms.

Other forms:

Some other forms you will see are:

Joel: "warning-instructional"

Micah: use of word plays and contrasts

Habakkuk: dialogue between God and the prophet

Haggai: antithetic parallelism and repetition (use of "This is what the Lord says..." 26 times in 38 verses)

Malachi: use of rhetorical questions (a question in which an answer is not expected or in which there is only one answer)

(see also Paul, esp. Romans for use of questions as he anticipates the objections or responses to some of his statements in his theological treatise on salvation.)

These questions become valuable assets as they focus our attention upon a specific issue which is well-defined by the question.

## **VII. Recommendations for interpreting the prophets:**

Purposes of Predictive prophecy:

1. Affect the conduct of those who hear the prophecy
2. when the prophecy is fulfilled –build faith, establish confidence in God who miraculously foretold the events
3. prophecy not yet fulfilled – Affect present thought and conduct, not satisfy our curiosity about the future
4. establish the authenticity of the prophet

In order for any prophecy to have an impact on our thinking or actions, its meaning and therefore its message must be understood.

So, we need some guidelines for interpreting a prophetic passage.

1. Principle that guides our interpretation of all scripture –

Take the passage in its simple, direct and ordinary meaning unless there are compelling reasons for not doing so. Take it at its literal meaning unless it is indicated to be figurative.

e.g. Amos 9:14-15

No reason to take it other than literal. (although some do)

2. Identify figurative passages by following the ordinary rules of language in making the distinction between literal and figurative.

A. Some language is obviously figurative because it would be absurd to understand it literally.

Joel 2:31 moon to blood

Isa. 11:1 a branch grow out of a human being

Zech. 4:7 a mountain removed

John the Baptist – lower the mountains, raise the valleys

Intended by the author to be understood as picture language.

Dreams – Pharaoh – 7 good ears, 7 bad ears –

What was the literal meaning of this figure of speech?

Joseph – the sun and moon and stars would bow before him

B. Defined in the context

Dan. 7:17 4 great beasts - ...are 4 kings and will arise from the earth.

John 2:19 “destroy this temple”

v.21 “but He was speaking of the temple of his body

result: they believed the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken (v.22)

Rev. 1:20 the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches

5:8 the golden bowls full of incense are the prayers of the saints

C. Other scriptures may identify an apparently literal statement as having a figurative meaning.

(but not contemporary interpreters)

Gen 3:15 judgment – Eve vs. serpent

Literal interpretation would be that there would be a war between Eve and snakes.

Rev. 12:9; 20:2 serpent is a symbol of Satan

The goal of interpretation is to discern what the figure points to because the thing figured is to have a literal fulfillment in history.

Predictions in scripture should be taken at their face value. If there are no compelling reasons to understand a non-literal meaning, the literal meaning is to be accepted.

e.g. 400 years in servitude in a foreign land  
70 years captivity in Babylon

Type: a prophetic symbol (it foreshadows something to come)

: people, rites, ceremonies, acts and events, objects, offices (e.g. prophet, priest and king)

3. Keep in mind that the principle function of a prophet was to speak an oracle (spoken message from God) to a specific people at a specific time which was far removed from our 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Look first for the central message to the people being addressed.

4. Determine the historical context of the prophetic oracle.
5. Distinctive literary features of that day were employed by the prophet. Therefore, you will need to determine the literal meaning of figures of speech, idioms, symbols, etc. unique to that culture.
6. Identify the type of prophetic form. This will provide guiding parameters for your study. (helpful in determining the limits of an oracle)
7. Distinguish between the central message of the Bible as opposed to what is only peripheral. e.g. The central message of the Bible is God's redemptive plan and activity on behalf of mankind. Women's head coverings and the holy kiss are peripheral to the central theme.

Another example is the core teaching of God's sovereignty and holiness in the 10 commandments versus the instruction by Paul that women were to remain silent in their assemblies. This latter teaching was most likely a cultural and local issue but not a



mandate for the universal church. I would consider it a peripheral issue. (what is mandated versus what is optional)

8. Distinguish between cultural differences between the OT and the 21<sup>st</sup> century times. A good example is the role of women during the OT times versus today. Women during the OT times had limited educational opportunities and, in general, were 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens. Few were given the opportunity to have a professional career. Their career was to take care of the home and have children.

Another significant difference between the times were the 613 laws given to Israel by God which provided the “spirit of the law” for communal living. Today, the U.S. has over 20, 000 laws and the number continues to grow.

## SESSION # 7 – Gospels

Outline of Session #7:

- Introductory comments
- Dates written
- Differences in the gospel accounts
- Two points to consider
- Principles for interpretation of the gospels
- Summary

### Introductory comments:

Discuss the gap between the completion of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.

As we turn the final pages of the Old Testament in our Bible to the New Testament, we are about to encounter the most important event in human history.

It is an event that:

- was planned before the beginning of time,
- was foretold in the Old Testament numerous times and as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Genesis,
- is instrumental in keeping a promise made to Abraham by God Himself,
- will fulfill numerous prophecies recorded in the OT regarding the coming of a Messiah, a mighty deliverer,
- will pave the way for mankind to have a new relationship with his Creator.

The implications and effects of this event are so huge and so dynamic that the Scriptures provide four similar but differing accounts of this event which lasted approximately 3 ½ years (public ministry of the Messiah).

These accounts, known as the gospels, provide us with “the greatest story every told.”

The accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, provide us divinely inspired accounts of the Messiah, not just another great man, but God Himself, come down to the earth to rescue mankind from his sin, corrupt nature, death and the devil, elements of his existence against which he is powerless without Divine assistance.

The 4 gospels are God’s divinely inspired witness to the life of Jesus.

- twice as many witnesses as needed in a legal court

- two from his intimate group of apostles (Matthew and John)  
two others from outside his intimate group – Luke and Mark

### Dates written:

Mark is often believed to be the first gospel written (late 50s or early 60s).  
Others think that Matthew was the first written.

Some scholars believe that other gospel writers may have used some of Mark's materials in writing their own gospels.

Ask: Why, if Mark's gospel was written first, is Matthew placed first in the arrangement of the New Testament documents?

Luke (~60 A.D.) would have been written next.

John was the last gospel written, most likely in the late 80s or early 90s.

### Differences in the gospel accounts:

The gospels are similar but different and unique.

For example:

Matthew begins with a recitation of Mary's genealogy and then the birth of Christ. Note also the significance and revelatory nature of his opening statement about Jesus

Mark begins with an account of John the Baptist leading to Jesus' baptism.

Luke begins with the birth announcements of John and Jesus.

John goes back to the very beginning of time for 5 verses (a sort of Genesis 1 of the New Testament) and then introduces John the Baptist.

They each tell their stories with unique audiences in mind (but also inclusory of all peoples.) They often duplicate events that are told by other gospel writers but, their records are not exactly as the others and have their own uniquenesses.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are often referred to as the "Synoptic" gospels because they have much similar material.

John's material, on the other hand, is ~ 93 % unique to John (only 7% found in other gospels.)

The following chart identifies some of the differences between John and the Synoptics:

<b>Synoptics</b>	<b>John</b>
Focused on Jesus' ministry around Galilee in the north	Focused on the southern region around Jerusalem
"Kingdom of God" emphasis	Focus on Jesus as a person
Jesus, the son of man	Jesus, the son of God (and therefore divine) –see John 5:18
A lot of short sayings, parables	Contains more of the longer discourses of Jesus
Authors report the accounts but with little commentary	John inserts much commentary
1 passover mentioned	John includes 3, possibly 4 passovers

Matthew is writing to Jews and uses a significant number of scriptures from the Old Testament with the hopes of convincing the Jews that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. He has a continuing, strong emphasis on "the kingdom of God." (33 verses include this phrase.)

Mark writes to Gentile Christians, especially Romans, and appeals to them by the recording of numerous miracles demonstrating Jesus' power which would get the attention of the Romans. His particular focus on the exorcisms performed by Jesus demonstrate the power of God but in the spiritual realm...the kingdom of God is attacking the kingdom of the world (this age/Satan) and is providing for the potential of the person being delivered to enter the kingdom of God.

Luke, a doctor, writes to Theophilus to provide an orderly historical collection of the events of Jesus' life on earth. He is writing to Gentiles and focuses on Jesus as the Son of man, a compassionate and ideal man.

John's gospel is for everyone and is unique in that it specifically states his purpose for writing: "to tell individuals how to have eternal life." (John 20:30-31) He presents the deity of Christ by the use of signs and statements to demonstrate His Divine authority.

Emphasis:

Matthew: Jesus is the Messiah, the King.  
 Mark: Jesus is the suffering servant.  
 Luke: Jesus is the son of man.  
 John: Jesus is the son of God.

Discussion of differences:

One of the questions that often arises is: “If the gospel writers recorded the same messages preached and taught by Jesus, why aren’t their words exactly the same?”

Some possible answers:

1. Depending on where they were positioned when listening to Jesus, they may not have heard everything that was said. They simply recorded what they themselves heard.
2. Jesus preached the same messages in many different locations.

For example:

Sermon on the mount - Matthew – Jesus went up on a hill...  
Luke sermon account – Jesus came down to a level place...

A word of explanation from my person experience:

In my life, I’ve taught a number of lessons several times. And even though I meticulously record my “teaching” word-for-word in advance and generally use the same notes, I never, in the actual presentation, use exactly the same words. I estimate that I may use 75 – 85 % of the same words. But the same lesson, taught in different locations and to different audiences is never exactly the same unless I simply read my notes exactly as they are. (I generally wander down a few rabbit trails on the way to the end.)

I also believe that, as I speak, God leads me to say things that I haven’t prepared. This extemporaneous speaking is the Holy Spirit guiding me to speak a unique message to this specific group of people.

The stories of the gospels provide factual biographies of the life of Jesus focusing on the things he did and the things he said.

With this in mind, we should be able to utilize the interpretive principles of narrative and epistles. (See chapters 2 and 8 for interpretive principles for these literary types.)

Generally this is true. However, there are some difficulties with which we must deal.

2 difficulties:

The two primary difficulties we encounter are that Jesus did not write the gospels and that there are four of them.

1. The only recorded instance of Jesus writing was when he wrote in the dirt at his feet when encountering the woman taken in adultery. (There is no record of what He wrote.)

Jesus' principle language was Aramaic but the gospel records were recorded in the Koine Greek of the day.

And his recorded sayings often come to us in two or three of the gospels but the wording is not exactly the same.

One possible reason for the variations, as discussed above, may be that Jesus, in preaching from town to town, often preached the same message. The gospel writers were recording their message in the way and words that they heard.

2. The second difficulty is that there are four of them, some containing much but not all of the materials contained in other gospels. John, for the most part has the least common material. It has been estimated that approximately 93% of his gospel is unique to John.

Mark, on the other hand has only 6 passages that are unique to his gospel.

Another key contribution to this issue is that each of the writers appear to have been writing with specific audiences in mind. Matthew, for example, uses many quotes from the Old Testament. His gospel is primarily for the Jews and his literary style was to appeal to the Scriptures which they loved and believed in order to demonstrate that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. The difficulty here is that Jesus did not behave in the way they expected. The Messiah they were waiting for, in their minds, would come in power and glory, deliver them from the repulsive, oppressive, rule of the hated Romans and set up His kingdom on the earth. He would rule over all and there would not be any choices about it.

Mark records many miracles demonstrating the power of the Messiah, a power that would get the attention of the Romans who were really interested in power and control.

Luke, being well-educated and a doctor, likely wrote to non-Christians, cultured Gentiles.

Underlying all of this is the fact of the inspiration of the Spirit. God gave us, in the gospels, that which we needed, in the way we needed to read or hear it.

#### Two points to consider:

When approaching the gospels, we need to keep in mind that:

1. Each gospel is provided to be a historical witness about Jesus, his life work and message.

2. Subsequent communities would arise that were unfamiliar with Aramaic and the primarily agricultural community of the Jews. This of course includes us. As a result, we need to be cognizant of Jesus' historical setting (the culture and religion of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestinian Judaism) and also the guiding motivations of the authors. e.g. Matthew's focus on the Jews.

### Principles for Interpreting the Gospels:

#### A. For Narratives in general:

Look for the plain, usual, literal meaning of the text unless there is something in the text that leads you to believe otherwise; e.g. "And Jesus taught them a parable." If you read that "the moon was turned to blood" – we know that the moon doesn't support life as we know it on earth so it must be a symbol or representative of a truth other than what it literally says.

1. What is the context of the passage? (3 levels)
2. Interpret a particular narrative in the light of the subject and purpose of the book in which it is located. e.g.
  - What is the subject of the gospel of Matthew? the life and teachings of Jesus, the Messiah.
  - What is the purpose of the book of Matthew? (There may be multiple purposes)
    - o demonstrate to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah.
    - o record God's saving acts on the earth
    - o provide a record of the words of Jesus (great commission – teach them everything I taught you)
3. A narrative does not often teach a doctrine directly but illustrates a doctrine that is specifically taught somewhere else in scripture. (implicit vs. explicit)
4. Narratives are historical accounts that are literally true (not fiction), having occurred with real people at real places and at real times. As such, they have real applications for real people such as us.
5. Narratives record what actually occurred, not what could have or should have occurred according to biblical faith. (e.g. Jephthah's rash vow)

6. Narratives don't tell us everything we want to know but just the things we need to know to satisfy God's purposes. Base your interpretation on the facts presented in the text. "Nothing but the facts")
7. The conclusion of the matter in all narratives is that "God is the hero."
8. The ultimate purpose of narratives is to relate the real, recorded events to biblical faith and God's plan of redemption.
9. The meaning of a biblical narrative is to be found in what the author purposed to teach his initial readers by recalling the incident. The meaning is not just: "What happened?" (the historical facts) but rather the interpretation of what happened in the eyes of biblical faith.

Let's look at an example: crossing the Red Sea

1. What happened?
2. What happened in the eyes of someone watching from the shores?
3. What did the Israelites learn?

What did the Israelites do when they had no water in the wilderness?

What lesson had they learned from crossing the Red Sea?

4. What happened in the eyes of Biblical faith?
5. What should we learn from this experience? (many things)

God is Lord of creation.  
He leads, protects and fights for His people.  
Don't mess with God's kids.

B. Especially for the gospels

10. Observe explanatory comments that an author inserts into the text, e.g. John 21:19 Jesus has just spoken to Peter: read vv. 17-18, then v.19 with quotation marks: "This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God."
11. Note use of repetition (e.g. Matthew – kingdom of God – 33Xs)



12. Be cognizant of author unique audience (e.g. Matthew – the Jews)
13. Note use of direct quotations from the characters of the narrative. Often, this occurs at the climax of the narrative.
14. Review and incorporate details from other parallel gospel accounts.
15. Note cultural differences. e.g. time of Abraham vs. the time of Christ. During Abraham's time, the land was in the possession of various tribes, Canaanites, Jebusites, etc.; during Jesus' time, the land was ruled by Rome.
16. Consider the progressive revelation of the Scriptures. e.g. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob didn't have the Law. But when they arrived at the promised land, Israel had the Law, they had the temple design, the holy place, the sacrifices.
17. Keep in mind that references in the New Testament to the Scriptures are to the Old Testament documents.

I only know of 2 references in the NT which are to non-Biblical sources; e.g. Paul in Titus 1:12 "All Cretans are liars..."

## SESSION #8 - Epistles (Letters)

Outline of Session #8:

Introduction  
Context  
The hermeneutical question

### Introduction:

The epistles or letters constitute the larger portion of the books of the New Testament, the second largest in volume being the gospels.

Although the letters were written by a number of different authors from various walks of life, they all have one thing in common. They were written to address a specific situation or issue that had arisen in one of the churches. This element of commonality becomes crucial in reading and interpreting the epistles.

Additionally, they were all written in the first century A.D.

These documents were written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and therefore are appropriate for all ages. However, to rightly interpret them, we must account for the situation (or context) of the author and the context of the initial congregation that would receive the letter.

Often, the occasion for the writing was an issue arising in a church such as a questionable behavior, a doctrinal dispute or a circumstance in which additional understanding was needed.

Keep in mind also that the epistles were not written primarily to teach doctrine but were to provide answers to a particular need. The epistles are filled with doctrine but that was not the primary purpose for the writing.

### First things first: Context

The initial task of any study of an epistle should be to identify the situation to which the author is writing.

If we use the book of Philippians as an example, you might ask questions such as the following:

- How was the church at Philippi formed and who was the primary person involved in its conception?
- What was going on within Philippi that prompted the writing of the letter?
- What was Paul's relationship to the Philippians?
- What was the age and status of the church at Philippi?
- How was he made aware of the issues he will address?

- What importance or significance did the city of Philippi hold?

The more you learn about the historical and cultural background of a book, the better you will be positioned to understand the instructions being provided. e.g. Paul had fathered the Philippian church during his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey in approximately 49-50 A.D. He is writing to them about 10 years later recognizing that persecution is occurring. He speaks to them and exhorts them as a father to his children. His opening comments (v.1) refer to deacons and elders which indicates that the church had grown with new believers being added to the church over the years since Paul was there.

Major topics for the issue of context are:

1. Dates
2. Political situation
3. Literary style
4. Topography – any unique geographical features
5. Setting
6. The People
7. Place in God's overall plan of redemption

See the end of this chapter for an example of a book context (Philippians).

As a part of this stage of your study: Read and reread the book. As often as you can, read through the entire book.

If you've ever done a Precept study, you're familiar with their style in which they have you reading and rereading, highlighting key words, underlying, summarizing, etc. In engaging this process, you become very familiar with the entire book.

The importance of gaining a familiarity with the entire text cannot be overstated.

Read the letter as you would read a letter from a friend or relative. The authors write to people and speak in plain language that can be understood. You don't need to look for the hidden meaning.

Be attentive to key words and themes throughout the book. e.g. In Philippians, the word "rejoice" continues to surface. Ultimately, you might see the theme of this book as "The Joy of a Spirit-Filled Life."

Some categories you might look for and record information as it is identified could be:

1. What do you know about the Philippians?
2. What is the author's attitude toward the recipients of the letter?  
e.g. In Philippians, his attitude is that of a loving father exhorting his children to stand fast, to remain firm in their faith.

3. What does the text tell you about the occasion of the letter?  
In Philippians, Paul eventually gets around to telling them that he is writing to thank them for the gift they sent. The gift has been received, and Epaphroditus, their messenger, who had become sick to the point of death, is well, something he wants them to know because he has heard about their concern for this loved brother.

4. An outline

I find it an indispensable tool to build an outline of the entire book noting chapter and even paragraph themes as I continue reading.

For Philippians:	chapter 1:	the Christ-centered life
	chapter 2:	humility
	chapter 3:	rejoice in the Lord
	chapter 4:	final exhortations

For chapter 1:	vv. 1-2	greeting
	vv. 3-11	Paul's longing for them
	vv.12-18	even in chains the gospel is preached
	vv.19-26	to live is Christ, to die is gain
	vv.27-30	live in a manner worthy of the gospel

See end of this chapter for a summary .ppt chart of the book of Philippians

An aside: I'm a "chart guy." I recommend the development of charts as much as it is appropriate and possible. Charting gives you a visual picture enabling you to assimilate the information of the text in a formative and memorable way.

### **Literary Context:**

For the epistles, it is important to be able to trace the logic of the author's answer to the problem that is being addressed.

An example:

In Phil. 2, it becomes apparent that Paul begins to address the issue of unity and humility in the body. We are not told how this topic was brought to Paul's mind, possibly from Epaphroditus in relaying the account of Euodia and Syntyche.

In v.2, he exhorts them to be of the same mind and love.

In vv.3-4, he encourages them to think of others more significant than themselves.

In v.5 he holds up the example of Christ to them.

In the remainder of the chapter he holds up 2 examples to them, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Note also that, in 4:2-3, he raises the issue of the dispute between Euodias and Syntyche. The exhortations from chapter 2 may very well have been a recommendation from him for helping these 2 loyal servants to resolve their difficulties.

### **The Hermeneutical Question:**

Up to this point, we have used the skills of exegesis to determine what the author meant to say to the first recipients of his letter. In our case, we used the letter of Paul to the Philippians as our case example.

But now, we come to the crucial point of our study:

“What does this passage mean to me?”

One of the big issues in discussing hermeneutics is that of cultural relativity. What does this passage, written to first century converts in a civilization ruled by Rome, mean to me? What is cultural and belongs in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and what is considered to transcend culture and therefore is a specific word for me? Also, we need to determine if the word is to be “normative” (standard practice) for all Christians.

We all know many such cultural issues...women wearing head coverings while they pray or prophecy, baptism for the dead, women should be quiet in the assembly, long hair on men, infant baptism, etc.

A significant part of the difficulty we face is that we all do hermeneutics in English on a daily basis utilizing what we have been taught in our culture as to what is right and acceptable and what the meanings of idioms and figures of speech are.

For example:

In the culture of my early years, men took off their hats/caps when they entered the sanctuary as a sign of respect for God, the supreme person of importance. In our post-hippie culture, many young men don't have “taking off your hat in the sanctuary” in their upbringing so they don't do it.

I know of a church that insists that you need to wear a suit and tie to church, dressing your best for the Master. After all, we do this for kings and presidents. We don't enter an important person's presence in our street clothes. On the other hand, some are taught that “clothes don't make the man.” God is more interested in the heart than the outer garment. A hat is a hat and removing it has no relevance for them.

So...”what to do?”

1. Keep in mind the following basic rule:

“A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to the author or its readers.”

This is one reason that we first exegete a passage to learn what it meant to the initial readers.

An example: Some faiths teach that we are no longer to seek after spiritual gifts (I Cor. 14) because that which is perfect has come and therefore, that which is imperfect will pass away. (I Cor. 13:10 The perfect was the remaining text of scripture, the New Testament. This was the attitude in the denominational church in which I grew up. As a result, people in this church (myself included until later in life) did not seek or desire spiritual gifts.

But this is one interpretation that good exegesis cannot allow because Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, had no knowledge of the New Testament. He could not have written about something that neither he nor the people had no knowledge. The Holy Spirit would not have allowed Paul to write something to his readers that they knew nothing about, i.e. the canon of the New Testament.

2. It is important to distinguish what is a doctrinal issue and what is a cultural issue. The issue of “hats” raised above is a cultural issue.
3. A third rule of hermeneutics is that “whenever we do share a similar situation with the first century situation, God’s word to us is the same as it was to them.”

“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” and “the wages of sin is death” are just as true for us today as they were for the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians. (example of a doctrinal issue)

Problems:

1. Extended Application – Comparable Situations

The question here is if, when there are comparable contexts in today’s church, can the principle being taught to first century believers be applied to other contexts.

An example is II Cor. 6:14, the “do not be unequally yoked to unbelievers” text.

This passage is often quoted to state that believers should not be married to unbelievers.

However, during the biblical period of this text, the term “yoked” was rarely used with reference to marriage. It most likely referred to idolatry or joining in idol-feasts. (see I Cor. 10:14-22)

Therefore, we cannot legitimately apply the principle of this text to marriage since we cannot be sure of the intention of the author.

However, the principle of not marrying an unbeliever is a principle taught elsewhere in scripture that can be maintained apart from this text.

It would not be appropriate to make your case for not marrying an unbeliever based on this text alone.

## 2. Contexts are not comparable

### Illustrations from I Cor. 8:

This text has to do with eating food sacrificed to idols in an idol’s temple.

The second from Gal. 5:2 addresses an issue of people wanting uncircumcised Christians to be circumcised.

The difficulty with these two passages is that we likely will not encounter these kinds of issues.

So, what do we do?

The first step is to determine the clear scriptural principle being taught. This most often will transcend the historical context to which it was applied.

In the case of meat sacrificed to idols, the clear principle is to abstain from an activity that would cause a brother to stumble (destroyed ESV). Note that this is an action that one believer can do in a clear conscience but another cannot. It is not simply that someone is offended by an action. Secondly, recognize that the principle does not therefore become timeless and boundaryless and therefore, applied to every situation that comes along.

In I Cor. 10:23-11:1, the problem of eating meat sacrificed to idols and then sold in the marketplace, was a matter of indifference to both God and Paul. But others didn’t have this stance.

### An example from the Old Testament in Gen. 1:2:

People who maintain an evolutionary basis for their doctrine of creation often quote Gen. 1:2 as follows: “And the earth “came to be” formless and

void.” This implies that the original creation was ruined and subsequently remade.

The basis for translating the verb “hayeta” (came to be) comes from the application of 2 passages, one in Isaiah and the other in Jeremiah. The context of these 2 passages is one of ruin which has come about by divine judgment.

However, this is a violation of sound exegesis to take the interpretation from a scene of judgment and apply it where there has been no judgment.

The contexts are not comparable. Therefore, “hayeta” cannot be translated “came to be.”

So how do we distinguish matters of indifference from those that count?

We certainly have many issues in our society that qualify for the list of questionable indifference: movies, TV, cosmetics, dancing, women’s slacks, etc.

Some guidelines:

- A. Matters of indifference as indicated in Scripture (e.g. food, drink, observance of days, etc.) may still be regarded as such.
- B. Matters of indifference are not inherently moral issues but are culturally based.
- C. Matters of indifference are not included in sin lists such as are found in the letters. (see I Cor. 5-6, Rom. 1 and II Tim. 3)

Also, the matters of indifference such as quoted above are never included in the different lists of Biblical imperatives such as those founds in Rom. 12, Eph. 5 and Col. 3. These lists of imperatives can be utilized as a screen to confirm matters of indifference.

### 3. Cultural relativity

The difficulty here is that there is no divinely ordained culture. Cultures, from age to age, change and have points of difference.

Some guidelines:

- A. Distinguish between the central core of Biblical teaching versus that which is peripheral to it.

e.g. core teachings – saved by grace through faith  
- Jesus is the Messiah-redeemer



peripheral teachings

- women's head coverings
- the holy kiss
- take a little wine for your stomach's sake

The one-time mention of a specific issue or practice in Scripture may be a clue as to cultural relativity.

B. Distinguish what the Scriptures identify as moral and what is not:

e.g. see sin lists quoted above

Items such as adultery, drunkenness, idolatry, stealing, dishonor to parents, are always wrong.

non-moral issues – eating food sacrificed to idols that is being sold in the marketplace, foot washing, personal preference for celibacy

These items only become moral issues by their use or abuse in certain contexts, e.g. disobedience or lack of love.

C. Consider cultural options a NT writer may have had. Note where the NT has a consistent witness regarding an issue and also where there does not appear to be a uniform witness to an issue.

e.g. Slavery was never denounced by the NT writers.

women's role as a teacher in the church –

see I Cor. 14:34-35 and I Tim. 2:11-12

“not permitted to teach or have authority over a man”

Fully complying with these instructions would forbid her to write books on Biblical matters that men might read, teach men in missionary circumstances or speak in conference situations where men are present.

But, women are found teaching in Acts 18:26 and prophesying in Acts 21:8

It is very possible that I Tim. 2:11-12 speaks to a local problem.

D. Consider cultural differences between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century that may not be immediately obvious.

e.g. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, there were few educational opportunities for women. Much was expected of 1<sup>st</sup> century women in the home (e.g. food preparations) that are now not such a time-consuming process; e.g. making a pie from scratch versus buying it in a store.

Women in our society have many more freedoms than did the women of the first century.

- E. Recognize that we all “know in part.” We “see through a glass darkly.” No one has perfect knowledge and no matter how much you know, there is always more to learn. It is likely that anyone reading this booklet will, at some time, change their minds regarding the rightness or wrongness of a cultural action based upon additional Biblical understanding.

With that in mind, let our teachings and relationships be governed by the law of love, being kind-hearted and considerate towards one another, looking to see how we can build each other up in our faith.

## Context of the book of Philippians

### **1 See Map – “2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey” Antioch to Philippi**

Use a map to trace Paul’s journey

- A journey of ~1000 miles

When he started (Acts 15:34ff), he had it in his heart to revisit churches he had established during his 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey.

After visiting these churches, he continued on towards the east. (no evidence of a known destination yet)

Twice, the Holy Spirit closed a door - to Asia (7 churches of Revelation) and Bithynia.

When at Troas, he had the vision to go to Macedonia (Greece).

Now he knows where God is going to open the “door to the kingdom.”

### **2 I. – VII. Context**

#### **I. Author, Date and Chronology**

Author: Paul, the apostle (although Paul, in 1:1 assigns the letter to both Timothy and himself)

Date: Most likely ~ 60-62 A.D. - written from Rome while Paul was in prison

The church in Philippi was established in 50 A.D.

Therefore, the writing of the letter to the Philippians was approximately 10-12 years later.

Pertinent Chronology:

Nero became emperor of Rome in 54 A.D. and continued in power until 68 A.D.

He did well for the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 years but then lost two of his trusted advisers, one to death, the other to retirement.

In 64 A.D., a good portion of Rome was burned.

After the fire, Nero attempted to cease control of several of the burned properties.

It was suspected that he started the fire.

He deflected blame for the fire to the Christians and hence a great persecution.

Paul’s death occurred in 64 A.D.

#### **II. Setting**

A. The City – Philippi – in Macedonia (present-day Greece)

Note: This is not Caesarea Philippi which is N. of the sea of Galilee and south of Mt. Hermon.

Philippi was named for Phillip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great.

It was strategically located on the Egnatian Way which connected the eastern provinces of the Roman empire.

It was a leading city of Macedonia.

In 42 B.C., it had been granted the highest possible status for a provincial city, the status of a Roman colony.

Benefits to citizens:

- could purchase, or transfer property
- could file civil lawsuits in Roman courts
- were exempted from paying poll and land taxes

Note: There was not a large population of Jews in the city. It took only 10 men to establish a synagogue, but there was no synagogue in Philippi.

## B. The People

Acts 16: 13-15 - story of Lydia

Acts 16:16-19 - the demonized girl

Acts 16:20-34 - charges against Paul

- Paul beaten and jailed
- the jailor and his household saved

In the church:

- a mixture of races, cultures and social classes
- Lydia and her family – upper-class woman who dealt in royal dyes
- middle-class jailor and his family
- lower-class young girl who had been demonized ? Did she join the church?
- Jews, Gentiles, Romans

## C. The book of Acts - historical account of the journey

- 15:34ff - beginning of the trip
- 16:6ff - call to Macedonia – 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary journey
- 20:1-2 - 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary journey – Philippi revisited

## III. Literary Structure

Follows the normal form of Paul's letters

A letter of exhortation, encouragement and instruction

104 verses

## IV. Themes

A. The joy of serving Jesus (the Christ-centered life illustrated)

B. Partnership in the gospel

C. Persevering in the faith

Paul's personal goal – getting to know Jesus better

V. Key Words

Joy, rejoice, the gospel, Jesus Christ, God

VI. Outline of Philippians

Chapter 1: "A Christ centered life"

- 1-2 greeting
- 3-11 Paul's longings and prayer for the Philippians
- 12-18 His imprisonment has turned out for good - the gospel is being preached.
- 19-26 "To live is Christ, to die is gain."
- 27-31 Conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel.

Chapter 2: "The humility and exaltation of Christ  
"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

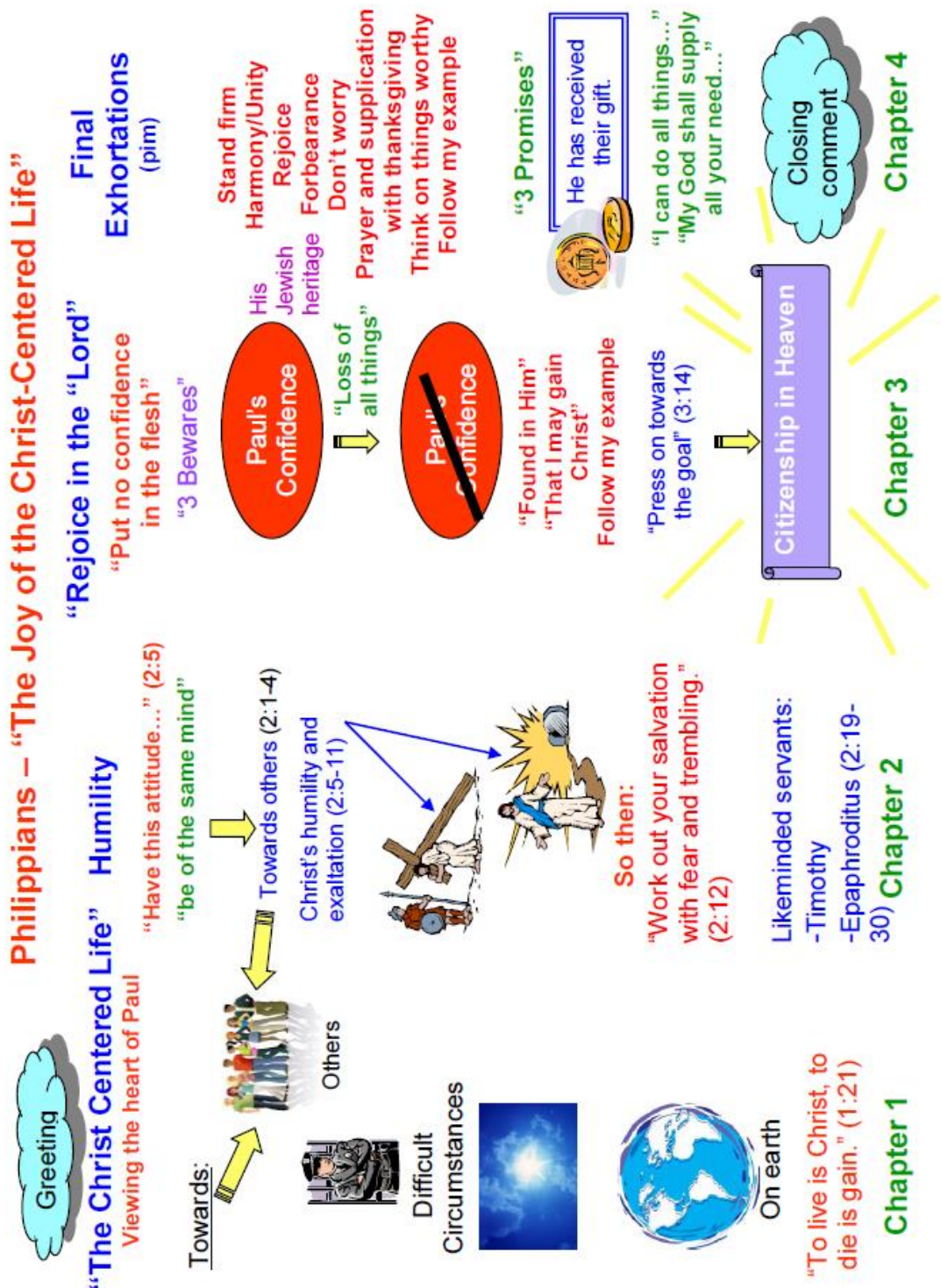
- 1-4 humility/regard for others
- 5-11 Jesus' humility and exaltation
- 12-18 work out your salvation
- 19-25 Timothy – a kindred spirit
- 26-30 Epaphroditus' illness

Chapter 3: Paul's commitment

- 1-2 the 3 bewares
- 3-16 Paul's attitude
- 17-21 Follow my example.

Chapter 4: Practical exhortations

- 1-1-7 Exhortations
- 8-9 Thought life
- 10-19 Paul has received their gift.
- 20-23 Closing



## Session #9 – Parables and Allegories

This session will provide explanations of parables and allegories and also prescribe some recommended guidelines when studying these literary types.

### I. Parables

There are two principle words in scripture for the parable:

Old Testament – *mashal*

New Testament - *parabole*

These two words encompass a large range of literary types. They can refer to a proverb, a satire, a riddle, a figurative saying, a simile and a story or example parable.

However, within this broad range of meanings, we can see a common thread:

a comparison between two things that are different;

something is illustrated to be like something that it is not.

e.g. the kingdom of God is not literally a highly valued pearl; but it is like the highly valued pearl in that the kingdom of God is of such value and importance that a person should take all available measures to get it.

There are several kinds of parables:

A parable is:

(1) a true-to-life story designed to teach a truth or answer a question.

A parable is also designed to obscure the truth from the unresponsive, while making it plain to the responsive.

Why would Jesus want to hide his truth from certain persons?

Matt.13:10ff provides an answer to this question:

- Their hearts have grown dull;
- Their ears can barely hear;
- They have closed their eyes.

These comments in themselves are metaphors referring to their capacity to receive spiritual truth.

I liken these people to those described by Paul in Romans 1:18ff in which say no to God. Each time they say no they harden their hearts making it increasing difficult to perceive the truth.

“pearls before swine” - If you gave pearls to swine, they would only trample them under their feet, not recognizing the true value of what they had been given.

This is an apt comparison because the kingdom God is likened to a pearl of great price. (Matt. 13:45-46)

(2) a comparison between two things that are different

Something is likened to something that it is not.

“the kingdom of heaven **is like**... (simile)

(3) a fictional literary form

The picture does not describe a real event. It is a fictional creation which came from the mind of its author, in our case, Jesus.

It is not to be confused with a historical narrative which is a real life event. But this confusion occurs upon occasion due to the real-life quality of the parable.

In parables we find unusual exaggerations.

e.g. Matt. 18:24 10,000 talents (Herod’s annual income was 900 talents). In this case, the 10,000 talents represents a huge amount.

Lk. 14:18 all of the invited guests refuse the invitation

#### Guidelines for interpretation:

1. Begin with the immediate context. (Use prodigal son story)

2 crucial elements are found in the context:

a. Look for the occasion for telling the story (a clear historical occasion)

Prodigal son: Jesus speaking to religious people who clearly objected to his ready acceptance of sinful people.



The point of the story is the contrast between the elder brother and the loving, forgiving father as represented by Jesus Himself.

b. Look for the explanation of its meaning

Sometimes the explanation of a parables meaning is given in the story: e.g. Matt. 24:44 “you be ready to” and Matt. 25:13 “be on the alert”

See also “Good Samaritan” – context is the question posed to Jesus: “Who is my neighbor?” This is the purpose of the story.

2. Look for the one basic point of comparison between the picture and the reality to which it corresponds.

The danger of a parable is to read too much into the specific details of the parable searching for hidden meanings.

Parables have one main point that Jesus is teaching.

e.g. the treasure hidden in the field (Matt.13:44)

The parable is teaching the great value of the kingdom of God.

Lk. 16:4-7 “The unjust steward”

Point: acting decisively in preparing for the coming judgment

The steward’s dishonesty is not the point of the parable.

Matt. 25:1-13 “the wise and foolish maidens

The point is to be prepared.

3. Identify irrelevant details

Parables contain many details that are not intended to teach truth at all. They are usually inserted to make the story complete, realistic and true to life.

e.g. Lk. 11: 5-13 the persistent friend at midnight

- midnight, 3 loaves, for a friend on a journey

Lk. 17:7-9 “The servant ploughing or keeping sheep”

Jesus constructed a story that was true to the life of their times.  
His point: We do not deserve credit for doing the right thing.

The other details of the parable are irrelevant and should be set aside.

4. Identify the relevant details

Those that are intended to teach some truth and therefore, may legitimately be interpreted and applied.

The Prodigal son:

Not relevant - the fact that the father stayed home and did not go in search of the son

That the father ran to meet the son is a relevant detail and has spiritual significance.

How do we know? It reinforces the central theme which is to reveal the heart of the father.

5. In a parable, we must limit ourselves to the information provided in the parable.

e.g. prodigal son- can't ask: "How did the older son respond to his father's appeal?"

or: "How was it that the father saw the son while he was at a distance?"

The father saw the son because Jesus wanted him to.

6. Don't try to ascribe hidden meanings to the various points of the parable.

Ex. story of the good Samaritan:

One interpretation from an early church father:

- the inn = the church
- 2 coins given to the innkeeper were the two love commandments
- Innkeeper = the apostle Paul
- the good Samaritan = Christ

6. Arriving at the main point:

This is based upon what has been called "the rule of end stress."

A good story teller starts slowly, builds up and draws peoples' attention to the conclusion of the story.

- A. Focus on the main characters?
- B. Identify what happens at the end of the story.

Matt. 20:1-16 "The workers in the vineyard"

Jesus ended the story with the grumbling of the first hour workers. (This would be representative of the Jews who were the first to be invited into God's kingdom. The Master of the house is God.)

The point of this parable: the unwillingness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law to accept God's gracious offer of salvation to those who came later, i.e. the Gentiles.

- C. What occurs in conversations?

Prodigal son: At the end, there is an extensive conversation between the father and the older son.

Note that even though the younger son had given his rehearsed speech, the father does not respond to him.

- D. Who gets the most space?

Once you have evaluated the story, ask the question:

What are the implications of the story that are most relevant to us. This should provide you with the application for the present-day reader.

e.g. The prodigal son: The emphasis is not on the demonstration of God's love for the outcast but on the reaction of the older brother to such love.

The "Lost Sheep" story in Lk. 15:3 must be interpreted in the light of his audience who had said: "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

## II. Allegories

An allegory is a story with an underlying meaning that differs from the surface facts of the story itself.

It is created to teach one or more truths.

Two examples from scripture:      John 15:1-8 (vine and branches)  
    Gal. 4:21-31 (bond woman and the free woman)

Steps for evaluation:

1. List the features of the allegory (use Gal. 4)  
 (Note that v.24 identifies this teaching as an allegory.)
2. Identify any interpretations given in the text.
3. Don't contradict the clear teaching of scripture by interpreting an unexplained detail in a way that would contradict scripture.
4. Do not try to assign details to all of the features of an allegory.

Parables and allegories (see Gal. 4:21-26 Sarah and Hagar):

Overlap – both are designed to teach spiritual truth by comparing something to spiritual reality.

Differences:

1. a parable is realistic while an allegory may not be  
  
 Allegory – Christ might be a door or a vine; Christians, sheep or branches
2. parable makes one point; an allegory will teach many related or unrelated truths

John 10: the good shepherd – virtually every detail has meaning (See Christ' explanation)

### COMPARISON OF PARABLES AND ALLEGORIES

<b>Parable</b>	<b>Allegory</b>
1. Has one central point	1. can have more than one central point
2. teaches one truth	2. can teach a number of truths
3. every relevant detail reinforces the central theme or point of emphasis	3. The details may be varied or many, relating to more than one theme.
4. can have irrelevant details; all features of the parable don't have to be identified	4. can have irrelevant details; all features of the allegory don't have to be identified
5. usually the story is separate from its interpretation and application	5. intertwines the story and its meaning
6. interpretation usually follows the parable	6. interpretation is found within the allegory

## Session #10 – Figures of Speech

### Introduction:

As I began to address the issue of figures of speech, I've been amazed at how many figures of speech are interspersed in our own language.

It seems that we can hardly have a conversation without using a figure of speech.

A popular song that sells is called "a hit" (reference to baseball.)  
One that doesn't is referred to as a dud (reference to a bomb that doesn't detonate)

Someone without common sense is "nuts."  
Someone who doesn't seem "all there" is regarded as having a few screws loose.  
And on and on.

Figures of speech are used in all languages and especially in eastern countries.

The Bible is filled with many kinds of figures of speech.

One author has identified over 8000 figures of speech which he has put into more than 200 classifications.

Figures of speech are words that are used with a meaning other than their common, literal sense.

Phil. 3:2 "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers..."

The literal designation of an animal is not intended.

In Jesus' day, the term came to mean those who had morally impure minds.

Matt. 19:24 *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

One of the continuing problems of biblical interpretation, especially with new Christians who are unfamiliar with the Bible or treatment of language, is interpreting figurative language as literal.

People for years have been looking for a pass in the mountains where a camel has to get down on its knees or in some other way achieve a difficult passage.

But the scripture specifically says for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

This figure of speech, a hyperbole, is an exaggeration for effect.

In this case, the teaching is in regard to the difficulty of entering the kingdom of God.

### Why use figurative language?

- a. All human language contains non-literal talk.

“He grasps an argument.”

“I see your point.”

“I follow you.”

It enables us to talk about things which cannot be perceived by the senses.

Pity the poor foreigner who has to deal with our hang-ups.

Hang: hang-ups, hang-out, hang in there, hangover, hang on

- b. Figures of speech are used to emphasize a point, to make a stronger impression. They are, at times, stunning and therefore, more memorable.

Who can quickly forget the Proverbs that states: “...that a beautiful woman without discretion is like a fine gold ring in a pig’s snout.”

Luke 13:32 Messengers tell Jesus that Herod wants to kill Him.

Jesus says, in reply, “Tell that fox: behold today I cast out demons and perform cures...”

“that fox” is considerably more forceful than “tell the king”.

Another attention-getting figure of speech is Jesus statement that a man must “hate his father and mother.” (That really gets your attention).

What is Jesus saying? To answer this question we need to refer to other teachings on fathers and mothers.

Other teachings call upon us to love and honor our parents.

The key here is contrast.

- c. Used to move one to action
  - “Behold, I stand at the door and knock...”
- d. May help the memory
  - “Don’t hide your light under a bushel”
  - “salt of the earth”
- e. Is effective in illustrating
  - “I am the bread of life.” – satisfies, nourishes
- f. Useful in clarifying
  - “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.” – it spreads to other parts
  - It makes spiritual and infinite truth available to finite beings.
- g. Useful as a code – explained to disciples, hidden from foes
  - obscuring – light to the obedient, obscure to the unbelieving
- h. Sometimes prophecy is given obscurely so that it may remain hidden until the time of fulfillment.
  - John 2: 19-22 “destroy this temple and in 3 days...”

**Steps for addressing figures of speech:**

1<sup>st</sup> step: Identify that the language is figurative and not literal.

- 1. Consider a text literal, unless:
  - a. the statement would be irrational, unreasonable or absurd if taken literally. e.g. “beam in the eye”
    - remove this mountain – Jesus doesn’t want us to rearrange the topography
    - What’s the biggest thing you can think of or see?
  - b. the context indicates that it is figurative
    - Nebuchadnezzar’s dream – great statue

- c. A clear contradiction with enduring emphases in scripture

“hate your mother or father”

- 2. The viewpoint of the author must control our understanding.

2<sup>nd</sup> step: Identify the kind of figurative speech being used.

A few of the more common types in scriptures:

The most common type of figure of speech in the Bible is comparison.

Keep in mind that ordinarily, only one comparison is intended.

- a. Simile: like, as “His eyes were like a flame of fire.” (Rev. 1:14)

Parables: “the kingdom of heaven is like...”

“sweating like a turkey on the day before thanksgiving”  
“as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs”

From down under: “happy as a koala in a gum tree”

- b. Metaphor: “I am the vine.” (Jn 15:5)

Some additional types of figures of speech:

- c. Hyperbole: exaggeration for effect: a blind guide who strains at a gnat and swallows a camel

beam in the eye

camel going through a needle’s eye

- d. Metonymy: the name of one object or concept is used for that of another.

“All the country of Judea was going out to him.”

Country is used for the people

“All Jerusalem went out to be baptized by John.”



- e. Synecdoche: the whole is referred to as a part: God says He will call for a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth. (Jer. 25:29)

sword = an army of swords

- f. Personification an object is given the characteristics of a person

“trees of the field will clap their hands

Ps 19 “their line has gone out into all the earth”

The creation is given the human ability of speech.

- g. Irony: a statement which says the opposite of what is meant

I Kgs. 22:13-18 a true prophet tells the king what he wants to hear

- h. Ellipsis: a gap is left in the sentence (words are omitted) – focus attention on particular words

How are you doing? Awesome. Not: “I am doing awesome.”

= an ellipsis

Ps 147:9 “He gives to the beast its food and to the young ravens that cry”

Step#3: Interpret the figure of speech to its literal meaning.

- e.g. “Who were the bulls, lions that surrounded David?” (Ps. 22:12-13)

bulls = ready to dash in upon the in-circled victim

lions – ready to pounce on the prey

Commentaries and Study Bibles often provide the literal meaning of figures of speech. (This may require a bit of research on your part.)

Step #4 Interpret the entire passage

Figurative language is important and very valuable for many reasons. But for it to be valuable to us, we must understand the intent of the author and

we must work to establish the literal meaning of the figurative speech in the culture and language of his time..

Example: Matt. 13:45-46

“Again, the kingdom of God is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

Step #1: Identify that the text contains figurative language

These verses contain a simile in which one item is compared to another.

This is a parable and parables generally teach one truth.

Step #2: Identify the kind of figure of speech

The comparison is a simile. Note the use of the word “like.” (A metaphor would say that something “is” not “like” something else.)

The comparison is of the kingdom of God to a pearl of great price. Note also that the kingdom of God is not literally a highly valued pearl. The pearl is used to teach a single truth.

The merchant discovers it and sells **all** of his goods in order to acquire it. Note key word “all.” He held nothing back.

Step #3: Interpret the figure of speech

The kingdom of God is of great value just as is the pearl.

In fact, we understand that obtaining/entering the kingdom of God is the most important task that you need to accomplish in this life. Being in the kingdom of God establishes your final destiny for all eternity.

Step #4: Interpret the passage:

Therefore, we ought not to hold back anything...spend all we have, if necessary, in order to enter into the kingdom of God.

Possessing the kingdom of God is therefore our most prized possession.

## Session #11 – Idioms

Idiom – from idiousthai (Grk.) = “to make one’s own”

In our case...to make one’s own definition which is different than that currently accepted or recognized.

An idiom is a form of speech in which the meaning, as presented by the author, is different than our normal understanding of the words.

Idioms are some of the most difficult forms of literature to interpret simply because the words don’t mean what they normally mean to us. When an author uses an idiom, his meaning can be different, even the opposite of what we expect it to mean.

The problem that we have today is that we are unfamiliar with the idioms of the first century Palestine culture. We have our own idioms that we use daily, just as the Israelites had their own idioms and used them daily. When they spoke and used an idiom, people knew instantly what was meant. And, of course, it is pointless to apply a 20<sup>th</sup> century idiom to a 1<sup>st</sup> century text.

Exercise: Think of some of your idioms and try them out on one of your friends. See if they don’t instantly know what you mean and, without thinking about it, provide themselves with a literal translation.

The meaning of an idiom is determined by what the author decides it will mean.

e.g. bad – good

“How are you? = hello – a greeting

a friend = an inquiry into the state of your health – could be requesting your emotional, mental or spiritual state of well-being

a doctor = give me a detailed account of your physical symptoms

The younger generation of our culture has a new saying: Something is “wicked sick.”

What does this mean?

The first order of business then, is to identify that a word or phrase is in fact, an idiom.

## How do you know if a word or phrase is an idiom?

1. At times, it will produce an apparent contradiction to what other passages are teaching. (Law of non-contradiction)

Classic example: “love – hate” from Lk. 14:16 : hate mother and father, wife...

Confusion occurs because in one place we are told to love and in another we are told to hate. These apparent contradictions can be confusing and frustrating.

2. The passage interpreted according to accepted word meanings is vague and unclear or confusing.

“dashing their babies on the rocks” - Ps. 137: 8-9)

This is difficult. I can't pray that way.  
How can this be an example for me to follow?

But if you had been raised in the Hebrew culture, you could.

See explanation below.

3. Other passages using the same word or phrase indicate something other than that which the literal interpretation provides.

Once we've identified an idiom, the next step is to determine the literal meaning.

### Determining the literal meaning:

There are three options of which I am aware:

1. Ask the author. (source of the idiom)

In our time and culture, e.g. reading a book, if an author uses a word which appears to confuse the passage or doesn't make sense, we can simply ask him.

However, when the author is no longer alive or in a different time, this option is not available to us. (I'd like to chat with Andrew Murray or Saint Francis of Assisi, but they are no longer alive.)

And, we obviously can't ask Peter, Paul or Luke about something they said in the gospel or their letters, but we can petition the Holy Spirit to enlighten us.

2. Consult other writings:

- a. One avenue of approach that is available to us is to consult non-biblical historical documents as to how they used the word or phrase.
- b. Another source for us is the modern-day authors who have collected and written books providing a collection of sayings or figures of speech from the Bible times.

They will address questions such as: “What is the origin of a saying or custom and what does it literally mean?”

- c. A third source for us is Bible commentaries.

A good Bible commentator, in order to provide an accurate commentary on a book or text, will first go through the writings and interpret the figurative language. (He has already done your homework for you.)

Determining the literal meaning of an idiom is an absolute must if you are to “rightly divide the Word of truth.”

3. Look at other Biblical passages that use the same word or phrase.

We can determine the meaning of an idiom by reviewing parallel Bible passages in which the same phrase or word is used and noting the context and usage in the parallel passage.

At times, you may find several passages with which to work. (the examples to follow have multiple references.)

Let’s look at an example of resolving the mystery of an idiom.

Example A: love-hate – (one of the most troubling)

Lk. 14:26 “hate his father, mother wife...”

How can God tell us to love our wives in one passage (Eph. 5) and then to hate her in another?

One of the verses that unlocks our understanding is Gen. 29:30-31.

Gen. 29:30-31 “Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.  
When the Lord saw that Leah was hated...”

The statement that Leah was hated refers to the previous verse where it is stated that Rachel was loved more than Leah which is to say that Leah was loved less.

Jacob did not hate Leah. He loved Leah. He had 6 children by her and she was buried in his tomb with him. (which must certainly have been directed by him.)

He loved Leah, but he loved Rachel more.

So, the “love-hate” issue is really a love “more or less issue.”

This new understanding of loving more or less helps to understand other passages.

Another passage that provides the same result is the parallel gospel account of Luke’s passage in Matt. 10:37:

Luke 14:26 and Matthew 10:37. Read these passages to see the evidence of “loving more than.”

“Anyone who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Example B: “seizes their infants and dashes them against the rocks”  
(Ps. 137:8-9)

This is not a desire for blood-thirsty revenge but a desire for divine justice to be accomplished.

The author uses the imagery of his day to petition God for the overthrow of nations.

Here, the Psalmist is expressing his desire for God’s divine justice to overthrow the nation of Babylon. He is simply using the language of his day to express his heart-felt desire.

This judgment must fall on the reigning monarch’s children so that there will be no continuation of this cruel reign.

Example C: other idioms

- our hearts melted – loss of courage (Josh 2:11: Rahab with the 2 spies from Israel, 5:1; 7:5; II Sam. 17:10; Isa.13:7, 19:1; Nah. 2:10))
- the stars, sun and moon not giving light – divine intervention in history whether for blessing or judgment (Isa. 13:9-11; 24:23; Ezk. 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Amos 8:9)

- “as numerous as the sand on the seashore” = a large number or too numerous to count  
In this case, it seems obvious that the task of counting the grains of sand on the seashore is an impossible task.

And, just as people for ages have been looking for a mountain pass which is difficult for camels to negotiate, so for years, people have been trying to count the number of grains of sand on the seashores all around the earth.

Sometimes, a little bit of common sense is what is needed.

- “weeping and gnashing of teeth” = experiencing severe sorrow or loss (Lam. 2:16)
- Prov. 30:20 the adulteress who eats and wipes her mouth and says she has done nothing wrong.

In the Hebrew culture, this was an idiom for illicit sexual relations.

- From Joshua 8:17: “not a man was left standing” is an idiom for depicting the totality of a victory over an enemy.
- “a double heart” Ps; 12:2 In this passage, the lips of the ungodly are described as saying one thing and yet having a different thought internally. They flatter with their mouth but inwardly their thoughts and motives are inconsistent with their words.

## Session # 12 – Types and Symbols

This final session will address the difficult topics of Types and Symbols in the Bible.

The interpreter of Scripture (which we all are) should exercise special care in approaching the identification and interpretation of types and symbols.

Outline of this session:

- I. Typology (use of types)
  - A. Definitions
  - B. The extent of typology
  - C. Interpretation guidelines
- II. Symbols
  - A. Definitions
  - B. Use of symbols in prophecy
  - C. Identifying symbols
  - D. When is a symbol not a symbol
  - E. Interpreting symbols

### I. Typology (use of types)

#### A. Definitions

The Greek word **τυπος** (tupos) which is transliterated as type has the primary meaning of making an impression such as the sealing of a letter with the imprint of a stamp or signature into a heated substance.

In the NT, tupos is used to designate an example or pattern; e.g. Timothy is encouraged to be an example to other believers in II Tim. 4:12)

Paul also uses this word in Rom 5:14 when he says that “Adam is a figure or type (tupos) of him who was to come.

The types presented in the OT can be a person (e.g. Adam), an institution (an established law or custom), an event, an object or a ceremony which had a concrete reality in the OT but also, by divine designation, provides a prophetic picture (foreshadowing) of something that is yet to be revealed.



The legitimate types of the OT have their anchor in the history of the OT but also provide us a view into the future, of things to come.

The OT sacrificial system was a type which provided a view into the future of the atoning work of Christ on the cross. (see Heb. 9:11 “But Christ came as the high priest of things to come with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands...”)

Types direct our attention to things in the future. They record a present reality but also point to a coming reality.

As a “shadow and type,” it always leads to a higher application; e.g. the Passover lamb is a foreshadowing of the Lamb of God who did the complete, once-for-all work that the type foreshadowed.

Typological interpretation is the interpretation of the literal base of a given type. (It is not the allegorization of the type...assigning a significance to a picture, object or event which is not contained in the literal basis of the type.)

Keep in mind also that the type is not the equal of the fulfillment. As a foreshadowing, the interpretation proceeds from the lesser to the greater; e.g. the sacrificial lamb of the OT does not equal Christ.

B. The extremes of typology:

There are two extremes that people sometimes take with regard to typology:

1. Types are designated according to the imagination of the interpreter. Types are seen in numerous situations where an apparent analogy can be drawn.
2. Types are designated only if the NT specifically states it. Either Christ or his apostles had to specifically designate something as a type.

I think the reality of identifying types must exist somewhere between these two extremes. At any rate, the interpreter needs to recall that we are “handling” God’s Word and special care must be exhibited. (We should also recall that it is God’s Word “rightly interpreted” that has power and life.)

Some guidelines for the identification of types:

1. the Scripture specifically says it (e.g. Rom 5:14 where Paul, when writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says that “Adam is a figure or type (tuos) of him who was to come.)
2. the scripture records an exchange of names or designations; e.g. In I Cor. 5:7b “For indeed, Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us.”
3. there are significant likenesses between the events, persons or objects; e.g. Jacob’s ladder (see John 1: 45-51)

C. Interpretation guidelines

1. Be sure to consider context.
2. Exercise good sense in identifying and interpreting types. Don’t create types where they don’t exist. Hold tight the “reins of your imagination.”

Note: The Scripture warns against those who like to “tickle the ears” of their listeners. Some, with a desire to impress their hearers resort to fanciful findings without sound biblical basis for their declarations.

3. Keep in mind the larger picture of God’s redemptive purposes.
4. For a type to be identified by step 3 above, there needs to be a clear analogy or resemblance between the type and its fulfillment.
5. Regarding types by analogy, be mindful that the analogies that do exist do not legitimize the parts of the analogy that do not exist. e.g. In Rom. 5:14 where Paul identifies Adam as a type of the one to come,” obviously, there were things about Adam that were not analogous to Christ (Adam sinned, Jesus didn’t)

Another analogy that is often identified is that of Joseph to Christ. However, there are things about Joseph that were not analogous to Christ...he married a foreign wife, he gave pagan names to his children, his arrogance towards his brothers, he brought the people of God out of the promised land. (Some have suggested that Joseph may be used more as an illustration than as a type.)

6. Don't teach doctrine based upon types. Types can be used to illustrate doctrine. e.g. In I Pet. 3:21 Peter used the flood to illustrate baptism.
7. Don't limit your interpretation of the type to a specific mode of fulfillment. Consider that, a type may proceed from:
  - the literal to the literal
  - the literal to the spiritual
  - from the earthly to the heavenly
  - from the external to the internal

## II. Symbols

### A. Definitions

A symbol is something that stands for something else, especially something concrete that represents or suggests another thing that cannot in itself be pictured; e.g. the lion is a symbol of bravery (MW dictionary)

The item that is symbolized is not the real thing but provides a representative meaning.

Symbols can be words or acts.

When something is identified as a symbol, its meaning will be discovered in something different than what the symbol denotes.

Sometimes proper names such as Egypt are used as symbols in Scripture.

A symbol is timeless, a type points to the future.  
A symbol may vary (leaven), a type points to one particular fulfillment.

A symbol is often a material object for something immaterial:

- the Bible: bread, meat, milk, a sword, a seed

A symbol designates one characteristic held in common (but not a full-scale comparison)

Numbers can be symbolic (but not every time they are used)

40	testing
6	man
7	perfection/completeness

Examples of symbols:

Brass, water, leaven  
Sheep, dogs, serpents

Places – Babylon, Egypt  
Events – Exodus  
Rituals – circumcision

When a symbol is used to predict something future, the principles of prophecy apply.

Symbolical actions are sometimes employed by the prophets to convey the message they have received from God to the people to whom they are prophets. (e.g. Ezekiel)

B. Use of symbols in prophecy

Why are symbols used in prophecy?

1. to bring an understanding of future events to the prophets so these can be conveyed to a people; e.g. in Rev.1:1 John states that the revelation of Jesus Christ was given to show to his servants the things to come. v.1.b “and he sent and signified it by his angel ...”
2. Prophecy, at times, provides a glimpse into the future regarding the outcome of wars, the rise and fall of nations and the destinies of people and individuals.

The use of symbols conceals the events predicted from unbelievers who might determine to use this “advance knowledge” to their own unrighteous purposes.

C. Identifying symbols

In beginning, keep in mind that, although the prophets sometimes present their messages symbolically, it is not true nor appropriate to consider that their message is symbolic throughout.

1. Accept as symbols those which are so designated by the author; e.g. King Nebuchadnezzar’s great image of Daniel 2.
2. Accept as symbols those items which cannot be truly possible in the arena of our realities; e.g. Rev. 13:11 the beast coming up out of the earth with two horns like a lamb and spoke as a dragon.

Note: Once an element of text is identified as a symbol, do not automatically assume that everything else in the text is also a symbol; e.g. In Rev. 19:19, the beast is symbolic but the kings of the earth in the same text are not. Also, the sword from Jesus’ mouth is symbolic but Jesus and his saints are not.

D. When is a perceived symbol not a symbol?

1. When the text being considered involves things in the future which are plausible.

In these cases, the interpreter should accept these items as literal; e.g. the locusts or Rev. 9 are most likely actual locusts.

Example: from Isa. 65:25 Isaiah's prophecy that the wolf and the lamb shall feed together.

Although this seems implausible at the current time, we also know that before sin, there was no death and hence no animal killing another. We also know that on a day to come, all of creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay. This would suggest that today's "meat eaters" most likely will return to their vegetarian ways before the fall.

2. When details within the text are given that are not needed for the symbolism of the text; e.g. Ezekiel's prophecy of the Millennial temple. In the text of Ezk. 40-48, so many details of the temple are provided that one can draw a layout view of the entire complex. This would signify that the temple vision cannot be assigned as a symbol.

3. When a symbol divides or separates itself

In Rev. 7, the 24 elders cannot be symbols because one of the elders separates himself from the others and talks with John.

#### E. Interpreting symbols

As in much of the interpretation process, the levels of context provide significant information to afford an interpretation. Many who interpret symbolic prophecies agree that the most symbolic of the biblical books, Daniel and Revelation, provide information sufficient to explain their symbols.

1. the immediate context of the passage (20-20 rule) or chapter and chapters before and after.

The most reliable information for interpreting a symbol is the immediate context in which the symbol is given. (Note that a number of the passages almost immediately give an interpretation of its symbols.

In Dan. 7, the four beasts are earthly kingdoms; Rev. 9:1 the star that fell from heaven is a personal being.

2. Correlation with other passages

As with other techniques of interpretation, examine related biblical passages that deal with the symbolism being used; e.g. see parallel passages on “time and times and a half with forty and two months

3. Recognize that every word picture utilized in scripture is not a symbol. Many are simply everyday figures of speech. (see Lesson # 10)

Example: Isa. 2:2-3 “...the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains...”

This is a figure of speech describing the glory of the Jerusalem temple during the millennium, not a symbol of the Christian church and world-wide evangelism.

## ABOUT PASTOR DAVID

I grew up in Illinois; my wife, Brenda, in Oregon. It was a path of many twists and turns to get the two of us connected in California! We entered into our marriage covenant in 1986 after she had agreed to my proposal for a life of adventure. Brenda claims that she scarcely comprehended the adventure that our life would be simply by saying those two little words (I do).



We had both been Christians for a number of years and determined to make God the center of our marriage. In order to make a good beginning, we structured our wedding vows around the instructions of Scripture. We are convinced that this is the reason for our successful, growing relationship.

I received my BS in Civil Engineering in 1966 from the University of Missouri. Having taken ROTC in college, I next served as an officer in the U.S. Army, stationed in Germany.

After returning home to the states, I attended Golden Gate Seminary in California and received a Master of Divinity in 1972.

I worked for three Engineering companies before settling in with GE Nuclear Energy in San Jose, California. I finished my engineering career with 25 years of service at GE.

I was ordained a minister of the gospel in 1991.

Brenda is blessed with musical gifts and has played numerous instruments, e.g. bassoon, flute, guitar, piano, bass. She taught piano to children for 14 years until our move to Wilmington, NC. I also had some musical inclinations, growing up in a musical family in which everyone played at least one instrument. Brenda also has a heart for and is involved in a local "Special Touch" ministry, a ministry to people with disabilities.

Several years ago, we began attending Calvary Chapel San Jose, CA where Don McClure was pastoring. The emphasis on God's Word and the presence of God's Spirit in the worship kept us coming back until we felt confident that this was to be our church home.

Brenda became involved with the Praise team playing flute and singing. She also led the worship for two Women's Bible studies. I became involved in the teaching ministry working principally with the mature adults class (ages around 50-95, they called themselves the "Sonshiners") and also a young married couples class.



Even though we felt like we were settling into the San Jose Fellowship, in early 2004 we were presented with a company relocation, and we began to feel that God was leading us to a significant change, relocating from the West Coast to the East Coast. Little did we know what was in store for us in Wilmington, NC.

We often felt like Abraham who was told to leave his homeland but was given no information regarding what he would encounter when he arrived at his destination.

The next very shocking surprise was my early retirement, something we had not even considered when planning the move to the east coast. Nevertheless, God made it very clear that my engineering career of 37 years was soon to be ended. The retirement occurred almost 5 years in advance of my plan. But God had a bigger (and better) plan. One of my reoccurring supplications to God has been that I would rather be expending the main energy of my life teaching the Word of God than pouring it into the management of engineering projects and writing technical engineering reports. Now, God was giving me the desire of my heart.

I eventually came on staff with a local church and served for 7½ years as an associate pastor teaching Bible studies and ministering principally in the Equipping the Saints ministry. Brenda was involved in several ministries... Praise Team, Special Touch, hospitality/helps, Home Fellowships, to mention a few.

After a 1-year sabbatical in 2014, God has led us to begin a new fellowship which is called Safe Haven Berean Fellowship. Our focus is principally on the Word of God, with both Bible book studies and doctrinal teachings in progress at this time. Principal focuses are on the assurance of salvation, knowing what God in Christ has done for us, learning to live in a way that honors and glorifies God, and a continual focus upon our End Times preparations for our coming King.

Looking back now over the years that led us to this place in life, we are amazed at the Sovereignty of God and how he has orchestrated the events that have brought us to this place in this time. His loving and merciful hand has been seen time and again as he has opened doors and brought us quickly to where He wants us to be. He is, without question, an awesome God.

A painting of a ship on a stormy sea with a bright light breaking through the clouds. The scene is dramatic, with dark, turbulent waves and a sky filled with heavy, grey clouds. A bright, golden light source, possibly the sun or moon, is breaking through a gap in the clouds, creating a strong glow and illuminating the scene. A large, multi-masted sailing ship is visible in the distance, struggling against the waves. The overall mood is one of hope and resilience in the face of adversity.

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