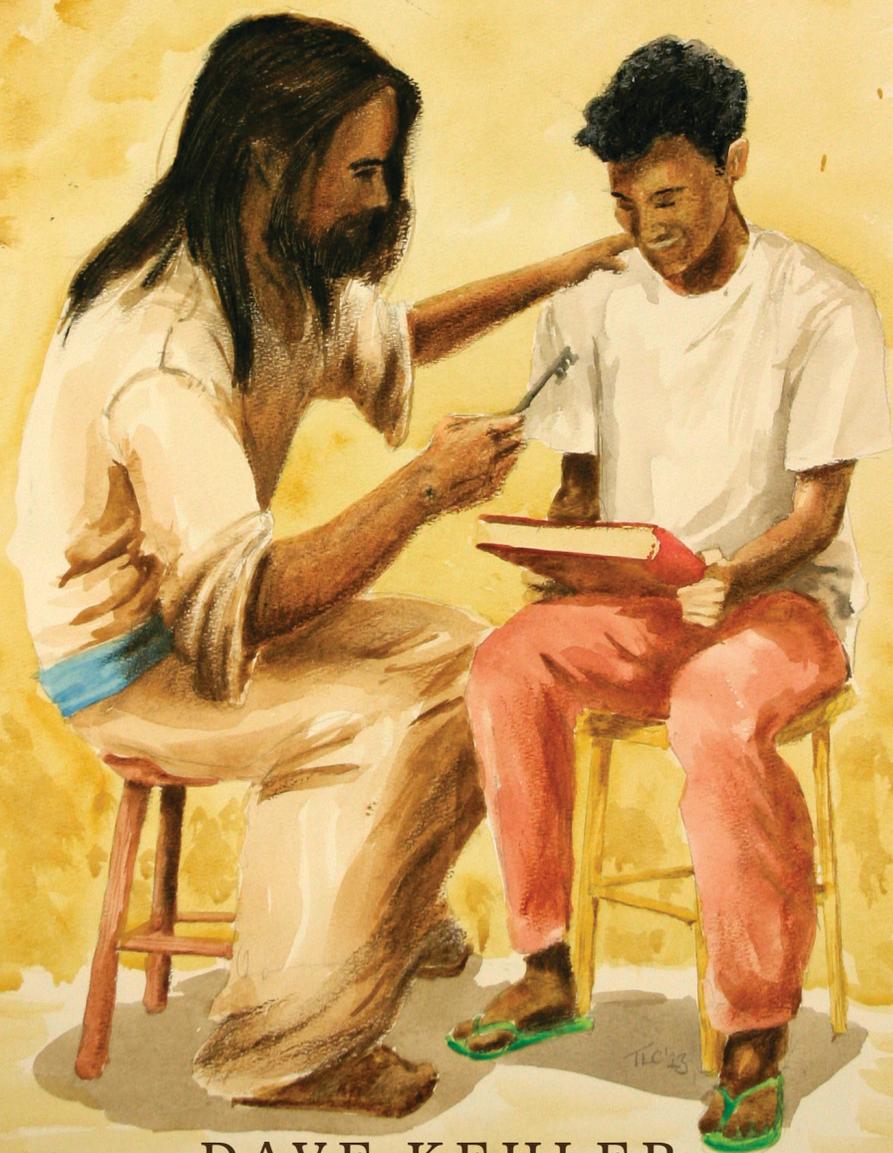


The Christians' Life:
God's Word



DAVE KEHLER

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Jacket Artwork: Tony Livingstone Clark

Printed in Canada: Friesens, Altona, Manitoba
Layout and Formatting: Print Studio One, Steinbach, Manitoba

ISBN: 978-1-55383-362-8

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the Lord for the invitation received from the ADEPR Executive in Rwanda in requesting this work in Kinyarwanda, without their request this work would never have begun. I am grateful for the opportunity. Specifically, my gratitude goes to Pastor Jean Sibomana for his most excellent recommendations in translation and review of the book, I am indebted to you.

Lynn, my wife and companion for thirty-nine years for being my encourager my sounding board and for catching so many errors before others even got to see the work.

Rob Balfour and the Elders at Calvary Chapel Steinbach for graciously encouraging me in this work. Rob, thank you for your excellent guidance on content regarding theology and doctrine and your recommendations on format, this has made the book much more readable and ensured Biblical accuracy.

Jean Paul Seneza, my Rwandan brother whom God has and is using to connect us to the African community, thank-you for your patience and care especially throughout the writing and translation process, you truly are a great blessing!

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Thank-you for your willingness to engage me
regarding content and to work to make this truly
our book.

Thank-you Tony Clark, elder at Calvary Chapel Steinbach,
for the cover picture, an artistic expression of the content
of the book.

Finally, thank-you to Charles & Sarah Niyomugabo
(Nakure), my Rwandan/Canadian brother and sister for
your careful eyes in both versions; since I do not know
Kinyarwanda without your input this work would have
been presented long before it was ready, thank-you.

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Introduction:

THE NEED TO INTERPRET

I remember as a child growing up on a small farm, living in the same yard with my siblings, my parents and my grandparents. We had a very large garden with many vegetables, and a great variety of fruit trees and fruit shrubs. Sometimes when I was sent to the garden to get some vegetables for the meal my mother was preparing, I would get distracted and found myself playing rather than doing the task my mother had asked me to do. One of these times when I got distracted on the way to the garden and did not fetch the vegetables my mother needed for making dinner, my grandmother severely scolded me.

She scolded me with these words, “Your mom sent you to get the carrots and you are disobeying her. The Bible says, ‘*Children obey your parents*’ and you are disobeying your Mom! Do you want to go to hell?” With that of course I quickly repented and fetched the carrots. In my mind I found it strange that just because a young boy might get distracted he would end up in hell.

I lived in great fear for most of my early years. Fear I might at some time get too distracted, not to do the task I had been asked to do, and thereby losing salvation forever. I found myself questioning and wondering who God was and who I was.

Living in fear was one response to this type of discipline and misuse of the Word¹ of God. The other response I had as a youth was to become a troublemaker. I remember one morning asking my grandmother, "Am I going to Heaven or to Hell today?" When she was shocked at my question and asked me why I would ask her I replied, "It seems like you are the one who knows if I'm going to Heaven or to Hell, and I find it very hard to enjoy my day never knowing where I will end up. So if I am going to Hell, then I will live that way and enjoy my day, and if I'm going to Heaven then I will live in that way and enjoy my day."

I will readily admit more often than not this young lad deserved discipline and punishment and that his parents and grandparents had most noble and honorable intentions. I make this point to illustrate that when we do not properly interpret and apply Scripture, when we use it as a weapon to try to force people, especially innocent people to comply with what we believe to be proper behavior, we are totally misrepresenting God and His² Word.

Lovers of the Bible ask the question, "What does God's Word say?" That is where most of us begin our reading of Scripture. While this is a worthwhile question it needs to be the second question we ask. The first question must be, "What did God's word mean when it was first given?" Once we have answered these two questions we are faced with the option of obeying or not obeying. For the most part, obeying the greatest challenge.

It is our intention in this work to present a culturally sensitive guideline for reading, studying and applying Scripture. We hope that the Scripture will become increasingly alive and significant in each of our lives. Also, this is an introductory work, not intended to replace the serious study and interpretation undertaken by Biblical

1 I use the capital "W" to indicate "God's Holy Word". I also use the capital "S" to indicate "God's Holy Scripture".

2 Whenever the personal pronoun is referring to God, we will use the capital letter, for if *He*, *Him*, *You*, or *Me*, is referring to God, we will use the capital letter.

Scholars and trained theologians. Neither describes me. I am a Pastor and I bring my deep concern to encourage my fellow Christians, being aware that there are many who have no resources other than the Bible, and for them this may serve as a wellspring of life.

FAITHFUL TO THE BIBLE

We may have heard it said, “Simply read the Bible and obey what it plainly says.” This has been how many of us have approached the Bible and it sounds simple enough. The problem is that many don’t agree on what the Scripture *plainly* says. That which is *plain* to some is not so *plain* to others.

Though we may never all agree on the meaning of every part of the Bible, each has an obligation to the Lord to faithfully interpret His Word. Paul charges Timothy to “*be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of God*”^{3,4} (2 Tim. 2:15). Though we may not be church leaders as Timothy was, each of us are called to do our best to faithfully understand and apply God’s Word to our lives.

INTERPRETING WITH BIASES

There are two important considerations for clearly understanding and interpreting Scripture. First, each of us has biases and opinions we bring to the act of interpreting the Scriptures. We can sometimes assume that our understanding is the same as the Holy Spirit’s intended

3 All Bible quotes throughout this work are from the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. 1995 (2 Ti 2:15). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

4 All Bible quotations throughout the work are *italicized*.

meaning without realizing that we are mishearing what is said.

When we put on sunglasses, the color of the glass will make everything we look at have that kind of color. Each of us has had a unique experience of life and that gives a specific color to the lens through which we view Scripture, and it impacts all that we read and see. It is important for each of us to recognize that we have a lens, that we become familiar with that lens and further, to be gracious with each other. If there were no such things as biases then why would we not always agree with others who are equally spiritual and equally well informed?

The second problem we have is that the translation we are studying is already an interpretation⁵. When people translated the Scripture, they chose words with specific meanings. The words they chose were based on an understanding of the original intent and were carried forth in an effort to communicate that intent. God expected people to understand what He was saying when He first gave His Word. God expects His word to be understood today, which is why the Lord has given faithful teachers to the church that can learn the original languages and help the body become aware of translation issues.

For an example of how our personal experiences can affect our reading and understanding of various words or expressions, let us consider the use of the word *snow* throughout the Bible. Most of our African friends have little idea of what snow looks like. If we speak to our Canadian friends, they can experience snowfalls sometimes 15 cm deep covering everything around.

So what do we envision when Moses' hand turn "*leprous like snow*" (Ex. 4:6)? How does one "*wash myself with*

5 The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament was written in Greek

snow”⁶ (Job 9:30), or what does a “storehouse⁷ of snow” (Job 38:22) look like? Experiencing Canadian snowfall can help to understand the use of the word *snow*⁸. What do we look like when the Lord has purified us and washed us so that we are “whiter⁹ than snow” (Ps. 51:7)? Why would someone need to be afraid of snow¹⁰, since Pr. 31:21 says, “She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet.” And finally why would *snow* and *lightening* be used interchangeably (Matt. 28:3) in describing the brightness of the Lord’s clothing?

For snow to come in summer, freezing and killing the plants, is a disaster (Pr. 26:1). However, if we don’t even know what *snow*, or *freezing* is, or have anything to compare it to, how will we ever grasp what is meant by this description? The use of the word *snow* is one simple example to illustrate how personal perspective or life experience has an impact on how we read the Bible.

If we know some basic background information, the context in which Scripture was written, it gives us a greater understanding of what was happening. During the time of the New Testament, the Roman Empire ruled the entire area. They taught that Caesar was God and that all people must submit to and pay homage to Caesar. That to live a life of purpose one must conform to the expectations of the government. Temple worship, and regular sacrifices associated with Judaism was central in the life of the

6 This would be a powder-like substance, similar in size and weight to the chaff coming from grain, but when rubbed against the skin would turn to water, very, very cold water.

7 In winter snow accumulates and it looks like sand, piles and piles of sand. It is removed with large earth moving equipment and then piled, making large hills of snow, or what would appear to be a *storehouse of snow*.

8 As it falls to the ground it resembles ash from a volcanic eruption, only it is all white and fluffy.

9 As the snow covers the earth, appearing as sand dunes in a dessert, and the sun shines, it is so bright that unless people protect their eyes, may experience temporary blindness, and if prolonged exposure, permanent blindness.

10 With the snow comes cold temperature, unlike the cold in Africa, this is so cold that if you are not protected it will kill you. Depending on how cold it is, there are times of the year, where if not properly protected, a person would die within one to two hours of being outside.

Jews. Jesus was a Jew. The Roman government tolerated the Jewish practices as long as it did not challenge or interfere with the government.

After Christ's crucifixion and subsequent resurrection the Christians' faced extreme persecution, both from the government and from the Jewish religious leaders. Almost all the early Christians converted from Judaism. When people spoke about Messiah or Redeemer, they were looking for someone to save them from their present circumstance. When they talked about establishing Christ's Kingdom, they were looking for a Kingdom to be established on Earth, one in which the Roman oppression would stop and Jesus with His followers would establish the government. It is helpful to remember this background information as we read the New Testament.

The same holds for the Old Testament books. For example:

Jeremiah began preaching in the 7th century BC, almost at the end of the life of the two tribes in the south, who went into exile in 586 BC (though some were deported even earlier. He lived during the reigns of seven different kings of Judah: Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. His 40-year prophetic career was during the reigns of the last five.

He spoke at a traumatic time for the people of God. The 10 tribes in the north had been taken into exile by Assyria, leaving the two tribes of God's people living in and around Jerusalem. Isaiah and Micah had now gone, their messages largely unheeded. Jeremiah is the last prophet to speak to the people and warn them that it was almost too late to stop the disaster from coming.

His birth was in the reign of Manasseh, the evil king who had sawn the prophet Isaiah in half inside a hollow tree for prophesying against him. If this evil wasn't bad enough, he also sacrificed his own babies to the devil and filled Jerusalem's streets with the blood of innocent people. 2 boys of significance were born in his reign—Josiah, who became King, and Jeremiah. Manasseh was replaced by another wicked King, Amon, who lasted a few years before Josiah found himself on the throne at the tender age of eight. It was during his reign that the book of Deuteronomy was found in a dusty old cover in the Temple. Josiah was horrified to read that the curses of God were on the land and the people. So he tried to reform the people but failed.¹¹

As we look at the Scriptures, we see them from where we are in history. Each of us has a different experience of life and therefore we see things differently. It is important to remember what was originally said and how the original people heard it; context is important.

CONCLUSION:

We end with where we began, and that is an encouragement to not add or take away anything from God's Word. Guard the trust God has placed in you.

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

¹¹ Pawson, David. *Unlocking The Bible*. Harper Collins Publishers, London, 1999-2001; 2003; 2007. pg. 571

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:18-20)

Practical Application

1. You should find at the back of this book a basic Bible reading plan. It is important that each of us read the whole Bible. I have found it helpful to have a guideline that can serve as a reminder to read God's Word.
2. Keeping a journal as a record of interaction with God's word and the Holy Spirit is also very helpful. As you sit down to read the word ask the Holy Spirit to guide your mind and your emotions. Write down any questions you might have about what you read, make observations, ask the Holy Spirit what the application is for you today, and then pray.
3. Choose a specific book of the Bible for a more in-depth study, ideally one that is not very long. I would recommend for you Ephesians, Philippians or Colossians. Once you have selected your book begin by reading it through entirely in one sitting. Keeping your journal and a record of your interaction with God's word. Do this at least once a week for at least 15 weeks.

I.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

Before we visited Rwanda we received a letter of invitation from the legal representative of a large denomination in Rwanda. In Canada we sent our passport along with a copy of this letter to the Rwandan Consulate, they stamped an entry visa into our passport and sent it back to us. Before we were allowed to board the plane in Canada, they asked us what our final destination would be and when we said Rwanda they looked into our passport and if we did not have an entry visa we would not have been allowed to board the plane in Canada.

When we changed planes in the USA, before we boarded they asked the same questions and had the same response. This happened again in Europe. Then when we finally arrived in Rwanda and we got to the customs officer we were again challenged with why we should be allowed into Rwanda. It seemed like he was unimpressed with our entry visa stamp in our passport. He wanted to know who had invited us, where we were going to stay, what we were going to do and how long we were going to stay.

It seemed like the more I explained to him the more agitated he became. I referred repeatedly to a letter of invitation I had received from the Pastor who was the Legal Representative of this large denomination. It was not until I produced the letter, and he saw the signature

with the corporate seal on the signature that he invited us into the country. He was asking, "Who gave you the authority to come to this Country?" It was not until he saw a letter, and recognized and accepted the authority behind the letter that he allowed us into the country. If he had chosen to not recognize the authority of the letter, we would never have been allowed into the country.

The issue of authority is a common theme throughout the world and it has been since the beginning of time. Jesus' authority was challenged regularly, "*When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"*" (Matt. 21:23) If we are determined in our heart to not believe in Jesus then we must reject the Scripture as having any authority. This was the issue Jesus discussed with the religious leaders of His day in John 5:39–47.

WHAT IS SCRIPTURE?

The Bible is the word of God, given in human words in history. It is both human and divine, much like Jesus Christ, who was both human and divine. The paper is not Holy, the physical book is not Holy, but God is Holy and His Word is Holy. Jesus Christ is the greatest expression of God's Word; He is the Word. "*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us*" (Jn. 1:14). Jesus is the expression of God in human form, the visible Word of God.

Since the Bible is God's Word, it has eternal relevance. It speaks to all humankind, in every age, in every culture, and to every area of life. However, because God did not send down a manuscript from heaven, choosing rather to engage specific humans in history, we have the humanness of these words. The faithful Bible reader keeps in mind

both the eternal relevance of God's Word and the particular historical situations in which it was inspired.

Some emphasize the Bible only in terms of eternal relevance, and tend to think of it only as a collection of stories to be believed and commands to be obeyed. However, there is a great deal of personal preference clouding the choice of which to obey and which not to obey.

Although the Bible is eternally relevant, God chose to write it in history. He used certain people who spoke Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic in ancient Middle East or Mediterranean cultures. God also used almost every available type of communication: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, laws of all kinds, poetry of all kinds, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons, and apocalypses. Common sense tells us that we don't read a poem the same way we read a letter, and we don't read a historical report the same as we read a prophetic utterance. The question is, how do we know which is which and what do we do with each of these?

1. EXEGESIS

The first task is to carefully analyze the Scripture to discover the original intended meaning. We ask the question, "What did the original author of the Bible mean to say in his day?" It is an attempt to hear the Word, as the original people would have heard it. This is a skill and there are experts at this sort of thing, but each of us does exegesis. We gaze intently into Scripture, trying to hear the voice of God.

If we do not begin by asking the exegetical question, by analyzing what was being said or heard when it was first given, we will usually end with an incorrect understanding of God's Word. For example, Galatians 3:28, "*There*

is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Most of the translations agree on the translation of this verse, so the issue does not arise with translation.

This verse is used as a “proof text”¹ for a doctrine that states men and women are totally equal and there is no such thing as a man having authority over his wife or in the church. “They assume that it speaks about functional social roles ... and thus the text which articulates such important truth about salvation is evacuated of its meaning”.² If we are not committed to first looking at the Scripture exegetically but rather we are trying to find a Scripture as proof for what we believe, then the truth can quickly be lost.

Also, if we are not asking what this verse meant back then, we are more likely to miss what it means today. Never would Paul have envisioned that this portion would be used to undermine God’s ordained authority. To do so would mean we would have to ignore Paul’s teaching throughout his letters in Timothy, Galatians and Ephesians.

The problem with “expert” analysis is that sometimes the experts are not very expert. Galatians 3:28 is an excellent example of what may happen if we accept what experts say without analyzing what God’s word said. Each of us needs to be thinking exegetically, we need to be analyzing what the word plainly says; we must learn to think analytically. If we do not do this then we are open to hearing something that was never said or seeing something that simply is not there.

Even if all we have is a Bible translated into our own language, each of us can become reasonably good at

1 A *proof text* is when we present a particular point of view and we offer as *proof* a particular portion of Scripture, usually without any attention to the context of the verse quoted.

2 <http://bible.org/seriespage/biblical-gynecology-part-2>

understanding God's word. There are two basic types of questions that we must ask of every biblical passage: those that relate to context and those that relate to content.

EXEGESIS: LOOKING AT CONTEXT

For our African friends searching for context is quite natural and happens regularly. People will pay attention to each other only when they understand where they come from, who they are in relation to others and how others know them. It is hard to accept what someone says if we do not know who they are; we need context! The key to good analyzing is to learn to read the text carefully and to ask the right questions of the text. For context there is both historical context and literary context.

Historical Context deals with geographical, topographical, religious and political factors that are relevant to the authors setting; and the occasion of the book, letter, Psalm, prophetic oracle or other genre³.

For example, it helps to know that the denarius (Matt. 20:1–16) was the equivalent of a full day's wage and not just a few francs. "A days wage" is quite different in Africa than in Europe or North America. In order for the reader to relate effectively to this story, the setting of the original story makes a difference. While much can be learned from a careful reading of the text, some of this background information is only available from an outside source, such as a Bible Dictionary⁴.

The question of *occasion* and *purpose* of each book is often answered in the book itself. For example, 1 Corinthians was a specific letter written to a specific people

3 *Genre* is a "category of artistic work", would be like gospel music and secular music are two different style or types of music, they are different *genres*.

4 Do not place too much emphasis on material that is not the Bible, it is helpful to have this material but the Holy Spirit is quite able to speak to us without this.

addressing specific situations in the church. Even though it was very specific, this letter was relevant to other contexts. In 2 Cor. 1:1 the specific letter written to a specific Christian congregation, includes in the introduction “all the saints who are throughout Achaia”. We see from this that it is expected a vast audience will read the letter. We also learn that Paul would ask his Churches to exchange his letters to receive the same instructions (Col. 4:16). By comparison, Proverbs is intended to be wisdom that is helpful for all of life with a special focus on helping youth have successful lives living in the fear of the Lord.

Here are a few questions to help discover the historical context:

1. Does the book tell us when it was written?
2. Does the book tell us who wrote it?
3. Does the book tell us to whom it was written?
4. Are there any problems specifically mentioned in the book?

Literary Context deals with the words used and the meaning of those words when they were used. Words only have meaning in sentences, and sentences only have clear meaning with the sentences before and after each sentence. The most important question we will ask is, “What is the point?” Next is, “How does this sentence add to the story or the argument of the book?” We must try finding what the author was thinking, what he is saying, and since he said that, what is he saying now? We need to look at paragraphs, seeing a thought brought forth by a group of sentences; we need to learn to think in terms of paragraphs. Look at the paragraph before and the paragraph after the one in question.

Literary Content deals with the meaning of the words on the page in front of our eyes. The most fruit in life and

sermon preparation will come from *content analysis*. Ask questions like:

1. What is the genre; for example is this a poem?
2. What are the characters, the settings or the actions described?
3. Is the writer using symbolism?⁵
4. Is there a plot or storyline being developed?
5. What is the point of view of the person speaking?
6. What is the overall tone of the writing?

These are all questions that each of us may ask and find answers to as we read the Bible in our own language. The goal of analyzing, one must remember, is to find out what was the original intent of the words. It is good to have as many translations as possible for comparative purposes and from these comparisons we should be able to gain considerable insight into the original meaning and intent.

2. HERMENEUTICS:

This refers to what the Bible means to say to us here and now. We now ask the question, “What does the Scripture mean for us today?” It always begins with solid exegesis. The original intent of the text needs to serve as the control of what the plain meaning of the text is today and protects us from misreading the text. Otherwise the text can be made to say whatever someone wants, and this is not pleasing to the Lord. Also, the interpreting becomes totally subjective, and we have no basis to decide who is right or wrong.

In crucial areas believers, especially where there may be disagreement, need to learn to talk with each other and

⁵ Where the description of what is happening means more than what is happening, for example: *the prodigal son* stands as an *example*, or a *symbol* of everyone who is selfish enough to want only what they can get for themselves.

ask the Holy Spirit to bring unity. One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to give insight into Scripture (2 Tim. 2:7). We can trust that as we seek to understand together, He will make plain the meaning of His word. We must not assume anyone has the correct interpretation unless it lines up with all of Scripture. This is commended to us in Acts 17:11 *“Now these were more noble minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”*

3. APPLICATION:

Once we have analyzed the text and are clear on what it meant when it was written, and we have interpreted the text so that it can be understood in today's language and culture, we then move on to application⁶. We asked the question, “What do we do with this truth?”

As we apply Scripture to our own specific situation and to others around us we must be ever vigilant to ensure that this is consistent with all of Scripture. We must remind ourselves that God's word cannot mean today what it did not mean then. We must be willing to submit ourselves to God and His Word and to demonstrate this by submitting to one another.

Paul's words are an excellent reminder (Eph. 4:1–3) *“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

6 The last chapter of this book, *Ethics*, will deal with this subject.

CONCLUSION:

We want to end where we began, with the issue of the authority of God's Holy word. In 2 Corinthians 10 Paul testifies that as a believer in Jesus Christ we must live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit and we are to walk not according to the flesh. Genesis 3 illustrates 2 Corinthians 10. Satan reasoned with Eve, and Eve, seeing that the tree was good for food, responded with reasoning, she responded with her flesh. She did not listen to God; she did not respect the authority God had placed over her. If she had, she would have consulted with Adam, nor did she respect the word of God. Eve added to the instructions God had given; thus demonstrating her lack of respect for His Word.

Paul admonishes young Timothy too *“be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene.”* (2 Tim. 2:15)

Studying the Bible is honourable work; it is also hard work and requires a great deal of diligence. It is work that God calls each of us to do and as we accept the challenge, we will experience *“the good hand of God”*, as did the Old Testament prophet. *“For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.”* (Ezra 7:10)

Practical Exercise:

1. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 2:6–14.
 - a. What is the secret to understanding God's wisdom?
 - b. According to vs.11, what is the relationship between the thoughts of man and the thoughts of God?
 - c. How does the unenlightened person respond to the truth of God? (Vs.14)
2. List at least 3 illustrations of spiritual blindness in the Bible.
3. If one cannot properly understand the Scriptures without the aid of the Holy Spirit, is there any advantage in encouraging non-Christians to study the Bible? Explain.
4. What was Jesus' promise concerning the Holy Spirit and enlightenment in John 16:13?

II.

OLD TESTAMENT HIS-STORY

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

It was the end of summer and we were blessed with an abundant crop of large juicy apples from the tree in our garden. Having been invited to speak at an African Church in a neighbouring community, we anticipated a fellowship meal and decided to bring a bag of these apples to share with the community. We received a polite “thank you” for the apples. While going to the market and purchasing apples and bringing them would be a blessing, there seemed to be a greater blessing as they discovered these were from *our own* garden We were sharing something of ourselves.

Visiting someone’s garden can be a great opportunity to connect and learn about the garden and about the gardener. We do this as we walk through someone’s garden and ask questions about why some trees are chosen and some were not? Why the plants are placed where they are? Where the plants came from and how the gardener feels about each plant? It is fascinating to hear stories of plants that have been handed down from one generation to another. We may hear stories of a grandmother who

was gifted in grafting¹ fruit trees, who had one tree in her garden that produced three different kinds of apples. We may hear of a small berry bush that reminds the gardener of the many berry bushes that were in the garden where he grew up as a child. Each one has a story to tell.

The earth is God's garden. We can learn a great deal about God by observing His garden and by living and working in His garden. We may ask Him about His garden and He will gladly communicate with us. We also learn more about the garden and the Gardner by talking to others who are in the garden. God loves to tell His story; He wants us to know Him and experience Him daily.

The Old Testament is part of God's story, it is also the story of the Israelite people, and as Christians it is part of our story. The promises and calling of God to Israel are also *our* historical promises and *our* historical calling *in Christ*. Paul tells the Gentiles (1 Cor. 10:1) that it was *our* fathers who passed through the Red Sea. In order to understand these words we must get to know the Gardner. We need to understand what He was saying to the people at that time. From there we go to what this means for us today and finally, "How do we respond?"

God spoke to and through human beings. People did not become unwilling or unknown instruments that God moved about and caused to write. God did not send down a manuscript from heaven, no, God moved in people's hearts and minds. God, by His Holy Spirit directed the ancient writers; His Holy Spirit empowered and directed them to write their response, their words, yet they were God's words. You see, God was and is behind all of this! In this way, the Bible is the history about God and the history about God and His people.

1 Taking a branch from a different type of tree and attaching it to the branch of a growing tree. This is practiced in the Apple farms in Canada, especially where they have discovered the root of one apple tree will produce a much healthier tree, while a fruit you wish to grow may naturally have not as strong a root system. By *grafting in* a branch, we get the benefit of the healthy root with the benefit of the desired fruit. This also may help us understand Rom. 11:11-36

I heard a story on a new bride preparing a meal for her husband and some guests. She was preparing a large ham². The husband observed his young wife as she cut off the narrow part of the ham with the bone and discarded this piece of food. He asked her, "Why did you cut off that piece of meat and throw it away?" She replied, "It is how my mother used to do it." The young wife had no understanding of why her mother had done this.

Having his curiosity aroused the young man asked his mother-in-law if this indeed was how she prepared a ham. As she confirmed this to be true, the young man's curiosity grew sharper, and he asked her, "Why?" The mother-in-law responded by saying, "It is how my mother used to do it." Finally, the young man sought counsel from the grandmother. She too confirmed that she cut off four inches from the ham bone.

Upon further questioning, the grandmother brought clarity to the situation. She said, "When we first came to this new country we had very few possessions, only a few basic tools and basic pots. I did not have a pot large enough for the entire ham so I would cut off a piece to make the meat fit the pot. I would use the cut off part to make soup." The bride had a pot large enough for the whole ham; however, she was doing what she observed her mother do and did not bother to ask her mother, "Why?" If we look closely enough we will usually find there is a reason for someone doing what he or she does.

The Old Testament makes up three quarters of the Bible and over 40% of the Old Testament is history told as a story. It is God's story; it is God revealing Himself to people in His Garden; His-story. The story is not fiction; it is not make-believe. In any story, the storyteller chooses what information to include or not to include. With these choices the storyteller will convey a specific message. Even though human beings wrote the stories in the Old

2 The large back portion of a pig, the thigh part with the bone still in the meat.

Testament, the Holy Spirit inspired them. We know from present-day experiences that the telling of a history will give messages about the people, places and events of the past. So it is with Scripture, even though most of the Old Testament's commands are not for us today, we can learn a great deal about God and our relationship with Him and with each other.

All narratives have three basic parts; they have *characters, plots, and resolution*. The characters in the Old Testament include God, Satan, God's people and the enemies of God's people. God is the hero and is always good. Satan is the ultimate villain³ always and is always bad. Humans join either with God through their faith and obedience or with Satan through unbelief and disobedience. There is no such thing as not having decided, if we do not decide for God, by our silence, we are deciding for Satan!

This story is played out at three different levels. There is the big picture which is the universal plan of God including creation, the fall, the power of sin, the need for redemption⁴ and Christ's incarnation⁵ and sacrifice: also called *redemptive history*.

The second level of the story includes God redeeming a people for His name—called Israel. This level includes the covenant⁶ with Abraham, the enslaving⁷ of Israel, God delivering His people from bondage, making a covenant with them at Sinai and bringing them into the promised land of Canaan; the Israelites repeated sins and increasing disloyalty; God's continuing patient protection and the story of His pleading with them; the ultimate

3 Person who is evil, an evil character or person; *ultimate villain*, the one from whom comes all evil.

4 To buy back, something that is lost or thrown away, having become of no use, now becoming precious.

5 God coming to earth as a human being, a man, whose name was Jesus.

6 Covenant is like a contract or a bond—more on this later.

7 Israel went to Egypt and they were saved from starving (Gen.42), but after Joseph and his family died and the Egyptians forgot (Ex. 1:8) that they were friends, they made the Israelites their slaves!

destruction of northern Israel and then of Judah; and the restoration of the people of Judah from exile. This makes up the stories of tribal groups and the people of Israel.

Finally in the third level, we have the micro-story⁸. There are hundreds of individual stories that make up the nations and peoples. As we read these stories and as we identify with the characters in the stories, we must continually remember how they fit into the bigger picture.⁹ Just as these individuals were written into God's story so we are written into God's story.

THE STORYTELLER

The storyteller¹⁰ is everywhere and knows everything about the story He tells. The storyteller chooses what He will tell and what He will keep hidden. He never shares all that He knows but chooses what He will share. The storyteller chooses the perspective from which the story is told; very often the point of view comes by way of one of the characters. As we read stories we must constantly be watching for how the storyteller chooses to tell the story.

8 *Micro* refers to the smallest detail— we get the word *microscope*, a device that lets us look closely at things that are too small to see by just looking at them.

9 “The big picture” is sometimes called the *macro* story, *macro* being the opposite of *micro*.

10 Ultimately, God is the storyteller, but here the term *storyteller* is talking about the people through whom God gave His story.

THE STORY

The Hebrew way of telling a story is in *scenes*¹¹ and will flow from one scene to another with differing characters. Most of the scenes include only two or three characters. This makes it easy to follow, and we can find ourselves quickly drawn into the story, identifying with various characters in the story. This is part of the art of fine storytelling.

We see characters interacting with other characters and with their environment. While we are not often told of the characteristics of the person, or their personality, it is their interaction with other players that exposes the character they have. For example, when we read the story of the interaction between Joseph and Potiphar's wife we have a bold illustration of Joseph's virtue and integrity, as well as the Queen's bent¹² toward unfaithfulness. It is not difficult to identify with these characters in this story.

Observing the dialogue between characters helps us to better understand them. The first point of a dialogue is often a significant clue to the story plot and to the character of the speaker. Learn to observe and listen to how the characters speak to each other, how long they speak to each other, and if something is repeated. In the story just told (Gen. 39:7) Potiphar's wife gives Joseph a brief invitation. Joseph gives a lengthy reply, (Gen. 39:8–9) the narrator makes the effort to reveal Joseph's character by giving him a long speech, which reveals his heart.

These characters, dialogues and scenes are each set inside a plot. Each section will have a *beginning*, *middle*, and these together will create a dramatic tension that will eventually be released in the *conclusion*. Usually the plot

11 A scene is a short section of play or drama presentation, similar to the African way of telling stories, it is a big story made up of many small stories. It is this small story here referred to as a *scene*.

12 *Bent* is that natural habit of doing a certain thing, a natural response showing the world our heart. Hosea 11:7 *So My people are bent on turning from Me. Though they call them to the One on high, none at all exalts Him.*

will have some kind of conflict that will create interest and make us eagerly wait for the resolution.

For example (Gen. 38) in the story of Judah and Tamar; the plot is set as Tamar's husband (v.7) dies and she goes to Judah, her father-in-law, requesting another husband so she can have children. Judah is not honorable in how he treats Tamar (v.9–11). Tamar then goes and presents herself as a temple prostitute (v.14). Judah comes along and most inappropriately has relations with her (v.15, 16). After the encounter as they negotiate wages Judah offers personal items as security (v.18). When he sends his servant to find the prostitute and make payment, the servant does not find her (v.20).

Now as we move into the middle of the story we begin to feel the tension building. When Judah is informed that his daughter-in-law has become pregnant through prostitution he is enraged (v.24). As it is revealed that Judah was the one who lacked integrity, we come to the tensest moment in the story, for we do not know how Judah will respond. Judah chooses to repent, and this brings a resolution (v.25–26). This concludes this short story, set inside the larger story of Israel and that is set inside the larger story of God and all people.

The structure of the stories in the Old Testament was designed primarily for hearers; the stories were meant to be told and to be retold with others listening and hearing the story. This lends itself very well to the African community where much of society is based on oral history and storytelling. Therefore, it is important to read these stories out loud so they can be heard and we can hear them as well.

Another feature in Hebrew storytelling is the repetition¹³ of key words. This too is quite common in African storytelling; it is important to listen for this as we read the Hebrew text. The African way is often to tell stories in a

13 Saying something over and over and over again. (Like I just did.)

circular fashion; the West's way of telling stories is more linear¹⁴; we can see the circular structure¹⁵ reflected in the Hebrew text. It is as the circular story is told that one can see the connecting dots and form the line of movement. A linear perspective looks only for the main points and is often distracted with all the extra information. The circular perspective cannot see the main points without all the other information. As we read the biblical story we must keep our eyes open for *key words* that get repeated.

It is helpful to remember there is a common thread¹⁶ to the stories. God is always the hero. The characters and plot in the story show the interaction among the people and with God. Satan is always the villain. People will choose to partner with God or with Satan. As we identify with the characters in the story and as we appreciate the method of communicating we must be careful to observe what is clearly stated in the text and what is implied in the text. Also, whom we most identify with in a text may reveal something of our own character.

THINGS TO BE AWARE OF AS WE READ NARRATIVE/STORY

Narratives are not allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings. We must be careful to not apply meaning to a text where the Bible does not clearly state that this is the meaning. The New Testament has many references to the Old Testament and here the application is simple and obvious, we must ensure that we do not use a particular story as a proof text for a point that we wish to make.

14 In as straight a line as possible, connecting dots using the shortest distance between them; giving only the main parts of a story, without a lot of other information.

15 Giving great detail around each person, event or place in the story, so we have a short story about everyone or everything that is in our present story, as much background information as the one listening likes to have.

16 *Common thread* when there are many pieces of fabric forming a larger piece, each of a variety of colours, yet there is one thread common to all the pieces tying them together, it is a *common thread*.

Secondly, the narrative is not always intended to teach moral lessons or offer examples of good moral behavior. The story tells us what happened and just because the story is in the Bible does not mean it is good behavior, or necessarily bad behavior. Many patriarchs had multiple wives, yet clearly God's plan from the beginning has been one man with one woman. Even though Scripture records Jacob's polygamy it is not presented as a prescribed practice. It is simply telling us the story of what God did in the history of Israel and of how people responded. While there are practical lessons we can learn from these stories, we must be careful we do not say the Bible is saying something that it is not clearly saying.

As we look at the micro-story, the small sections as we did above, we need to always remember it is part of a bigger story, a bigger picture. As we look at key words we see the picture but focusing only on these key words and overlooking their context makes it hard to apply proper interpretive tools.

Also, as we see ourselves in the story, we may tend to *personalize* parts and feel they apply to us specifically in a way that they do not apply to everyone else. This is *self-centered* reading and has the *self* as the object and focus of Scripture. Remember, this is God's story and it is not all about any one of us.

We need also caution against using a text for purposes foreign to the biblical narrative. For example, (Judges 6:36-40) putting out a fleece as a test for what God is saying. This Scripture is pointing out that God saved Israel through Gideon *despite* his lack of trust in God's word. The requiring of the fleece was a sign of Gideon's lack of trust in God's word. So to use a modern day version of a fleece is to demonstrate our own lack of faith, or lack of submission. The using of a *fleece* was not a sign of walking in faith, so therefore, today; it also is not a demonstration of walking in faith.

Yet another caution is, in coming to the text with an idea and using the text to say what we want it to say—ignoring all proper tools of interpretation. For example, there are those who would promote homosexuality as an acceptable life style and they might use David and Jonathan's relationship as a proof-text. Since we are told David loved Jonathan as he loved himself (1 Sam. 20:17) and (v.41) they kissed each other, which in many cultures in the world is normal for heterosexuals¹⁷. Their "love" was covenantal and is like God's love; homosexual behaviour is clearly condemned in other parts of Scripture, both Old and New Testament. So to say this is evidence of a "God approved" homosexual relationship in the Bible is inconsistent with the rest of the Bible, therefore, it is an example of using the text to mean what we want it to mean, with disregard for what it actually says.

Know this, no Bible story was written specifically about you! Stories are precious to us because they so vividly *demonstrate* God's involvement in the world and *illustrate* His principles and calling, but they do not systematically include personal ethics. We can learn a great deal from these stories but we can never assume that God expects us to do exactly the same thing that Bible characters did or to have the same things happen to us that happened to them.

TEN PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING NARRATIVE/STORY:

1. Narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine.
2. Narrative usually illustrates a doctrine that is taught as a command elsewhere.

¹⁷ (*Heterosexual* someone desiring the opposite sex.) In some African communities men holding hands with men, or walking arm in arm, or women doing the same, is a demonstration of a deep love and respect—there is absolutely nothing sexual about it. In the west, this same action is a display and demonstration of a homosexual relationship. Those wishing to promote the homosexual agenda will use this as a *proof-text* for homosexuality.

3. Stories record what happened, not necessarily what should happen.
4. What people do in the story is not necessarily a good example for us.
5. Most of the Old Testament characters are far from perfect.
6. We are not always told at the end of the story, whether what happened was good or bad, we are expected to be able to judge based on the rest of Scripture.
7. Not all the relevant details are always given; all stories are selective, what *does* appear is everything God wanted to appear.
8. Stories are not written to answer all our theological questions.
9. Stories may teach explicitly¹⁸ or implicitly¹⁹.
10. In the end, God is the hero of all biblical stories.

Practical Exercise:

1. According to John 3:14–15, what did the brass serpent (Num. 21:9) symbolize?
2. According to Romans 5:14, what does Adam typify?
3. What does “water” symbolize in: a) Ephesians 5:26 b) 2 Peter 2:17?
4. What does “Lamb” symbolize in a) John 1:29 b) Luke 15:6?
5. Read the story of Joseph as told by Moses in Gen. 37-50 and then:

¹⁸ Clearly stating a point

¹⁹ Clearly suggesting or implying something

- a) Identify the characters in this story.
- b) Identify the various scenes in this story.
- c) What is the overall plot of the story?
- d) What are the key words in the story?
- e) Identify the subplots within the story.
- f) Notice the beginning, the middle, and the end of each subplot and how these fit into the overall plot.
- g) How does God reveal Himself as the hero throughout the story?

III.

THE LAW: COVENANT TERMS FOR ISRAEL

Do take you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, according to God's holy decree? Do you promise to love, nourish and cherish her, serving her in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, remaining faithful, cleaving only to her as unto the Lord, as long as you both shall live? If you do, then respond with, "I do."

Do take you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, according to God's holy decree? Do you promise to love and respect him, to serve him in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, remaining faithful and submitting only to him, as unto the Lord, for long as you both shall live? If you do, then respond with, "I do."

"For in as much as this man and this woman have made this solemn covenant of marriage before God and in this company, I declare them to be husband and wife, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What God has joined together let no one separate; Amen."

With these words, or something like them, all around the world, in every culture, people are getting married. This is the most basic of covenant relationships that exists in every society. It is the relationship that was ordained by God to reflect the relationship within the triune Godhead. God the Father who is complete in Himself, God the Son Jesus Christ who is complete in Himself, and God the

Holy Spirit who is complete in Himself, being united as one with the Son being totally submitted to the Father and the Holy Spirit working as directed by the Father and the Son, together being glorious. This is a mystery¹, and so is the marriage union. Each person is complete on his or her own, yet as they join together they become one flesh; a mystery². Throughout Scripture we are told that the church is the body of Christ, the Bride of Christ. The foundation for the relationship within the Godhead is "covenant". The starting point for the relationship within the marriage is "covenant". That is why God so hates divorce, for this is the primary relationship established before the fall, to demonstrate the unity and complementary³ relationship within the Godhead.

The Apostle Paul affirms that this has been the plan from the beginning of time as he quotes the Old Testament, the Old Covenant. (Eph. 5:30,31) *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother⁴ and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church."* This theme runs from Genesis through to Revelations.

When reading Scripture, when reading about covenant, and Law, it is good to realize that God is speaking to and preparing His Bride for His Son. God is absolutely committed to His Bride and is calling His Bride to be

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- 1 *Mystery* in the New Testament refers to something that was previously unknown, hidden but now is totally clear and revealed in Jesus Christ; something that God wants us to know and is quite knowable!
 - 2 A mystery, that unless you are married and have experienced this, you do not fully know, however, being married and experiencing it, you now fully know! God's intent is for each of us to fully experience Him and therefore *know* Him; unless we experience God, we will not *know* Him.
 - 3 Jesus submitted to the Father, only the Father knows when Jesus will return, yet Jesus is not "less than" the Father. Part of Jesus' identity is to "be the one who submits". Marriage is to reflect this relationship, neither is less than or greater than the other; we *complement* each other.
 - 4 Interesting that God tells Adam to leave father and mother when he did not have an earthly father and mother, but when we understand that God is talking about Christ and His Bride, the church, and that God is setting in place His design for this relationship well before the fall, then this begins to make sense.

absolutely committed to Him. Scripture is full of illustrations of the Bride prostituting herself, openly rebelling or simply ignoring God. Covenant forms the basis of the relationship between man with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; covenant forms the basis of relationship in marriage. Some relationships are not based on covenant, Father /child, Mother/child to name two, however, covenant forms the basis for most Christian relationships.

Human covenants are mutual, voluntary promises or agreements, usually between two persons. For example Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:31) Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:34) David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:8). Here there is a mutual agreement, a contract of commitment, freely entered into by both parties of the covenant. Further, both sides obligate themselves to fulfill all the terms of the contract faithfully. Today we have mortgages, credit cards, bank loans, rental agreement, terms of employment etc., each an example of *covenant*.

The first covenant in history is God's covenant with Adam, a covenant of grace (Gen. 2:9,16,17). Even though the word "covenant" is not found in the Genesis account concerning God's relationship with Adam, the word is used in Hosea 6:7, regarding the transgression of Ephraim and Judah, the prophet says, "*like Adam, they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to Me there.*" There are two parties to the covenant, God and man; there is a promise, and there is an obligation or demand.

This first covenant is universal, even though it is made with one man, Adam; it affects all of mankind. Adam was given the responsibility and he is the responsible one, God will hold him accountable, whether or not he likes it is not the issue. The second part of the covenant promises the blessing of continuing life (Gen. 3:22), of eternal life, if you choose to eat of the tree of life, a covenant of grace. The third aspect of this covenant calls for obedience on man's

part: he is commanded not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This original covenant of God with man may be called the *covenant of life*. This covenant forms an umbrella and covers all of Genesis through Revelation. God has obligated Himself based on who He is and cannot be released from this covenant, no matter what man may do; it is a *divine covenant*.

Some divine covenants have a two-way obligation while with other divine covenants God takes everything to Himself. For example, God's covenant with Abraham in Gen. 15:17-20 has no condition placed on Abram, yet it completely obligates God. The Sinai Covenant in Ex. 24 is a covenant freely entered into by the Israelites with God.

Where divine covenant is a one-way matter: God Himself totally makes the promise and sets the terms. It is essentially God's covenant with man, not God and man agreeing with each other. God obligates⁵ Himself to fulfill all the terms of the contract, with man obliged to do nothing. In that situation there is no way man can break the covenant.⁶ In other cases there is an obligation that man is required to fulfill. If he fails, he thereby breaks the covenant and consequently does not receive the promise offered by God.⁷ Divine covenant always contain some blessing of God. They declare His goodness and kindness to His creation, and His unwavering intention to fulfill what He promises. God's covenants, while they are essentially His, invariably are for mankind's benefit. God is always for man, never against him, and since mankind is designed to be the body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, God seeks only mankind's well being.

God is consistently pursuing man, while man repeatedly rejects God, the picture of the groom pursuing the bride who displays no desire for the groom. After the human

5 He makes a commitment that cannot be broken.

6 The husband is to love his wife in this unconditional way, illustrating this love to the world.

7 The wife is to unconditionally respect her husband to reflect the proper human response to God.

race rejected God to the point where He destroyed almost all humans, sparing only eight on the ark, He covenanted again with Noah. Here Noah stands as a representative of all man.

The parties involved in the covenant with Noah are God, Noah, Noah's descendents, and all living creatures (Gen. 9:9–10). The promise of God is that He will never again destroy the earth by a flood (Gen. 9:1). The seal placed on the covenant is the rainbow (Gen. 9:13), visible to God and to humans. There is no obligation on man's part for God binds Himself to maintain the covenant regardless of what man may or may not do (Gen. 9:15–16). The covenant is constantly being fulfilled as rains come and go but never to the extent of destroying the earth, and God's reminder of His covenant is ever before us in the form of a rainbow.

The covenant with Noah is different from the covenant with Adam, since in Noah's covenant there is no obligation on man's part. While God promised never again would a flood like this occur, the next flood will be destruction by fire (2 Peter 3:5–7), which is as sure as the destruction by water.

Then we have the covenant with Abraham, which was initiated by God and has as the background, faith that demonstrated itself in obedience. The parties to the basic covenant are God and Abraham (Gen. 15:18), but it is also with Abraham's seed in generations to come (Gen. 17:7). The ultimate and final covenant with Abraham comes to completion with Jesus Christ and those who belong to Him (Gal. 3:16, 29).

God covenanted with the nation of Israel and with David (2 Sam. 23:5) an everlasting kingship, establishment of an unending dynasty, the throne, completely obligating God. The kingdom was sealed by God, with no condition placed on David, regardless of how far David or his descendants might depart from God, this covenant is firm, regardless

of any possible default by David, his son Solomon, or any of his offspring. Fulfillment of this promise is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY “LAW”?

When used in the plural form:

1. To refer to “laws”—those 600-plus specific commandments that the Israelites were expected to keep as their part of the covenant relationship.
2. To refer to all of these laws together (Matt. 5:18).

When used in the singular form “Law”:

1. May refer to the first five books of the Bible; the books of Moses.
2. By some in the New Testament to refer to the whole Old Testament religious system (1 Cor. 9:20).
3. By some in the New Testament to refer to the Old Testament law as it was interpreted by the Rabbis (Acts 10:28).

THE NATURE OF LAWS:

1. *The Old Testament law is a covenant*, a binding contract between two parties each having a specific responsibility to the other.

In Old Testament times, an all-powerful ruler often gave covenants, to a weaker dependent servant. Each side had a benefit and a responsibility. As long as the servants obeyed the rules he knew that they were loyal. If the servants disobeyed, the ruler would take steps to punish them.

This pattern, well known to the people of the Old Testament, forms the pattern for God's covenant law. This covenant law was made up of six parts:

- a. **Preamble:** identifying the parties to the agreement "*I am the Lord your God*" Ex.20:2).
- b. **Prologue:** giving a history of how the parties became connected to one another *I brought you out of Egypt* Ex. 20:2.
- c. **Stipulations:** the laws themselves.
- d. **Witnesses:** those who will enforce the covenants (*heaven and earth* all of God's creation is concerned with keeping this covenant Deut. 4:26; 30:19).
- e. **Sanctions:** the blessings and curses that encourage keeping of the covenant (Lev. 26; Deut. 28–33).
- f. **Document clause:** is the provision for regular review of the covenant so that it will not be forgotten (Deut. 17:18–19; 31:9–13).

It is important to understand how the laws worked in the relationship between God and Israel; understanding this will help make His-story clearer.

2. *The Old Testament is not our covenant.* The Old Testament represents God's previous covenant with Israel, which we are no longer expected to keep. We should assume that *none* of its laws are required to be kept by us unless they are given again in the New Covenant. *Loyalty* on our part is still expected, however, how it

looks in our relationships with each other and with God has changed.

3. *Two kinds of Old-Covenant laws have clearly not been renewed in the new covenant. They are:*
 - a. **Civil laws:** laws, for which one might be arrested, jailed or even executed. We may read them and gain an understanding of how society functioned in the Bible and we can learn more about God's character but no one living today is a citizen of ancient Israel.
 - b. **Ritual laws:** these included everything from how they were to worship, to the priests' responsibilities, which animals to sacrifice at which time, and all the sin sacrifices and offerings. We are living in a New Covenant where Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice has fulfilled all of these requirements. While these rituals are no longer expected or required, worshiping God continues in the New Covenant. Jesus was questioned on this subject and we may see His response in Mark 7:14–23.

The law cannot be changed (Lk. 16:16–17) but Jesus came to establish a New Covenant (Lk. 22:20; Heb. 8–10) and in so doing “fulfilled” the purpose of the Old Covenant before bringing it's time to an end. In the fulfillment of this Old Covenant Jesus called for the New Covenant—the law of love (Jn. 13:34–35).

4. *Part of the Old Covenant is renewed in the new covenant.* Some of the laws in the Old Testament have been restated or strengthened in the New Testament (Matt.

25:40) “*love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*” (Deut. 6:5) and “*love your neighbor as yourself*” (Lev. 19:18). Jesus takes laws from the Old Testament and gives them a new application (Matt. 5:21–48).

5. *All of the Old Testament law is still the word of God for us even though it is not still the command of God for us.* Even though God is not concerned about whether or not we build a parapet (fence) around the roof of our house so that visitors will not fall off (Deut. 22:8) we still need to be gracious hosts and protect guests when they come into our homes.
6. *Only that which is explicitly renewed from the Old Testament law can be considered part of the New Testament “law of Christ”* (Gal. 6:2). The Ten Commandments would be included in such a category since they are cited in various ways in the New Testament and are binding on Christians today (Matt. 5:21–37; Rom. 13:9–10) as well as the commandment to love. No other specific Old Testament laws can be proved to be strictly binding on Christians even though it is good for Christians to know all these laws.

The laws of God were not a burden to His people, and the people never saw them as a burden. These words affirm the law was received as a blessing.

*“The law of the Lord is perfect,
restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure,*

*enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true;
they are righteous altogether.
They are more desirable than gold,
yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey
and the drippings of the honeycomb.”*
(Ps.19:7-10)

The law about the Sabbath (Deut. 4:12–17) is an excellent example of how God's plan and design is to bless and how man has turned it into a burden. Jesus clearly stated that the Sabbath was a gift for God's people so they, their land and their animals would have a rest. There is nothing in the Old Testament that says you must worship God on the Sabbath. As soon as you make it a law, to go worship on this day you have made a law where the Bible does not have a law! It was given as a gift; God knows we cannot work seven days a week, week after week, and still stay healthy. The animals cannot do this and stay healthy (Mk. 2:27).

However, the New Testament clearly instructs us to get together for mutual encouragement. We are not meant to live alone or in isolation. (Heb. 10:23–25) “*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*”

They also never saw the law as a means of salvation. All the way through the Old Testament, salvation always comes through God by faith, it never comes by works or through obedience; keeping the law never saved

the people. If they were, they would never have been saved. (Deut. 9:6) “*Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.*” The children of Israel got out of Egypt because God chose to do it. It was an act of His mercy, a demonstration of His grace. Salvation is always an act of God never an act of a person. Salvation comes by God, by grace, by His unending pursuing love. The law was not given to save them, it was God’s gracious gift to them, and it was for their good.

Some people in the New Testament had taken the law and turned it into a burden, a list of rules which one must obey to gain salvation. This was never the intent of the Law. The New Testament takes great exception to people suggesting that this is what it meant (Eph. 2:8,9; Rom. 3:20,28; Gal. 2:16; Ja. 2:24; Matt. 19:16-21). The all-pursuing love of God is exactly what is displayed in the love of Jesus Christ.

HOW THE LAWS WORKED IN DAILY LIFE

The *civil laws*: laws that applied to how people live together in community. These were laws for marriage, farming, for business and they all deal with how people live together. They are mostly from Exodus 20 to Deuteronomy 34.

Next we have the ritual laws; these are careful instruction on how to worship. The Israelites were to live in the middle of Baal worshipers so they needed careful instruction on how to worship God. The Israelites were shepherds, they were nomads, and they roamed around openly grazing their livestock. When they got to the Promised Land they would become farmers. Each of the nations around the Israelites had a separate god for each

category of life's activities. They even had one god for open grazing livestock and another god for growing crops.

The gods of the farmers had become gods of fertility and they were also credited with responsibility for fertility in humans. The belief was that Baal deities or gods, were responsible for all these areas and therefore they were the ones who would cause the crops to grow.

The danger was that the children of Israel might start to think like foreigners, having a god for shepherds and now adding another god for crop farmers. Repeatedly the Israelites added Baal and other idols. In some cases they even transformed Yahweh⁸ into Baal (Ex. 32:24).

This underlying situation is what fuels⁹ all of God's instructions on how the Israelites need to worship. There was a constant danger that they would adopt worshipping idols so that they could become successful.

Most of these ritual laws are in the book of Leviticus. The recurring message of these laws is, 'I the Lord your God am holy. There is no other God like Me and I want you to be set apart for Me, and to Me.' The call was for the people to come to God in a very specific and precise way so that the other gods would not contaminate them. Every one of those laws ultimately goes back to the first of the Ten Commandments, that you should have no other gods besides Me. This again is echoed in our marriage covenant, "forsaking all others and cleave only to you".

The third group of laws are moral or ethical laws: in the New Testament these laws are summarized by Jesus when He says (Matt. 22:37-40) "*This summarizes all of the law and the prophets And He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' "This is the great and foremost commandment. "The second is like it, 'You shall love*

8 Hebrew title for God.

9 *Fuels* is an expression meaning, "It is the driving force". Like *fuel* in a car is what makes it drive.

your neighbor as yourself. “*On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*””

The laws are not about how we should obey God but rather are designed to help us learn about God (Ex. 22:21ff¹⁰). Israel’s problem in the Old Testament was not with their inability to keep the law; the problem was of their choosing not to do so, not unlike today.

IN SUMMARY: THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

1. Don’t see the Old Testament law as God’s fully inspired word *for* you or as God’s direct command *to* you.
2. Do see the Old Testament law as the basis for the Old Covenant, and therefore for Israel’s history, not as binding on Christians in the New Covenant, except where specifically renewed.
3. Do see God’s justice, love, and high standards revealed in the Old Testament Law, and remember God’s mercy is made equal to the high standards.
4. Do see the Old Testament Law as model-showing examples for a full range of expected behavior, not as a completed list.
5. Do remember that the main point of the law (the Ten Commandments and the two chief laws of love) is repeated in the Prophets and again in the New Testament. Don’t expect the Old Testament Law to be cited often by the Prophets or the New Testament.
6. Do see the Old Testament Law as a generous gift to Israel, bringing much blessing when obeyed, not as a grouping of non-relational commands limiting people’s freedom.

The book of Deuteronomy is presented as the instructions of Moses to the people. In this way, Moses is seen

10 “ff” indicated you are to include the verses following the verse cited.

as the mediator of the covenant, as God's messenger he is establishing the terms of the treaty. Moses serves as a groomsman at a wedding. He functions as the envoy¹¹ of God. An envoy would carry with him a written document as proof to be retained in the official records. The instruction, however, would be delivered orally, just like in Africa today. So the words of Moses to the people to be loyal to the terms of the covenant are very much what any Royal envoy would have expected to say. The subjects would have been reminded that it was a privilege to be brought into this agreement and it would be wise to refrain from any action that would put at risk these privileges.

Here were people who knew only slavery and Egyptian culture for centuries, whom God was now about to reform into a totally new people on the face of the earth. Not only must they be formed into an army of warriors to conquer the land promised to their ancestors, but they must also be formed into a community that would be able to live together during their time in the desert and eventually in the land itself. At the same time they needed direction on how they were to be God's people, both in their relationships with each other and in their relationship with God, so they would shed the ways and culture of Egypt and not adopt the ways and culture of the Canaanites whose land they were to possess.

Assignments:

1. Read through the book of Deuteronomy making note of all the covenant language and relationship between God, Moses and the children of Israel. Notice how God's never ending love constantly pursues the children of

11 Similar to how the donkey carried Jesus, the donkey may think and feel like he is important, since there seems to be much honour and praise coming his way, the truth is, that the one riding him is the one to whom honour is directed. So, an *envoy* may receive honour and favour, but he must always remember that he *represents* the King; he is not the king!

Israel, and how the children of Israel regularly reject God. Ask yourself how to respond to God's call?

2. Name several doctrines or truths that you embrace that are implied in the Bible but clarified during the course of church history.
3. Name several doctrines or truths that other Christian groups believe but which you reject because you do not find them in the Scriptures.
4. What was Jesus' view of the traditions of Israel's religious leaders as seen in Matthew 23:13–23?

IV.

PROPHETS, GOD'S MOUTHPIECE

It was in the early 1970's, a young 17-year-old lad was thousands of miles from home for the first time in his life. He was in the southern United States assisting in the cleanup after hurricane Camille, which until recently was the most severe storm to hit North America. A manager with the Red Cross, taking a few of the young adults on a tour of New Orleans, insisted that the young lad see someone known locally as "the seer". The lad was not aware of any significance to this visit but he noticed the manager felt it was very important.

They entered a room and there was an old man sitting in a big chair. He asked the young lad to come closer and gazed intently into his eyes; taking him by the hand he spoke things to him about his future as though reading a newspaper. Many years later, as this now young man shared this information, he discovered it was not well received. He would often wonder, "What was that?"

Currently there is no shortage of people with the title of, "Prophet". Some in the news media seem to be thriving economically and building large businesses based on this calling. We will neither validate nor discredit these individuals. However, I find it interesting how governments and political forces, depending on the message of the prophet, wish to align with a prophet or condemn them as

a false prophet. People want to gain an advantage by any means possible, and in that respect, it is very similar to the first prophets.

FIRST PROPHETS

The first person whom the Bible calls a prophet was Abraham (Gen. 20:7; Ps. 105:15), but Old Testament prophecy received its standard form in the life and person of Moses, who established a standard for all future prophets (Deut. 18:15–19; 34:10). Every feature that illustrates the true prophet of Yahweh was first found in Moses. He received a special and personal call from God; **the initiative in making a prophet rests with God** (Ex. 3:1–4:17; Is. 6; Jer. 14–19; Ez. 1–3; Hos. 1:2; Am. 7:14–15; Jonah 1:1). It is only the false prophet who dares take to the office upon him/herself (Jer. 14:14; 23:21).

The prophets were not only/mainly coming to Israel foretelling Israel's future; they were coming to Israel as the enforcers of the covenant. God had given His covenant and now the prophets were given the responsibility by God to speak forth the enforcement of the covenant. Everything that goes on in the Prophets' is related to the laws. Everything the Prophets' say, presupposes the covenant and its stipulations. What they say then is, "Because you have done this or you have not done that—this is going to happen".

THE FUNCTION OF PROPHECY IN ISRAEL

1. *The prophets were covenant enforcement mediators.* Through them God reminds people and the generations after Moses that if His law is kept, blessing will result but if not, punishment will follow. There are

specific blessings God covenanted towards Israel (Lev. 26:1–13; Deut. 4:32–40; 28:1–14); but these blessings are announced with a warning: if Israel does not obey God's law, the blessings will stop.¹ There are some punishments that Israel may expect (Levi. 26:14–39; Deut. 4:15–28; Deut. 28:15–32:42).

As we read the Prophetic books we need to look for this simple pattern (1) an identification of Israel's sin or God's love for His people; (2) a prediction of curse or blessing, depending on the circumstance. Most of the time, this is what the prophets are passing on, according to God's inspiration of them.

2. *The prophet's message was not their own, but God's.* It is important to remember that God is the one who called the prophets to speak His word to Israel (Ex. 3–4; Is. 6; Jer. 1; Ez. 1–3; Ho. 1:2; Am. 7:14–15; Jonah 1:1). If someone presumed to take the office of prophet upon himself, this would be good reason to consider such a one a false prophet (Jer. 14:14; 23:21). The prophets' responded to a divine call.

God often describes the prophets as 'My servants' (2 Kings 17:13, 23; 21:10; 24:2; Ez. 9:11; Jer. 7:25). Prophet, as servant of God was first a title of Moses (Jos. 1:1–2). So God views prophets as His servants.' Man of God' (Deut. 33:1) is what the people called a prophet and this continued until the end of the monarchy (1 Sam. 22:27; 9:6; 1 Kings 13:1).

3. *The prophets were God's direct representatives.* They were like ambassadors from the heavenly court who

¹ There is nothing we can say or do that will obligate God to respond to us in a specific way, we cannot manipulate God. Later in the book we will look at Job as Job serves as a reminder that bad things sometimes happen, even though we may have done everything right, and that does not assume God is wrong.

relayed the divine message of God to the people. They were neither radical social reformers nor innovative religious thinkers. God had already given His plan for social reform and religious thought in the Covenant Law. When the prophets preached against abusing the poor it was because God, in His law, had instituted the care of the poor and needy and they were acting in their role as God's mouthpiece to defend social justice.

No matter which group broke those laws, God's word through the prophet held punishment. Sometimes the guilt lay with royalty (2 Sam. 12:1–14; 24:11–17; Ho. 1:4) or with spiritual leaders (Ho. 4:4–11; Am. 7:17; Mal. 2:1–9), or another group. The prophet conveyed God's message of national curse faithfully. Sometimes at God's command the prophets even put things in place or took them down (1 Kings 19:16; 21:17–22) and declared war (2 Kings 3:18–19; 2 Chron. 20:14–17; Hos. 5:5–8) or spoke against war (Jer. 27:8–22).

A goal of the prophet was to interpret and explain historical events to the people. Israel's prophetic awareness of history came from Moses. Moses was forewarned of events and of their significance by the verbal communications of God.

The Israelites concern for the poor, widows and orphans and for the persecuted also came through Moses (Deut. 24:19–22). Seeing the oppressor as the enemy (Lev. 19:9ff), came through Moses. Many of the prophets were found confronting their kings and playing an active, statesman's part in national affairs. This was a function of the prophet, demonstrated in Moses, who legislated for the nation, and was even called 'King' (Deut. 33:5). We also see in Moses that, combination of *proclamation* and *prediction*, which is found in all the prophets. It is the fitting together of proclamation and prediction, which designates the true prophet from the false prophet.

Two other characteristics of the prophets', also found in Moses were the *use of symbols* in the delivery of the message (Jer. 19:1ff; Ez. 4:1ff); Moses used the uplifted hand (Ex. 17:8ff) and the uplifted serpent (Num. 21:8). Finally, the *intercessory* side of the prophetic task was also displayed in Moses. He was speaking favorably for the people towards God (Ex. 18:19; Num. 27:5) and on at least one time, he literally stood in the gap as a man of prayer (Ex. 32:30ff; Deut. 9:18ff; 1 Kings 13:6; 2 Kings 19:4; Jer. 7:16; 11:14).

FORE-TELLING AND FORTH-TELLING

Both proclamation and prediction are bringing God's view to the people. In *foretelling* the prophet is predicting the future, since God knows what will happen if they continue in the way they are. *Forth telling* has a different element to it. It is as though saying the words is making something happen. It reminds us of God speaking, and the earth and everything on it came into being.

The prophet was first a *man of the word of God*. This word was not merely a passive opinion of God but rather the prophets' believed that stating God's word completely changed the whole situation. For example, in Isaiah 28–29 we have a picture of people struggling for a solution and it is viewed mainly as a political problem as is evidenced in Isaiah 30:1–2. The people, striving for a solution apart from God, are a demonstration of their rejection of God's Word.

Isaiah 30 and following, shows that the problem is not one of political balance of power between Judah, Assyria and Egypt, but one of spiritual relationship between Judah, Assyria and Egypt, and the Word of God. The Word becomes the active ingredient added to the situation effectively moving the situation forward (Is. 40:8; 55:11).

Clearly, however, the prophets spoke to their situation primarily by means of warnings and encouragements concerning the future. Almost every prophet first appears as a foreteller (Am. 1:2). There are three grounds of this practice of foretelling.

1. If the people are to exercise due moral responsibility in the present, it is clearly necessary that they should be aware of the future.
2. Prediction arises from the fact that the prophets speak in the name of the Holy Ruler of history. We mentioned earlier that the prophets' call was primarily to the knowledge of God. Out of this knowledge sprang the awareness of what He would do, as He guided history according to the unchangeable principles of His Holy nature.
3. Prediction seems to belong to the very idea of the prophetic office (Deut. 18:9ff). We also note the extraordinarily detailed *telepathic*² and *clairvoyant*³ gifts of the prophets. Elisha had the reputation of knowing what was said in secret from afar off (2 Ki. 6:12) and gave evidence that it was not an inaccurate assessment of his powers. Ezekiel is famed for his detailed knowledge of Jerusalem at the time of his residence in Babylon (Ez. 8–11). The prophets were men of remarkable *psychic powers*, for example, the foreknowledge of personal names (1 Ki. 13:2; Is. 44:28; Acts 9:12).

2 *Telepathic* is a way of knowing things without explanation, just *knowing*, intuitively or by ones senses.

3 *Clairvoyant*, is similar to telepathic, it refers to *mystical*, or *spiritual*, again, physically or scientifically unexplainable.

NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS

Even though there are no “prophetic” books in the New Testament, there still are prophets in the New Testament. The Old Testament prophetic line did not end with Malachi, but with John the Baptist (Matt. 11:13). Prophetic utterances of John’s father Zechariah, and of Anna, Simeon and Mary at the beginning of Luke’s Gospel all bear witness to the ongoing prophetic inspiration (Lk. 1:46–55, 67–79; 2:26–38).

Christ did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17), and based His understanding of His own mission and destiny mainly upon their predictions. Jesus Christ points us back to the Old Testament prophets and of their message as a permanent revelation of God, sufficient to lead to repentance and therefore to make guilty those who fail to listen to them (Lk. 16:19–31). The Old Testament prophets are authorized teachers of the Christian church, men whose words are still to be heeded as the Word of God (2 Pe. 1:19–21). Just like in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament, the initiative in making a prophet rests with God.

CHRIST, THE GREATEST PROPHET

One of the most common references to Jesus Christ by those who knew Him was as ‘prophet from God’, or ‘teacher from God’, or both (Matt. 14:5; 21:11, 46; Lk. 7:16; Jn. 3:2; 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17). Their basic idea of a prophet was clearly based upon the Old Testament prophetic ministry, and included the declaring of God’s word, having supernatural knowledge, and displaying the power of God (Jn. 3:2; 4:19).

Jesus accepted this title, among others, and used it on Himself (Matt. 13:15; Lk. 13:33), as well as accepting

the title of Teacher (Jn. 13:13), and even of a scribe, by suggestion (Matt. 13:51–52). The apostles came to realize that the ultimate fulfillment of Moses' prophecy (Deut. 18:15ff) of the 'prophet' like him whom God would raise up, was found in Christ Himself (Acts 3:22–26; 7:37).

In the case of Jesus we do not just have a prophet, but the Son to whom the Spirit is not given sparingly. Because of this free flow of the Spirit, the ministry of prophet and teacher are perfectly combined, so in Christ, the greatest of prophetic revelation is shown (Matt. 21:33–43; Lk. 4:14–15; Jn. 3:34). More than the greatest prophet, we see Jesus as the one who sent the prophets (Matt. 23:34, 37) and the one who not just speaks the words of God, but is Himself the Word made flesh (Jn. 1:1–14; Rev. 19:13).

We must mention that prophecy in the New Testament gives no new revelation concerning God in Christ, the way of salvation, or the principles of Christian life. The living God uses the gift of prophecy to give particular local guidance to a church, nation or individual, or to warn or encourage by way of prediction and reminders, in agreement with the written word of God, by which all such words must be tested. Certainly the New Testament sees the job of the prophet to graciously deliver the word that the Spirit gives him, the same truth plainly given to all the saints (Jude 3), to challenge and encourage our faith.

Always in the New Testament, the prophets of both Testaments are regarded as the pioneers of faith, who stand in the front line in every age and reap the full blast of the wind of persecution stored up in the world by the devil against the people of God, whether through Jewish or Gentile opposition (Matt. 23:37; Lk. 11:47–50; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess. 2:15; Rev. 11:3–8; 16:6; 18:20, 24).

The treatment these prophets' received as God's voice is typical of what all His servants and children, who are faithful in their testimony, may expect in a fallen world; together with their victory, resurrection and inheritance

beyond it, by God's grace (Matt. 5:10–12; Heb. 11:39–12:2). For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10), and all His people are called to bear that testimony faithfully in various ways by the power of the same Spirit.⁴

SOME REASONS TO STUDY THE PROPHETS

1. To enrich the life of anyone who learns their teaching.
2. To strengthen the faith of the one who sees the fulfillment of the prophecies and predictions in history and in the New Testament.
3. To help one better read the signs of the times—seeing the principles on which God dealt with disobedience.
4. To make hearing and reading the news of today more meaningful—concluding God, in His providence, will act in a like manner today.
5. To learn as much of the word of God as possible.

What To Look For As You Study

1. Since the role of the prophet is being more than a fore-teller, look for places where he was a forth teller, where speaking the words change what was happening.
2. In times of spiritual and moral repression and decay, God raised up prophets in an effort to turn people back to Him. The main purpose the prophet served was to get people to repent. Look for ways in which the prophet:
 - a) Emphasized the deity of God: His Majesty, holiness, righteousness, and justice

⁴ Taken primarily from NEW BIBLE DICTIONARY 2ND EDITON. Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester England, 1982. *Prophecy, Prophets* pgs. 975-985

- b) Made known the principles on which God would act toward people
- c) Declared God to be infinite in wisdom, knowledge, and understanding so He can, therefore, declare the end from the beginning and never err in His actions
- d) Declared God to be infinite in power so we can carry out His divine purpose,
- e) Declared God to be immutable, His principles never change— so man can, therefore, depend on Him to act and react at all times according to a definite pattern (Is. 43:11ff; 44:6, 24–26; 46:10).

V.

PSALMS

My pastor friend sat in my office with an erratic heartbeat and barely being able to breath. He did not know what was happening or what was wrong with him but I recognized it as being *posttraumatic stress disorder*¹. As I explained the symptoms to him and he recognized them, we began to address some of the core areas of his concern.

He and most of his family had narrowly escaped their hunters in Africa and believed God had brought them safely into Canada, arriving with only the clothes on their back. They did not know whom they could trust or not trust. God had ordained that we should meet, and by God's grace we became brothers. As I sat and listened to this man's story I was asking the Holy Spirit, "How can I begin to help this man?" The Lord directed me to Psalms 88.

My brother began to read this Psalm, I asked him to read it aloud. Then I asked him to read it aloud again, and again, and to read it like he really meant it, to read it as if he had written it. Psalms 88 is probably one of the most depressing songs in the Bible. The simple fact that these are God's words meant that God understood what he was going through and what he was feeling. This Psalm ministered to the spirit and soul of this man, gave

¹ A type of anxiety disorder; it can occur after you've seen or experienced a traumatic event that involved the threat of injury or death.

him permission to feel these emotions, and so began his healing. Sometimes there just are no good answers, at least none that can make our situation any better, but it is most helpful to know that someone understands and cares. We do not always need to understand exactly what is happening, how or why it is happening, sometimes we just need the Holy Spirit to touch us, and for that, the Psalms are God's gift to us.

The difficulty with interpreting the Psalms arises primarily from their nature—what they are. Because the Bible is God's Word, many Christians automatically assume that all it contains are words *from* God *to* people. Thus they fail to recognize that the Bible also contains words spoken *to* God or *about* God—which is what the Psalms do—and that these words, too, are God's Word. That is, because the Psalms are basically prayers and hymns, by their very nature they are addressed to God or express truth about God in song.

This reality presents us with a unique problem of applying Scripture. *How* do these words spoken *to* God function as a word *from* God to us, since they are not direct commands or stories that get us in touch with God's Story? They do not function primarily for the teaching of doctrine or moral behavior, but beyond this, they are profitably used for the purposes intended by God, who inspired them, by helping us to express ourselves to God and to consider His ways. Psalms is one of the most quoted books in the New Testament for understanding Christ. The Psalms, therefore, are of great benefit to the believer who looks to the Bible for help in expressing joys and sorrows, successes and failures, hopes and regrets.²

The book of Psalms is somewhat like a modern hymn-book in that it is a collection of songs and prayers written by several people over a long period of time. It describes the worshipers' response of praise because of God's power

2 Fee, Gordon, Stuart, Douglas. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Zondervan 2003 pg. 205

and love; expresses their hope based on God's promises for the future; and records their cries for God to rescue them from the troubles of life. Believers in public and in private worshipping God use this collection of songs.

Wherever the early church gathered, in the temple (Ps. 100:4) or in homes (Col. 3:16), Psalms were sung. When a Psalm was sung (Ps.48), the singer was testifying to God's greatness, the listener was hearing how God had worked in another person's life, and everyone was encouraged to trust in God's power. The Psalms were filled with the emotions of fear and anguish because of persecution, as well as trust and love because of God's protection in the past. These prayers present a look into the close personal relationship that can exist between God and each one of us.

Many of the Psalms were written to music. Thus the heading of Psalm 4 includes the direction, "*for the choir director, (to be played) on stringed instruments,*" or the heading to Psalm 5 has "*for the choir director, for flute accompaniment.*" Psalm 3 has the word "*Selah*"³ at the end of verses 2, 4, and 8. This word indicated some sort of musical interlude. Several of the Psalms encourage singing (Ps. 95:1,2; 96:1,2; 98:1,4–6), and others promote the playing of instruments while people sing the praises of God (Ps. 98:5,6; 108:1,2; 150:3–5).

HISTORICAL SETTING

Many of the Psalms have two settings—the original historical experience of the author who wrote the Psalm⁴ and the later setting of the Psalm as it was sung in the temple in Jerusalem on a feast day. Some headings suggest the

3 *Seleah* is inserted to direct the reader to pause and consider what has been said; it may mean to express musically or in dance the emotion aroused by the words, to think about, contemplate the seriousness of the words.

4 An example is, David out on a hill caring for his sheep as he writes a Psalm.

original historical situation that caused the author to write the Psalm.

Psalm 3 was connected to the events surrounding David fleeing from his rebellious son Absalom (2 Sam. 13:34–18:33). Psalm 18 fits the context of David fleeing from Saul (2 Sam. 21–22). Psalm 30 commemorates the dedication of the place where God's house would be built (2 Sam. 24), and Psalm 51 was David's prayer after his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11–12). Other Psalms contain no historical information about the situation of the author in their heading but have clues within the Psalm itself. Psalm 45 is connected to a wedding.

The people who sang these songs many years later in the temple or in the early church did not always know the situation of the original author. Nevertheless, they could identify with the feelings of hopelessness portrayed in these songs because they had experienced similar emotions in their own lives. Other Psalms were primarily written to sing the praise of God in the temple or at a feast day. These Psalms frequently deal with universal problems or common reasons for joy that affect people in all cultures.

GROUPING OF THE PSALMS

The Psalms can be put into several different groups that have a similar topic, structure, or use. There are *messianic* Psalms (Ps. 2,110), *wisdom* Psalms (Ps. 1,73), *royal* Psalms (Ps. 96–99), *Zion* songs (Ps. 46,48), and *historical* Psalms (Ps. 105,106). We will look at Psalms of Lament and Psalms of Praise.

PSALMS OF LAMENT

People in Israel lamented and cried out to God for help for several reasons. Some Psalms describe a situation in which an enemy is attacking the individual author or the whole nation. A city may seek for God's protection as an enemy army is marching against it (Ps. 44:4–16); or an individual such as David might mourn his own personal situation when Saul had him trapped in a cave in the Judean desert (Ps. 142). At other times people lamented and confessed their sins (Ps. 51,130), mourned because of a serious sickness (Ps. 6), or lamented the fact that they had been unjustly accused of some evil deed (Ps. 7,17,120).

When people lamented, they frequently wept, fasted, and put on sackcloth and ashes (Joel 2:12–17). These were not casual requests for God's blessing. Their only hope was to depend on God for mercy and protection. The book of Psalms includes six or seven community laments and about fifty individual laments.

Most laments have the same general structure:

1. *An invocation, a call for God to help.*

This is frequently quite short. In Psalm 13 it is “*How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?*” The invocation is a recognition that the lamenter is turning to God for help. Indeed, God is the only source of strength for those who are having difficulty.

2. *A lament or complaint.*

In this section the worshiper describes the problem. Frequently, three issues are brought up: God is not protecting him, enemies are persecuting him, and he is in sorrow. In Psalm 13:1, 2 the worshiper complains about

God: “*How long will You hide Your face from me?*” about the person’s own situation: “*How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day?*” and about the enemies: “*How long will my enemy be exalted over me?*”

These complaints are honest expressions of how the people feel. They do not hide their feelings of sorrow or disappointment. Although they do not blame God, they do believe that God can solve their problems. They express their complaints because they believe their situation will change when God hears their prayers. These Psalms encourage believers to be open with God, to tell Him exactly how they feel, not to hide behind some religious attitude.

3. *A petition or request for God’s help.*

This portion usually asks God to listen to the person’s prayer and act to bring salvation or deliverance from the problems of life. In Psalm 13:3,4 the petition is “*Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,” And my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken.*” By calling on God for help, we confess our dependence on God and by faith rest in His strong arms.

4. *Confession of trust or statement of confidence.*

Even though believers may face great problems and feel very discouraged, once the petition is stated, the worshipers are to turn their attention from their problems to God, the solution to their petition. The confession of trust or statement of confidence is an expression of faith, an active looking forward to the fulfillment of the request. In Psalm 13:5 the psalmist proclaims, “*But I have trusted*

in Your loving-kindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.” Because the person believes God can be trusted, there is confidence that God’s salvation will bring great rejoicing in the coming days.

5. *A vow of praise.*

Many laments end with a commitment that the believer will sing God’s praise when He has answered this prayer. In Psalm 13:6 the worshiper promises: “*I will sing to the Lord, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.*” What began as a burdensome lament ends with a note of hope and victory, with the expectation of glorifying God and proclaiming His grace to others in song!

Each prayer is an individual expression that follows a somewhat unique series of building blocks. The people were different, the situations were different, and their sense of hope or hopelessness varied based on the seriousness of the problem.

PSALMS OF PRAISE

Another large group of Psalms are hymns of praise. These fall into several subcategories according to the structure, topic, or reason for praising God. Some hymns declare God’s praise for answering the lament of a believer. Psalm 9 is this type of declarative or narrative hymn of praise. God is praised (9:1–3,7–11,14) because the worshiper remembers how God destroyed his enemies (9:4–6,12,13,15,16).

A second group of hymns of ascent⁵ were sung as pilgrims or regular worshipers were coming to the

5 2 Sam. 15:30 “David went up the ascent of the *Mount of Olives*”. *Ascent* would remind people of moving up the mountain towards the Temple. Also it would invoke a picture of moving up towards God, similar to Moses ascending the Mount to be with God.

temple. These Psalms refer to the joy of seeing the city of Jerusalem and being in the temple to worship God (Ps. 122).

A major group of hymns proclaim the glory of God and list a series of reasons why God should receive praise. The structure of these descriptive hymns of praise is quite simple.

1. A call to praise God.
2. Reasons for praising God.

This pattern may be partially or fully repeated in this simple formula. Psalm 100 is a well-known hymn that follows this pattern. It begins with a call to praise God in 100:1, 2 *“Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing.”* This is followed with a reason for praising God in 100:3: *“Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”*

This pattern is repeated with another call to praise God in 100:4 *“Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.”* and a second reason for praising God in 100:5 *“For the Lord is good; His loving-kindness is everlasting And His faithfulness to all generations.”* Although the pattern is fairly simple, this brief Psalm of praise contains a great deal of theology.

The worshiper is recognizing the importance of coming to God's house to worship and praise God. This is not just a habit, the respectable thing to do, or an issue of obeying parents. Believers understand why God is praised: they have experienced His grace, and their hearts are full of motivation for thanksgiving. God created them, God considers them His special people, and He provides for their needs. He is good to them; He repeatedly shows His

love; He is faithful in so many ways. He is worthy to be praised.

These hymns fulfill one of the chief purposes for the existence of mankind on earth—the purpose of enjoying and glorifying God.

We will not closely examine the other types of Psalms but will give a brief overview.

Historical Psalms (105, 106)

Historical Psalms are different from other Psalms; they do not relate to a specific event in the life of a believer. Instead, they review Israel's history in order to remind the listener of the nation's past sins, to praise God for His gracious deeds on their behalf, or to encourage the people to trust God because He has been faithful in the past.

Imprecatory Psalms (Calling for God's curse)

A number of Psalms contain curses against the enemies of God's people. Some of these curses are a small part of a lament (Ps. 139:19–22), while other curses take up the major portion of the Psalm (Ps. 35,69,109).

Psalms of Confession and Penitence

Confessing sins was also closely associated with the presentation of the sin offering at the temple. It must be emphasized, however, that the act of offering a sacrifice was not the important element. The essential thing God was looking for was a broken spirit, the repentant heart of the sinner (Ps. 51:16,17).

Wisdom Psalms

Although it is a little difficult to identify what a wisdom Psalm is, most agree that there are a group of Psalms that reflect the teachings of the wisdom books (Ps.1, 37,73,112,127,128).

Royal Psalms

Within this group of Psalms are songs about or by an earthly king, as well as songs about the kingship of God. In the theocracy⁶ established when Israel first became the people of God, it was understood that God was their ruler and king.

Messianic Psalms

The interpreter must accept the witness of the New Testament that these refer to Jesus the Messiah, but one should explain these messianic Psalms on the basis of what was revealed to David, not what was revealed hundreds of years later when the Gospels were written. Since the Davidic Psalms say nothing about Jesus' virgin birth,⁷ it appears that David did not know about this.⁸

Even though David did not know about the person of Jesus being the Messiah, he did display some sense of the presence of the Lord. While the Pharisees were debating with Jesus on the issue of His authority or where He came from, Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1 after He asks them (Matt. 22:43–45) *“What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They said to Him, “The son of David.” He said to*

6 Theocracy is that form of government where God is the Head, God governs the nation or community.

7 Revealed about 250 years later in Isa. 7:14

8 Schultz, S. J., & Smith, G. V. (2001). *Exploring the Old Testament* (112–119). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet” ’? “If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” Even though David did not know the Messiah as we know Him today, he was looking ahead to the Messiah in the same way that we today look back to the Messiah.

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE PSALMS

1. God in sovereignty is involved in directing each believer’s life. In times of difficulty believers can bring all their burdens to God, for He always hears and comforts those who come to Him.
2. In spite of human sinfulness, God graciously offers forgiveness to those who will repent. The prayer for help should not just be centered on the problem or what is needed. It should also focus on God’s ability to answer prayer, the believer’s commitment to trust God, and the ultimate desire to glorify God for His grace and goodness.
3. God hates sin and will judge the sinner. God’s house is a place of praise and thanksgiving. The joy of the Lord should fill the hearts and lips of those who have been blessed by God.
4. God’s way of life has been revealed in His Word. The righteous person will wisely avoid sinful ways and follow God’s way. God is to be praised because He is God, we are His people, and He has provided for us.

5. God is the King of this world. He reigns with all power and with perfect justice. In the end He will defeat every other power on earth, and all will praise Him.
6. At the end of time God will send the Messiah, who now sits at the right hand of God, to defeat the forces of evil and rule the whole earth.⁹

Poetry has been well defined as “the measured language of emotion.” Hebrew poetry deals almost exclusively with the great question of man’s relation to God. Guilt, condemnation, punishment, pardon, redemption, and repentance are the themes of this heaven-born poetry.

Poetry helps us to connect with God; it gives credibility to our feelings, emotions and thoughts. We see ourselves in many of these Psalms and as the Psalmist affirms his well-placed hope and trust in the Lord, we gain new hope and new strength to trust. Many times the Psalms gives us words to express how we feel when our own words fail us.

Discussions, Questions And Activities

1. What can we learn about a Psalm from its title?
2. What are some similarities and differences between the book of Psalms and our modern hymnbooks?
3. What is the common structure of the lament? How does this structure encourage the people lamenting to overcome the fear and the discouragement of their difficult situation?
4. List some reasons why people praise the Lord in the descriptive hymns of praise in Psalm 33, 111, 135, and 145.

⁹ Schultz, S. J., & Smith, G. V. (2001). *Exploring the Old Testament* (120–126). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

5. Try writing and praying a simple prayer of lament based on a real problem you are facing (following the structure provided above) and also a basic hymn of praise that declares your own reasons for praising God. If you are musical, you might even set your hymn of praise to music.

VI.

WISDOM AND WISDOM LITERATURE

In Canada we have a saying; “Necessity is the mother of invention”. This means that the one who properly understands the need, and does not have a solution, is most likely to discover a solution to the problem, even if it means inventing a new device or tool. This same principal may be illustrated by “*wamva Mmimba ndiye atsekula chitseko* (Chewa, Malawi—‘the one with diarrhea opens the door’, meaning that the one with a problem goes to seek help)”¹

Each culture and language has its own way of communicating practical wisdom, and much of the beauty or image of the wisdom is lost in translation. However, the general principal is usually clear and we see new ways of communicating the same deep, practical truth. For example in my native Low German tongue, *Wea dot kliene nicht ieght es dot grotte nicht viet*. Directly translated is “Who the small not appreciates does the large not deserve”. And of course the meaning is quite clear even though the flow of it is lost.

My friend and brother in Rwanda gives this example of local wisdom: ‘Ubwenge bw’umwe burayobya.’ directly translated as, “The counsel of one person may mislead.”

1 AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY: Tokunboh Adeyemo, general editor. Zondervan © 2010. pg. 322

This proverb is said when they want people to seek guidance from many people, because relying on counsel of one person may lead you astray. ² The meaning of the proverb is clear, even in the translation, but it does not flow smoothly or naturally in translation.

BIBLICAL WISDOM

Biblical wisdom begins with a right relationship with the Lord (Pr. 1:7). The wise person believes that there is a God, that He is the Creator and Ruler of all things, and that He has put within His creation a divine order that, if obeyed, leads ultimately to success. Wise people also declare that there is a moral law operating in this world, a principle of divine justice which makes sure that eventually the wicked are judged and the righteous are rewarded. Biblical wisdom has no relationship to a person's intelligence or education; it is a matter of moral and spiritual understanding. It has to do with character and values; it means looking at the world through the lens of God's truth.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "wise" *hakam*, is used to describe people skillful in working with their hands, such as the artisans who helped build the tabernacle (Ex. 28:3; 35:30–36:2) and Solomon's temple (1 Chron. 22:15). Wisdom is something very practical that affects every area of life. It gives order and purpose to life; it gives discernment in making decisions; and it provides a sense of fulfillment in life to the glory of God. People with wisdom have the skill to face life honestly and courageously, and to manage it successfully so that God's purposes are fulfilled in their lives.

WISDOM'S MAJOR DOCTRINE

1. *God is the creator of the universe* (Job 28:23–27; 38:4–39:30; Pr. 3:19–20; 8:22–34). The consequences of this doctrine are these:
 - a) Man is a moral creature responsible to the Creator for his conduct toward fellow creatures. The ethical content of this literature is built upon this doctrine.
 - b) God is viewed in broad, universal terms rather than narrow nationalistic terms. He is God of all mankind, not just Israel.
2. *God is the source of wisdom* (Job 9:4; 11:6; 12:13; 32:8; Pr. 2:6; 8:22–31). Wisdom is God's Word written in nature and human experience illuminated by direct revelation in the law.
3. *Each person has a moral responsibility to be a positive influence in society.* He must not harm his neighbor. He must provide for himself and his family. He must live up to his God-given potential.
4. *God upholds the moral universe according to cause and effect.* Righteousness is rewarded, and wickedness is punished (Pr. 10:30). When this principle clashed with experience, wisdom teachers attempted to explain the contradiction.³

DIMENSIONS OF WISDOM

A survey of the Old Testament indicates the broad dimensions of “wisdom.” Skilled artisans (Ex. 35:35) were

³ Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms*. Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co.

considered endowed with the gift of wisdom, as were goldsmiths (Jer. 10:9), musicians (1Kgs. 4:31–32; Jer. 9:17), military strategists and statesmen (Isa. 10:13; 29:14; Jer. 49:7), magicians and mystics (Gen. 41:8; Isa 44:25), and wise judges (2 Sam. 14:17, 20; 19:27).

The *priests* were the official teachers of the law of God. The *prophets* delivered what were regarded as direct revelations from God. The *wise men* gave personal counsel and political advice.

WISDOM LITERATURE

If one had to design a cover for each of the three wisdom books in the Bible, drawn from their own contents, one might represent them by the various houses they describe. For Proverbs it could appropriately be the seven-pillared house of Wisdom, or better still that gracious, well-stocked home of the gifted wife, whose virtues bring the book to its calm close. For Job, a very different picture: perhaps the wreckage in which his family perished when a 'great wind came across the wilderness, and struck the four corners of the house'; or perhaps even the ash heap to which he banished himself. As for Ecclesiastes, its insistence on the passing of earthly glory could hardly find a better symbol than its own description of a great house (12:3–4) in the grip of slow inevitable decay.

Between them, the three books clearly cover three aspects of existence which no one can afford to overlook: the demands of practical good management; the mystery of calamities that are beyond control or explanation; and the brevity of human life.⁴

4 Kidner, Derek. *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes* Inter-Varsity Press, 1985 pg.116

JOB

All of Job wrestles with this one central issue, “How do you explain why this doesn’t work out?” His answer is, “You have to trust God because not everything is as neatly packaged as human beings tend to think it is”. Job, a godly man, knew that he had done nothing to deserve the wrath of God. He asserts his innocence (3:6; 7:9; 10:12; 14:16; 17:19; 21:23; 24:26–31) and expresses his frustration at the horrors he has to endure. He cannot understand why such things have happened to him. His friends are horrified to hear such talk; to them it is blasphemy. They persist in trying to convince him that he has offended God by his protests. One by one they urge him to confess his sin, whatever it was, and admit that God administers a fair and just world in which we get what our choices deserve. Job argues that life is unfair and that the world as it is now is not the way it ought to be.

Finally, when God speaks He corrects Job and puts the situation in perspective, but He also declares Job is blameless, unlike the “wisdom” of his colleagues (42:7–9). As to the question of whether everything in life is fair or not, Job has prevailed; it is not. As to Job’s wondering, ‘Why me?’ God has prevailed; His ways are far above our ways, and His allowing of suffering does not mean that He does not know what He is doing or that His right to do it should be questioned. His choices are always superior to ours.

This is true wisdom at its finest. The reader of the book of Job learns what is simply the world’s wisdom—seemingly logical but actually wrong—and what constitute God’s wisdom and builds confidence in God’s sovereignty and righteousness.

TEN REASONS YOU SHOULD READ THE BOOK OF JOB⁵

1. Hundreds of you have suffered or are suffering and are looking for light in your darkness.
2. Suffering is coming, for sure. Basic discipleship means tribulations.
3. Persecution, disease, war, disability, disaster, freak accident, assault — all are alike in this: Satan aims to destroy your faith, but God aims to strengthen it.
4. Natural disasters put [the subject of God's relationship to evil] in the news. Consider the tsunamis, hurricanes, flooding, tornadoes, and avalanches.
5. Many because of the suffering in the world reject God.
6. There are Christians who openly question the sovereignty of God over all suffering.
7. God's wise, good, just, absolute sovereignty is pastorally precious beyond measure. Being able to say, "Satan meant it for evil, *but God...*" gives hope and strength. Nothing is wasted. Nothing surprises God.
8. Suffering is appointed as one way the gospel is spread.
9. The supreme value and glory and admirableness of Christ is shown most clearly when Christians treasure Christ more than they treasure what they're losing — health, wealth, family, or life.
10. Job is the main book in the Bible dealing with suffering. It can help us in all these ways.⁶

PROVERBS

The Book of Proverbs represents practical wisdom. This "home-spun"⁷ wisdom is also grounded in the fear of

⁵ 7/27/12 by Jonathan Parnell

⁶ Piper, John. www.desiringgod.org.

⁷ *Homespun*, plain normal words, easily understood by children, typically taught at home by the parents

Yahweh. The wise men employed several literary devices as aids to memory. The most frequent device was the use of poetic parallelism of either a synthetic⁸ (Pr. 18:10) or antithetic⁹ (Pr. 10:1) type. Comparisons are common (Pr. 17:1) as our numerical sequences (Pr. 30:15ff). Using connecting consonants and acrostic patterns (Ps. 37; Pr. 31:10–31) are employed occasionally. Riddles (Jug. 14:12ff), fables (Jud. 9:7–15; Ez. 17:13ff; 19:1ff), parables, which are extensions of the comparisons mentioned above (2 Sam. 12:1–4; Is. 28:4), and allegories (Is. 5:1–7) are part of the wise man’s repertoire.

In Hebrew Proverbs are called *meshallim* (“figures of speech,” “parables,” or “specially contrived sayings”). A proverb, therefore, is a brief, particular expression of the truth. The briefer the statement is, the less likely it is to be totally precise and universally applicable. Proverbs are phrased in a catchy way, so as to be easily remembered. They do not state everything about a truth, but they point toward it. If taken literally they are often technically inexact, but as learnable guidelines for the shaping of selected behavior, they are unsurpassed.

Proverbs tend to use figurative language and express things suggestively rather than in detail. “*So is the one who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her will not go unpunished*” (Pr. 6:29). The word “touches” in this line is clearly a euphemism¹⁰ for sexual relations (cf. Gen. 20:6; 1 Cor.7:1). The point you should get from the whole proverb is that committing adultery is like playing with fire. God will see to it that sooner or later, in this life or the next, the adulterer will be hurt by his or her actions. To say it means anything else would be distorting the Holy Spirit inspired message. Thus a proverb should

8 Where words are used because the sound and the meaning are the same things, used so that it is easier to memorize, *synthetic*, made up.

9 *Antithetic* is using words that are opposite, so a picture becomes clearer

10 *Euphemism* is the use of a less offensive word to describe something that may be offensive, “touches” is less offensive than “had sexual relations” with or “made sexual advances”.

not be taken too literally or to universally in order for its message to be helpful.

(1) *Proverbs are not legal guarantees from God.* Proverbs are truisms¹¹; the particular blessings, rewards, and opportunities mentioned in Proverbs are likely to follow if one will choose the wise course of action outlined in the poetic, figurative language of the book. “*Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it*” (Pr. 22:6). Praying this prayer and claiming it, as a promise, offers no guarantee of the choices our children will make; we cannot obligate God. Furthermore, proverbs must be applied with wisdom. The fool hurts himself with proverbs because he does not know how to apply them correctly (Pr. 29:6).

(2) *Proverbs must be read as a collection.* You cannot say everything is a short proverb, but when grouped together, they sing in harmony. Each inspired proverb must be balanced with others and understood in comparison with the rest of Scripture. “*The mouth of an adulterous is a deep pit; he who is cursed of the Lord will fall into it*” (Pr. 22:14). If you have displeased God, is there a danger that you will suffocate inside the mouth of an adulterous?

(3) *Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not to be theoretically accurate.* No proverb is a complete statement of truth. Proverbs are designed either to stimulate an image in your mind or to include sounds pleasing to the ear. “*The way of the lazy is as a hedge of thorns, but the path of upright is a highway*” (Pr. 15:19).

(4) *Some proverbs need “translation” to be appreciated.* Many proverbs express their truths according to practices that no longer exist, although they were common to the Old Testament Israelites. “*It is better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house shared with the contentious woman*” (Pr. 25:24). Most of us do not have the flat roof houses of Bible times, where lodging on a roof was not

11 *Truism* is a statement that is generally true

only possible but also common (cf. Jos. 2:6). In Canada, this proverb may go something like this; it is better to live in the garage than in the house with a contentious woman. In parts of Africa, this proverb may go something like this; it is better to live in a cave than in a house with a contentious woman.

The Book of Proverbs is a book of moral and ethical instructions, dealing with many aspects of life. The teachings in this book guide its readers in how to lead wise, godly lives and how to avoid the pitfalls of unwise, ungodly conduct. It has a broad, timeless appeal because of its great variety of subjects and their relevance to everyday life. Proper and improper attitudes, conduct, and characteristics are referred to repeatedly and in plainly obvious, penetrating ways¹². Proverbs is God's book on "how to wise up and live."¹³ It is His treasure book of Wisdom.

If the Israelites would follow God's decrees and laws, they would be considered a people of wisdom and understanding (Deut. 4:5-6). This is true for all believers because "*the statutes of the Lord make wise the simple*" (Ps. 19:7). The Book of Proverbs showed the Israelites how their faith in the Lord and His Word should affect their daily lives; and it shows how believers in all ages can be wise in God's and others' eyes.

The Book of Proverbs rounds out¹⁴ the Old Testament by adding an important emphasis. The Israelites were to keep the Law and to hear and obey the Prophets, but the people were also to apply the truths of the Law and the Prophets to every aspect of living. Even if an Israelite broke no commandments in the Mosaic Law and offended no prophet he still might not be leading a full life. Prov-

12 Proverbs may *catch us*, they have a way of exposing our heart

13 This is an expression pointing to a person who does not always make wise choices and a call to become wise, a call to do the right thing.

14 *Rounds out*, is an expression, it means to not leave many things open or with sharp edges, but to smoothen what is being said so we see the whole picture.

erbs warns against the illegal and the immoral, but it also focuses on leading an aggressively dynamic life.¹⁵

ECCLESIASTES

It is important in approaching Ecclesiastes to have an overall strategy for reading it. Just like Proverbs and Job, we must not take phrases and lines out of their context and give them the meaning that lies outside the author's purpose.

The theme of the book is a search for the key to the meaning of life. The preacher examines life from all angles¹⁶ to see where satisfaction can be found. He finds that God alone holds the key, and He must be trusted. Meanwhile we are to take life day by day from His hand, and glorify Him in the ordinary things.

Within this general framework¹⁷ Ecclesiastes falls into two main divisions of thought, the futility of life, and the answer of practical faith. These run parallel through its chapters. To summarize its contents, one day the book constitutes an exhortation to live a God-fearing life, and one-day an account must be given to Him.¹⁸

Practical Exercise

1. In the Proverbs 1:2–7 what is said to be the value and purpose of studying these proverbs? See also chapter three for the answer.

15 Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1985). *Vol. 1: The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (900–901)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

16 *All angles* refers to looking at a situation from every possible view or perspective

17 *General framework* is an expression taking a picture of when one is building a house, with wood, you first have basic pieces of wood that are erected and one can see the shape of the building, although it is still unlivable, since there are no walls or floors, everything needs to be added but it is added to, fastened to this *general framework*.

18 *The New Bible Dictionary*. Intervarsity Press, England. 1991 Pg. 295.

2. Wisdom is personified as feminine and she warns what will happen if you disregard her (1:20–32), and throughout the first nine chapters. What does she warn will happen?
3. In the chapters 1–9 wisdom promises benefits that happen if you take wisdom to heart. What are some of those benefits?
4. Wisdom is personified as female, and foolishness is also personified as female, a harlot. Describe some of the characteristics of each, according to the 1st 9 chapters of Proverbs.
5. Choose three Proverbs that are especially meaningful to you and briefly explain why.

VII.

THE GOSPELS

Peter was one of Jesus' friends. He considered himself one of His *best* friends, willing to do anything and go anywhere for Him, even to die. However, when Jesus was taken prisoner, Peter's heart was exposed and fear gripped him as he denied Jesus, not once, but three times, one of those times Jesus heard him and looked at Peter. As their eyes met, Peter was overcome with remorse and shame—shame we have all felt when faced with our own sinful hearts.

Peter watched, from a distance, as Jesus was brutally beaten and then crucified—Peter watched Him die! He went away and wept! After three days, three days of torment, living with the reality of having betrayed Jesus, and how do you ever come back from that, how can you ever say “sorry” often enough? After such a deep betrayal, there is nothing you can do; there is no good news. Yet this is just it, this is the gospel, and the news is so fantastic that many don't believe it!

Let's go back in time and visit these three days through the eyes of Peter:

The gates and doors were barred
And all the windows fastened down
I spent the night in sleeplessness

And rose at every sound
Half in hopeless sorrow
And half in fear the day
Would find the soldiers breaking through
To drag us all away

And just before the sunrise
I heard something at the wall
The gate began to rattle
And a voice began to call
I hurried to the window
Looked down into the street
Expecting swords and torches
And the sound of soldiers' feet

But there was no one there but Mary
So I went down to let her in
John stood there beside me
As she told me where she'd been
She said they might have moved Him in the night
And none of us knows where
The stone's been rolled away
And now His body isn't there

We both ran toward the garden
Then John ran on ahead
We found the stone and the empty tomb
Just the way that Mary said
But the winding sheet they wrapped Him in
Was just an empty shell
And how or where they'd taken Him
Was more than I could tell

Oh something strange had happened there
Just what I did not know
John believed a miracle

But I just turned to go
Circumstance and speculation
Couldn't lift me very high
'Cause I'd seen them crucify Him
Then I saw Him die

Back inside the house again
The guilt and anguish came
Everything I'd promised Him
Just added to my shame
When at last it came to choices
I denied I knew His name
And even if He was alive
It wouldn't be the same

But suddenly the air was filled
With a strange and sweet perfume
Light that came from everywhere
Drove the shadows from the room
And Jesus stood before me
With his arms held open wide
And I fell down on my knees
And I just clung to Him and cried

Then He raised me to my feet
And as I looked into His eyes
The love was shining out from Him
Like sunlight from the skies
Guilt in my confusion
Disappeared in sweet release
And every fear I'd ever had
Just melted into peace

He's alive yes He's alive
Yes He's alive and I'm forgiven
Heaven's gates are open wide

He's alive yes He's alive
Oh He's alive and I'm forgiven
Heaven's gates are open wide
He's alive yes He's alive
Hallelujah He's alive¹

Artist: Don Francisco. Song Title: He's Alive

This is the Gospel, GOOD NEWS, Jesus Christ, came as a man, lived a sinless life, took our sin upon Himself, took responsibility for our sin, lived in submission and in obedience to God the Father, He suffered and died, and then rose again! He is coming back to be with us, yet, He did not leave us alone, He sent God the Holy Spirit to live inside us and to give life through us—all this is *the best news ever!*

Gospel is the good news that God in Jesus Christ has fulfilled His promises to Israel, and that the way of salvation has been opened to all. God has not changed His dealings with man from the Old Testament, but the gospel is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise (Matt. 11:2–5). Jesus Himself saw in the prophecies of Isaiah a description of His own ministry (Lk. 4:16–21). Mark declares the gospel of God as ‘the kingdom of God at hand’ (Mk. 16:15–16).

Most of the material in our Gospels existed for a considerable time in an oral stage before it was written in the form that now is so familiar. As it was handed down orally, people saw the importance of retaining an accurate account of what had happened and what was happening (Lk. 1:1-4) As those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word were removed by death, the necessity of a permanent written record of their witness would be more deeply felt than before. All four

1 <http://www.rockymountainministries.org>

of our Gospels are probably written within four decades A.D. 60–100.

Along with His public ministry, Jesus took care to give His disciples organized instruction in a format they could easily commit to memory. His debates with the Pharisees and other opponents led to decrees, which, once heard would not be readily forgotten. This helped His disciples later on when they were confronted with controversial issues; it was helpful to recall their Master's ruling.

In the preaching, the saving events were announced; Jesus was proclaimed as Lord and Christ, the Saviour; men were called to repent and receive forgiveness through Him. In the earliest days of the faith those who had known Jesus, would surely say to one another, "Do you remember how our master. .?)"

There are 4 main types of teachings, which may be entitled; (1) Jesus and John the Baptist; (2) Jesus and His disciples; (3) Jesus and His opponents; (4) Jesus and the future. None of the four Gospels includes its author's name.²

The first Gospels were written when eyewitnesses were still in positions of authority in the church and oral tradition could be checked; this supports their reliability. Life stories told by friends still alive are normally more correct than stories told of people who are long dead.

Students carefully learned sayings of their teachers, often taking notes to help them memorize. The sayings were sometimes passed on with the stories in which they happened, and at other times they were passed on as lonely Proverbs. Later students in the schools could also connect sayings to other fitting stories about the same teacher.

Jesus' words sometimes differ slightly from gospel to gospel. We expect such differences, because telling stories in one's own words was what was usually done

² The New Bible Dictionary—2nd edition. I. Douglas, J.D. II. Hillyer, Norman. INTER-VARSITY PRESS Leicester England. pg. 435-439

and was also common in ancient written work. Also, every eyewitness account will be a little different from other eyewitness accounts, since each has seen things from a different place.

Jesus used many of the Palestinian-Jewish teaching techniques of His date, such as parables and hyperbole³, to make His points easier to understand. To catch them the way His first hearers catch them, His sayings must be read within the context of the people of His day and then look at them as part of all of His teachings.

For example, readers must see God's way in both loyalty to parents (Mk. 7:9–13) and the greater demands of the kingdom (Mk. 10:29–30). Parables must also be read in the way Jesus' Jewish hearers would have heard them. They were examples in a story, meant to teach truth, but some of the details of most parables are included simply to make the story work, so we should be careful not to read too much into such details. For example in Matthew 13:31–35 Jesus is giving a picture of the kingdom of heaven. The tree becomes large, large enough for the birds to nest in it. Do not try to analyze what the birds represent—they are just there to show the size of the tree. This is a detail that helps the story work.

THROUGH THE EYES OF MATTHEW

Matthew was a Jewish tax collector (Matt. 9:9; 10:13). Matthew's great interest in the teachings of Jesus is reflected in this gospel. He tells a great deal of the material from the sermon on the Mount (10), the parables about the Kingdom of Heaven (13), teachings about greatness and forgiveness in the kingdom (18), and a large part about the final coming (24–25). Matthew was neat and tidy in the way he organized his material. He often put

3 *Hyperbole*, exaggeration to make a point

things in groups of threes, fives, or sevens. This carefully considered placement made memorizing easier.

Matthew speaks to the needs of His Jewish Christian readers, who it looks like were in conflict with the religious Pharisees, who were the leaders (Matt. 3:7; Lk.3:7; Matt.5:20; 23:2–39). Matthew wants to encourage his community to evangelize Gentiles as well as the Jewish people (Matt. 1:5; 2:1–12; 3:9; 8:5–13; 15:21–28; 24:14; 28:19). Matthew's collection of Jesus' teachings is to be used to make other disciples for Jesus, just as other Jewish disciples passed on their Rabbi's teachings to their own disciples (Matt. 28:19).

Again and again Matthew tells that Jesus fulfills the Jewish Scriptures, and debates from those pictures the way an educated teacher would; showing Jesus as the best and only hope of Israel for the Jewish people to whom He was writing; yet also saying the importance of missions to the Gentiles. Outreach to the Gentiles is first in the Old Testament and in Jesus' teachings (Is. 56:6–8). Foreigners who love ... the LORD are acceptable to God and will be re-gathered along with believing Israelites. Redeemed Gentiles, though not in the covenantal family of Israel, can still receive God's blessings. They show their devotion to the Lord by their service, worship, and obedience (keeping the Sabbath and God's covenant stipulations). As God promised Abraham, through him all peoples of the world will be blessed (Gen. 12:3). These Gentiles will be gathered to Zion (His holy mountain) along with Israel, where they too will worship the Lord in prayer and offerings.

Jesus healed the Centurion's servant and declared that his faith was greater than any He had seen throughout Israel (Matt. 8:5-13). Then in Matthew 28:19 we have the great commission where Jesus instructs the disciples to "*go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing*

them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”.

THROUGH THE EYES OF MARK

Mark lived in Jerusalem with his mother, a landowner whose name was Mary (Col. 4:10; Ac. 12:12), and he was related to Barnabas a wealthy Levite from Cyprus (Ac. 4:36). His mother, Mary, appears to have been a woman of wealth and position, as well as a Christian. Certainly her house was large enough to host a number of people, at least one maidservant, and was used as a meeting place by the apostolic church in time of persecution (Ac. 12:12).

Barnabas and Paul brought Mark to Antioch (Ac. 12:25). The two departed to Cyprus on the first missionary journey, and sometime later he accompanied them as traveling companion and helper of the older two men (Ac. 13:5). However, when the party reached Perga, on the mainland of Asia Minor, Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem (Ac. 13:13), while Barnabas and Paul continued alone.

It seems that Paul saw this as desertion, and thus, when Barnabas suggested Mark join them for the second trip; he refused (Ac. 15:38). The attitude toward Mark seems to be a point of character and principle (Ac. 9:27; 11:25), so a separation was to be expected, Barnabas taking Mark back to Cyprus with him, and Paul taking Silas instead.

We can see they all reconciled because later (Col. 4:10), he is with Paul the prisoner and it seems Paul is planning to send him on a mission to Colossae. He is also mentioned among the apostolic group in Phil. 24. By the time of 2 Timothy 4:11 Mark is now away with Timothy.

Mark's gospel is simple and direct, with not a lot of extra-added information. He gave a plain accounting of

what he had heard⁴ and wrote under the guidance of the Spirit working through him.

Mark seems to have noticed and tells us some of the personal exchanges that help us connect with Jesus and His disciples in a real way. For example, when the disciples tried to stop people from bringing children to Jesus, (Mk. 10:13-16) Mark says that Jesus became angry and tells how Jesus took the children into His arms and blessed them; these two details are not told in any of the other Gospels.

Mark gathers and groups the materials by type through the use of a keyword or theme or tying stories together. We see this in Mark 8, where the theme of blindness and sight becomes the string tying several pieces of material together. (1) The Pharisees are *blind* to the signs of the kingdom and ask for proof (8:11ff); (2) the disciples have *eyes to see* but do not understand who Jesus really is (8:14ff); (3) at Bethsaida Jesus gives *a blind man* a second touch after which he *sees* everyone clearly (8:22ff). It seems as though putting the stories together as ideas would be a good way to help in remembering the events.

Mark wrote to a community that needed to be reminded that God heard prayers and would work through their witness and faith. (Mk. 8:31-38) They also needed to be reminded that this might cost them their lives in persecution.

Finally, they could be reminded, seeing the failure of the disciples in the book of Mark, that if they were not yet living the radical lifestyle their Lord's words demanded, He would still work with them patiently to help them get to that level of commitment. Most people believe Mark is written during the suffering of Roman Christians under Nero starting in A.D. 64.

4 Tradition has it that he heard this from Peter

THROUGH THE EYES OF LUKE

Luke was Paul's personal doctor (Col. 4:14) during Paul's time in prison. Philemon 24 describes him as a fellow worker of Paul, which suggests that his help in the work of the gospel was not only as a doctor. When Jesus hung on the cross everyone deserted him; at the end of Paul's life, everyone also deserted him, except for Luke (2 Tim. 4:11) who alone stayed with Paul.

The writing style of Luke and Acts show that their author was a well-educated person with large words. The signs of medical words and the interest in medical things in them are what we expect if the author is the beloved doctor.

Within the gospels there is a general theme of concern for the disenfranchised within society, Samaritans, lepers, sinners, poor and needy all receive equal treatment. This attitude is demonstrated in Luke's concern and compassion for women. He tells about the widow of Nain (7:11–17), the unnamed woman who was saved by Jesus (7:36–50); the women who followed and served the Lord (8:1–3); the story of Mary and Martha (10:38–42); the woman weeping before the cross (23:27); and the women from Galilee who were present for Jesus' burial (23:55). These are important because they show a view and concern for women different from the culture of the day.

Luke writes to readers in the Greek world or Greek-speaking upper-class homes. His readers are well to do and are developed in literature, being refined, and possibly need confirmation in their faith, or need arguments they can use to defend it. *Greatness* themes are especially prominent in Luke: the emphasis of Jesus' ministry to the outcasts, religiously unfit, the poor and women; makes a way for His dealing with the mission in volume two, the book of Acts. The story moves from

Galilee to Jerusalem in Luke, and from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth in Acts.

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOHN

John was the son of Zebedee, a successful fisherman (Mk. 1:19–20), he left a successful career to follow Jesus. He and his brother James were nicknamed *sons of thunder* (Mk. 3:17). John was present when Jesus raised Jarius' daughter (Mk. 5:37), at the Transfiguration (Mk. 9:2) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14:33). Peter and John were the two disciples sent by Jesus to make preparations for the final Passover meal (Lk. 22:8).

This John is almost certainly the one who was close to Jesus at the Last Supper placing his head on the breast of Jesus (Jn. 13:23). Jesus entrusted John with the care of His mother at the time of His death (19: 26–27); it was he who ran with Peter to the tomb on the first Easter morning and was the first to see the full meaning of the untouched grave clothes with nobody inside (20:2,8); and he was present when the risen Christ revealed Himself to seven of His disciples by the sea of Tiberius. In the account of that last incident in Chapter 21, support is given to the later tradition that John lived on to a great age (21:23).

The Gospel of John is first an evangelistic document. Second its clear method is to present the work and words of Jesus to show the nature of His person. Third, the description of this person as Messiah indicates that a Jewish audience is probably in mind. Since, however, John appears to be writing for an audience outside Palestine and in part ignorant of Jewish customs, it seems that he wrote especially for displaced Jews and Christians in Greek synagogues.⁵

5 Ibid. pgs. 606-607

PARABLES in THE GOSPELS

There is a difference between a *parable* and an *allegory*. Both parables and allegories have usually been seen as forms of teaching which present the listener with interesting illustrations from which moral and religious truths can be drawn. *Parable* is the rather drawn out simile or short descriptive story, usually designed to say a single truth over and over or answer a single question.

Allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning. In Gal. 4:21-31 Paul tells us that the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael is an allegory, they each *represent* something unique and different, even though they were also real people.

Many of the parables of Jesus are not only illustrations of general principles; rather they carry messages, which cannot be understood in any other way. The parables are the best way to bring the message of the Kingdom to men. They are a way of opening eyes and touching hearts, with the plan to bring the hearers to the point of decision. Jesus, as it was, stands where His hearers stand, and uses pictures and stories they would know and understand as a way of bringing new ideas and new understanding to them.

Very often their aim is to shock or startle the audience into seeing things from a new point of view and to be the actual means of bringing them into a new situation. The parables were meant to force people to decide about their attitude to Jesus and His message and thus bring them into a new relationship with Him. Through the parables the Kingly rule of God comes to men with its promises, judgments, demands and gifts.

Luke 10:30-37 is an excellent example as Jesus introduces a parable in the middle of a conversation. There is nothing to indicate that He is beginning to tell a story to make a point; He responds to the lawyer's test of

‘what he must do to inherit eternal life?’ (25) By turning the question back to him, (26) giving him the opportunity to impress everyone around with his knowledge—thus drawing him into a deeper conversation, setting him up for the parable to follow. This is a beautiful example of how Jesus drew people into a parable.

After the lawyer, being emboldened⁶ by his correct response, (27) he follows with another question (29) and now the stage has been set for Jesus to give the parable of the Good Samaritan. As Jesus tells the story, He merely tells it as if He were relating a true event. Everyone who heard the exchange would be drawn into the story as well, each identifying with a character in the story.

The Priest, needing to retain his purity, to not be disqualified from Temple service, passed by the other side (32). He would not want to touch the unclean person who lay injured at the side of the road. If he passed far enough away from the victim, he would be unable to ask for help and then the Priest would not be obligated to help and would be able to retain his purity. Thus still qualified to serve in the Temple. Did the lawyer see himself in the place of the Priest?

The Levite doing the same, passing far enough away so that the injured person might not be aware of his presence and he, the Levite, would be able to retain his self-righteousness. Did the lawyer identify with the Levite?

Finally, the Samaritan, (33-35) the lowest of the low in that culture—the ‘less than human’ one, stops to help and serves completely. This surely was not the lawyer! How does one react when caught in such a story, when one’s heart with all its wickedness is revealed? When Jesus asked who it was that had proved to be righteous (36) the lawyer gave what seemed to be the correct answer, “*The one who showed mercy toward him*”. The lawyer does not even use the word, “Samaritan”. Does this reveal

6 *Emboldened* is to gain enough courage to proceed

further something about his hatred and contempt against the Samaritans' to the point that, as people often do in a situation like this, he was unable to say the right word to name this good and brave man? With that he was caught! Jesus simply instructs him to go and do the right thing. (37) The story, without question, shows the man's selfish heart.

The parables of Jesus may have the effect of hardening the unbeliever, just as Isaiah prophesied regarding the effects of preaching the word of God. The truth is, Jesus' parables are unique. We cannot separate Jesus and His parables; to fail to understand Him is to fail to understand the parables (Mk. 4:10–12).⁷

Anyone who does not receive Jesus as the Messiah cannot understand the parables. The mystery of the Kingdom that was given to the disciples was the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If anyone rejects this truth then they do not understand or embrace the lessons taught in the parables.

In reading parables we need to note 3 things:

1. What are the points of reference that are drawing people into the parable and would they have understood them?
2. Who is the audience and how do they identify the points of reference?
3. Must come to grips with the point of the story.

THE CROSS/CRUCIFIXION

Crucifixion was a common mode of punishment among heathen nations in early times. It is not certain whether it was known among the ancient Jews; probably it was not. The modes of capital punishment according to the Mosaic

⁷ Ibid. pgs. 877-879

Law were, by the sword (Ex. 21), strangling, fire (Lev. 20), and stoning (Deut. 21). Crucifixion was regarded as the most horrible form of death, and to a Jew it would take on greater horror from the curse in Deut. 21:23.

This punishment began by subjecting the sufferer to scourging. In the case of our Lord, however, His scourging was before the sentence was passed upon Him, and was inflicted by Pilate for the purpose, probably, of arousing pity and hoping to make a way for His escape from further punishment (Lk. 23:22; Jn. 19:1).

The condemned one carried his own cross to the place of execution, which was outside the city, in some conspicuous place set apart for the purpose. Before the nailing to the cross took place, a medicated cup of vinegar mixed with gall and myrrh (*the sopor*) was given, to deaden the pangs of the sufferer. Our Lord refused this cup, that His senses might be clear (Matt. 27:34). The sponge-full of vinegar, sour wine, (*posca*) the common drink of the Roman soldiers, which was put on a hyssop stalk and offered to our Lord in scornful pity (Matt. 27:48; Lk. 23:36). He tasted to relieve the agonies of His thirst (John 19:29). The accounts given of the crucifixion of our Lord are in entire agreement with the customs and practices of the Roman in such cases. He was crucified between two “wrongdoers” (Isa. 53:12; Lk. 23:32), and was watched by a party of four soldiers (Jn. 19:23; Matt. 27:36, 54), with their centurion. The “breaking of the legs” of the wrongdoers was intended to hasten death, and put them out of misery (Jn. 19:31); but the unusual speed of our Lord’s death (19:33) was due to His previous sufferings and His great mental anguish. The omission of the breaking of His legs was the fulfillment of a type (Ex. 12:46). He literally died of a broken heart, a ruptured heart, and hence the flowing of blood and water from the wound made by the soldier’s spear (Jn. 19:34). Our Lord uttered seven memorable words from the cross, namely:

1. Addressing God, the Father on behalf of all those responsible for His death: "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.*" (Lk. 23:34)
2. Speaking to the thief on the cross in response to his acknowledging Jesus for who He was; "*Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.*" (Lk. 23:43)
3. Speaking to His mother as He entrusted her to John; "*Woman, behold, your son!*" (Jn. 19:26)
4. At the ninth hour in pain; "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" that is, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" (Matt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34)
5. Just before He died; "*I am thirsty.*" (Jn. 19:28)
6. Just prior to His death, after taking a sip of the sour wine; "*It is finished!*" (Jn. 19:30)
7. Just prior to His death He cried out; "*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.*" (Lk. 23:46)⁸

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE CROSS⁹

What did Christ accomplish with His self-sacrifice, His self-substitution? The New Testament gives three main answers to these questions, which may be summed up in the words *salvation*, *revelation* and *conquest*. What God, in Christ has done through the cross is to rescue us, disclose Himself and overcome evil.

There are various images of salvation; 1) propitiation introduces us to rituals at the shrine, 2) redemption to transactions in a marketplace, 3) justification to proceedings in the court of law, and 4) reconciliation to experiences in a home or family.

8 Easton, M. G. (1996). *Easton's Bible dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

9 Stott. John R.W. *The Cross of Christ*. 2006, Inter-Varsity Press. Downers, Grove, Ill. taken from pgs. 166-245

SALVATION

1. PROPITIATION: to appease or pacify someone's anger. It is necessary because sin arouses the wrath of God. In the pagan context it is always humans seeking to avert the divine anger either by specific rituals, by formulas or by suffering. With the cross, God Himself has taken the initiative in His sheer mercy and grace. God does not love us because Christ died for us; Christ died for us because God loved us, if it is God's wrath that needed to be propitiated, it is God's love that did the propitiating. What was the propitiatory sacrifice; the person of Jesus Christ. God Himself is at the heart of propitiation. It is God Himself who is holy who in the person of His Son died for the propitiation of our sins. Wrath needs to be propitiated; and God, in Christ, did this.

2. REDEMPTION: to redeem, to purchase or buyback. Propitiation focuses on the wrath of God, which was satisfied by the cross; *redemption* focuses on the plight of sinners from which they were ransomed by the cross. In ancient times it was used to describe what happened when one would "buyback" a slave. In the Old Testament, property, animals, persons and the nation were all "redeemed" by the payment of a price. In all these cases of "redemption" there was a decisive and costly intervention. Somebody paid the price necessary to free property from a mortgage, animals from slaughter and persons from slavery, even death. Redemption without a price paid makes as much sense as a transaction of sale without the exchange of money.

Christ has ransomed us from our moral bondage (1 Tim. 2:5–6), from the penalty of our sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13; 4:5) and from the empty way of life we inherited from our forefathers (1 Pe. 1:18). The price paid was the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). Therefore at communion, to "drink Christ's

blood,” describes not participation in His life but applying the benefits of His life laid down (1 Cor. 11:23–26), it draws attention to the person of the Redeemer who has proprietary¹⁰ rights over His purchase. Bought by Christ, we have no business to become the slaves of anybody or anything else. Once we were slaves of sin; now we are slaves of Christ and His service is the true freedom.

3. JUSTIFICATION: is the opposite of condemnation (Rom. 5:18; 8:34), and both are verdicts of a judge who pronounces the accused either guilty or not guilty. Propitiation comes first, because until the wrath of God is appeased, there can be no salvation for human beings at all. Forgiveness remits our sins and debts and cancels our liability to punishment; justification bestows on us a righteous standing before God.

The source of our justification is found in the expression *justified by His grace* (Rom. 3:24), that is, by His utterly undeserved favor. We are justified by His blood (Rom. 5:9) we are granted amnesty. We are justified by faith (Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9). Grace and faith belong absolutely to one another, since faith's only function is to receive what grace freely offers.

One of the effects of our justification is that we are justified in Christ (Gal. 2:17). We are members of the Messianic community of Jesus, children of God and true (spiritual) descendants of Abraham, there are no tribal, racial, social or sexual barriers that can come between us (Gal. 3:26–29). This new community is for what Christ gave Himself on the cross to create, and its members are to devote themselves to good works (Titus 2:14; 3:8).

4. RECONCILIATION: to restore a relationship, renewal of friendship, it is the opposite of alienation. This

10 *Proprietary* refers to the rights an owner has over whatever he owns

presupposes an original relationship has been broken and has been recovered by Christ.

Reconciliation begins with God (Rom. 5:9–11). We are now adopted and we have access (Jn. 1:12–13; 1 Jn. 3:1–10). We have ongoing access and communion with God (Eph. 2:17–18; 3:12; Heb. 10:19–22). Thus, reconciliation, peace with God, adoption into His family and access into His presence all bear witness to the same new relationship into which God has brought us. However, reconciliation has a horizontal as well as a vertical plane.

Ephesians 2:11–22 is a wonderful picture of this reconciliation affected through the blood of Jesus Christ. We are reminded that the Gentiles, who were formally excluded, are now part of the family (Eph. 2:12). That Jesus Christ is our peace (Eph. 2:14) brought near to God and near to Israel (Eph. 2:13), that He abolished the laws and regulations that kept them apart (Eph. 2:15). Knowing the bitterness and contempt the Jews had for the Gentiles and the Gentiles for the Jews, this was a miracle of God. They are all now *fellow citizens* in God's kingdom, brothers and sisters in God's family (Eph. 2:19), fellow members of Christ's body sharing together in the Messianic promise (Eph. 3:6). This new community is the *mystery*, which for centuries has been kept secret but which God now has revealed to the apostles (Eph. 3:4–6), especially to Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Since we experience this newfound freedom and unity in Christ and in the community of Christ, we are to be ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–20).

REVELATION

1. THE GLORY OF GOD

God's glory was revealed in His Son, in His Son coming as a man and living on earth. Jn. 1:14 "*And the Word*

became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” In Christ’s words, it was at the cross where His glory shone the brightest. Lk. 24:26 *“Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”*

2. THE JUSTICE OF GOD Romans 3:21-26

Christ’s death on the cross was a demonstration of His justice. *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Rom.5:8).

3. THE LOVE OF GOD John 3:16

God’s love was displayed in Jesus Christ. His life, His death, all that He said and did was a demonstration of the love of God. His desire was for the world to see the glory and unity of God (John 17).

4. THE WISDOM AND POWER OF GOD

Only God’s wisdom could devise such a costly plan of salvation that both meets our needs and also satisfies His own character (1 Cor. 1:17–2:5).

As we end the session on the Gospels we want to remind ourselves of Christ’s as *“He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, He must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.””* (Mk. 8:34). So Christ summons us today, to pick up our cross daily and to follow Him.

Practical Study

1. Make a list of each of the parables found in each of the gospels. Note how they are the same and any differences between them.
2. Answer the three questions asked in the section on the Parables.
3. Which of the Gospels do you most identify with? Why?

VIII.

ACTS

As was stated in the introduction: **It is our intention in this work to present a culturally sensitive guideline for reading, studying and applying Scripture. We hope that the Scripture will become increasingly alive and significant in each of our lives.** This chapter is different from all the others in this book; it is more of a *workbook* than anything else. It is intended to serve as a guided reading or study of Acts. Many principles have been taught and unless they become part of our day-to-day life, they just get lost. So, to that end, please invite the Holy Spirit to guide your study and be blessed as you join with the ancients in discovering how God moves and directs each of us today.

The book of Acts is a *God inspired* religiously motivated history as brought to us by the Holy Spirit through Luke, a Gentile¹ who was familiar with the Jewish history. As well as writing Acts, Luke also wrote the book of Luke.

Acts is the only book of its kind in the Scripture; it records the earliest activity of the new Spirit-filled community. In Acts we see the focus of God's His-story shifting from the Jews being at the center of the story to Spirit-filled people, Jews and Gentiles being central. For Luke the main goal is *cross-cultural communication* and

1 Anyone who is not a Jew, is a Gentile

world evangelism. Many struggles seen here are tribal struggles at the root and the Holy Spirit treating *all* tribal groups equally, which the Jews did not accept.

As we look at the book of Acts we want to know *what* is being said and *why* it is being said, but we must begin with *what*.

Assignment

1. Read Acts all the way through in 1 or 2 sittings.
2. Make notes of key people and places, regular events, and natural divisions of the book.
3. Now go back and mark down what you see, adding references.
4. Ask yourself, “Why did Luke write this book?”

Notice the brief summary statements with each one closing a section and giving us a clue that we are moving to something else. We find these in 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:4 and 19:20. There are six sections giving the story a continual movement starting with its Jewish setting based in Jerusalem, (with Peter as its leading figure), moving towards a mostly Gentile church (with Paul as the leading figure) and with Rome (the capital of the Gentile world) as the goal. Once Paul reaches Rome, where he once again turns to the Gentiles, because they will listen (28:28), the story comes to an end.

5. In your own words describe each section; note the content and how it helps move the story along.
6. What do you see as the key in each forward movement?

1–6:7. Gives an account of the early Christian church in Jerusalem, its preaching, common life, growth, and its first opposition. Everything seems Jewish, the sermons, opposition, and the continual relationship of the believers with the Temple and synagogues. This section ends with the story showing a division had begun between the Greek-speaking and the Aramaic-speaking believers.

6:8–9:31. The first expansion carried out by the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians to the dispersed Greek-speaking Jews. This section includes the conversion of Paul, a Greek and a Jewish enemy of the gospel and includes Stephen being stoned to death.

9:32–12:24. *Contains a* description of the first move away from the Jews to reaching the Gentiles including the direct act from God in the conversion of Cornelius. This was carried out through Peter, the known leader of the *Jewish-Christian* mission. (Notice how God uses a known and accepted Jewish leader in this conversion) note also, Gentile conversion is now carried out by the Greeks (not Jews) in the Antioch church.

12:25–16:5. A description of the first expansion into the Gentile world with Paul as the leader; Jews now regularly reject the gospel because it includes the Gentiles. The church council meets and declares that the Gentile Christians need *not* obey the Jewish religious rules and it accepts them as Christians.

16:6–19:20. A description of the further westward move into the Gentile world, now entering Europe; repeatedly the Jews reject the gospel while the Gentiles accept the gospel.

19:21–28:30. This now has a description of the events moving Paul and the gospel on to Rome, with a focus on Paul's trials, in which three times he is declared innocent of any wrongdoing.

Notice that in this outline there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit plays the main and leading role in the book of Acts. None of the events here recorded happened by human design; it happened because God willed it and the Holy Spirit carried it out.

We must again remember this is a description of what happened in the early church not necessarily a direction of how it must happen today, except that we still need the Holy Spirit.

There seems to be little or no instruction on church organization. Luke does not tell us why or how the leadership in the church went from Peter and the apostles to James the brother of Jesus. Nor does it tell us how leadership was organized except to say that elders were appointed (14:23).

We notice that Luke does not seem to be too interested in making everyone the same. Individual conversions usually include two elements: the gift of the Spirit and water baptism. But these sometimes happen in reverse order, sometimes with laying on of hands and sometimes without, sometimes with the gift of tongues and sometimes no mention of the gift of tongues. It is important to remember that the Bible does not tell us everything about everything and that God is still committed today to speaking to His church by the power of the Holy Spirit through the revealed word.

Interpretation And Application Of Acts

Does the book of Acts describe what happened in the early church or does it suggest what must happen today?

If it does not say this is how church should be today then what could we learn from it?

Unless Scripture plainly tells us we must do something, what is told to us about what happened in the past does not automatically mean we must do it today--unless there is some way we can show it was supposed to function in this way.

Assignment

Take the notes you have made while reading the book of acts and get together with one or two other leaders and talk about the things you have seen, the questions that you have, and how this will impact how you read and teach the Bible?

IX

THE EPISTLES

Recently my wife received this brief note from one of the young women in our church. *“When we became pregnant this time, to us, it was a love gift from the LORD... when our son died, it felt like God was saying, “I hate you”, until God reminded me that, “My love for you wasn’t in giving you YOUR son, it was demonstrated in giving you MY Son”. God Loves Me!...with a “Love” that was raised to life and will NEVER die again!...because of God’s Son, my son lives!”*¹

This is a form of an “open letter”. There is much about this person that is not written but is known by those reading this letter. For example, we know that this is a happily married woman who already have a couple of children, she is living in submission to her husband and is in fellowship in the local church, this is not the first child she has lost, and she is praising God in and through this situation. There is much more that is known by us about her and her relationship with others, which is unknowable from simply reading this brief letter.

Even though, most people reading this will not know any of that information, those who have lost a loved one, or are in some form of pain, may be able to identify with this person and may be encouraged by this letter.

1 Used by permission, posted on a personal Facebook page.

An Epistle² is a letter, and like any letter today, some are more personal than others; the writer initiates some, the recipient initiates others. Specific people write letters in a specific time and in a specific place. The sender and the one receiving the letter will have some shared knowledge, which others are mostly not aware of, and this may be a problem.

Most ancient letters have a standard form, as do the New Testament letters, consisting of six parts:

1. Name of the writer
2. Name of the recipient
3. Greetings
4. Prayer, wish or thanksgiving
5. Body
6. Final greeting and farewell

There are many differences in the New Testament letters but they all have two things in common - each is an occasional document, which is a letter arising out of and intended for a specific occasion, and they are all from the first century. It is precisely this that makes their interpretation difficult at times.

Usually the occasion was in response to a pastoral issue in the church that needed correcting or encouragement, or a doctrinal error that needed setting right, or a misunderstanding that needed further light. Our problem stems from the fact that while we have the answers in the letter, we don't always know the questions the letter is meant to answer—it is much like trying to determine what is happening between two people when all you can do is listen to one end of a telephone conversation.

There are some things we just will never understand, like (1 Cor. 15:29) where Paul talks about people being

2 New Testament Epistles are: Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1,2&3 John, and Jude.

baptized for the dead. Nothing more is said about it and we certainly don't understand what this means or what the implications might be for today. So it is best to just leave this alone and recognize that if God wanted us to know more about this, He would have told us; further, let's remember that the less we understand a situation, the less dogmatic and the more gracious we must be about applying it.

SEEING THE CONTEXT OF THE LETTER **(Case study, 1 Timothy)**

To start we are told who is writing the letter and to whom it is written. *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope, to Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (1 Tim. 1:1,2) However, we still do not know what was the occasion of the letter?

Now as we read through it again let's look for:

1. Everything we can find about the recipients. (Greek or Jew, rich or poor, slave or free, etc.)
2. Look to see if we can get a sense of the attitude of the author. (Frustrated, angry, affirming)
3. What does the author say specifically that tells us why the letter was written? (“Now referring too”)
4. We will discover the letter falls into natural paragraphs. Learn to identify them and see the thought in each paragraph. We will also learn to develop why one thing follows another and we will see the pattern.

IDENTIFYING THE OCCASION OF THE LETTER (Case study, 1 Timothy)

1. (1 Tim. 1:3-7) Paul had urged Timothy to stay in Ephesus to stop people who were teaching false doctrine.
2. (3:14,15) Paul specifically tells why he is writing; to instruct on how people are to conduct themselves in God's household. So the point is how do *you* behave as opposed to what the *false teachers* are doing.³ After this we would want to know who are the false teachers and what are they teaching? We have some clues about this:
3. (1:3–7) they are teaching myths
4. Endless genealogies.
5. They promote speculations;
6. (7) They desire to be teachers of the law.
7. (19–20) Paul says by rejecting their own conscience, people have made a shipwreck of their faith and he goes on to name them!⁴ Paul says he has urged them not to blaspheme; the question is what where they doing that Paul said looked like blaspheming?
8. They were doing something that was causing the name of God to be blasphemed by outsiders. This of course would cause a huge problem for Paul and others for

3 Some people read this portion and may see it as a church manual for church structure; they do this because in the third chapter we are given instructions for church leadership. However, Paul does not specifically say these instructions are guidelines for the church, he specifically says he is dealing with False Teachers. Seeing how Paul deals with this situation can be helpful, even though is not a guideline for church structure.

4 In their day, many people would have personal knowledge of these people and would be reminded of who they were and of what they taught, even though today, apart from what we are told here, we know very little about them.

they would know (Lev. 24:16) how God instructs Moses that, “*the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death.*” So how should the leaders respond? Should the outsiders who were blaspheming be put to death? Or should the insiders who caused the outsiders to blaspheme be put to death? You see how there is a tension between obeying the letter of the Old Testament Law, and responding to the intent of the Law as demonstrated in Christ in the New Covenant and responding under grace.

9. (4:1–5) He mentions false teachers forbidding marriage and promoting abstinence from some foods.
10. (6:3–10) is the final indictment; they are conceited, they have a morbid craving for controversy, and argumentation, imagining that godliness is a means of gain, and it is through this craving for money that many have wandered away and pierce their hearts.

The false teachers were doing what they were doing, because they saw it as a means for false profit. As a way of making money!

The next question is, who are these people? In Acts 20 Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and he calls for the elders of the church from Ephesus. In vs. 30 Paul is saying that men from their own midst, false teachers would rise up and draw other’s away. In 1Timothy we see this happening, these false teachers were on the inside, some elders who have gone astray! They have allowed themselves to adopt all kinds of worldly influences.

Paul now gives instructions on how he wants the people to behave. Some good questions to ask, “Why did Paul write this right here and what is it doing here? What is this paragraph all about?” What is the recurring theme throughout this paragraph? “All men” - so the point of

the paragraph is prayer for all people because God wants all people to be saved we know this because Christ Jesus came as a ransom for all people.

The kind of teaching the false teachers were presenting - saying that not everyone should get married, and they should abstain from some foods – may lead to an exclusive elite group of people. God did not say to abstain from these foods so man must not put in rules where God does not. The forming of an exclusive club, directly contradicts the gospel being for all people. It is also an example of adding to God's word, a mistake that began in the Garden of Eden with Eve adding to God's word (Gen. 3:3).

Now that Paul has exposed some of the activities of the errant elders he sets about the qualifications of an elder. The qualifications of an elder primarily are concerned with *character*.

It is important to note what is being said before and after each sentence and before and after each paragraph. Learn to THINK IN PARAGRAPHS! Keep asking, "What's the point?" You must be able to do two things: (1) In a compact way state the content of each paragraph. (2) How does this content contribute to the argument?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TODAY?

God's word was given in a historical situation and circumstance and now we live in a different historical situation: so we have situations that are different from when it was written. The question is, "What are the issues that are cultural and what are the issues that are eternal?" Also, African culture is different from Western or Eastern or Hispanic culture, each brings a different point of view to the task at hand.

Culture is neither necessarily sinful nor godly; it may just be culture! Culture impacts how we worship, how the gospel is expressed, how we relate with one another and

how we do life together. The difficulty comes in discerning what is the Word of God and what is culture? Because of the specific details of these letters, inevitably they are influenced by culture.

BASIC GUIDELINES

1. One must be able to distinguish between what is *central core* in the gospel and what is *peripheral* to it. There is a difference between if you believe or don't believe Jesus Christ died for our sins and if you believe or don't believe women should have their head covered in worship - there is a difference! The difference is that one is *central core* and the other is *peripheral*. We are wise if we make *core* what the Bible makes *core* and we treat as *peripheral* what the Bible treats as *peripheral*. We all draw a line somewhere. We need to be aware of cultural variations and this really has more to do with *application* than it does with *interpretation* or *analyses*.
2. We should be prepared to distinguish between what the New Testament sees as inherently moral and what is not. In the New Testament we regularly get what are called "sin lists"⁵ and what are called "virtue lists"⁶. I would say that in both of those kinds of lists there is nothing that is cultural. Everything there is inherently moral. It has to do with the basic variety of our human existence. God has made us this way and not that way and He intends us to live this way and not that way. That is an eternal thing.

5 Mk. 7:21-22; Rom. 13:8-14; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Col. 5:9-11; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 4:25-31; Col. 3:5-9; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Rev. 9:20-21; Rev. 21:8,27

6 Rom. 12:9-21; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:32; 6:14-20; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:12-4:6; 1 Thess. 5:12-22; 1 Tim. 3:2-13; Titus 1:6-9; Heb. 7:26; James 3:17

These lists come out of the moral expression of the Ten Commandments. We never find in these lists things like head coverings, foot washing, or holy kiss. What we *do* find in these lists are things that are always applicable in every culture in every time and for every person. It has to do with our *essential character* as human beings before God.

3. One must make special note of items where the New Testament has a uniform and consistent witness, or where it reflects differences. For example: love is a basic Christian ethical response, non-retaliation is a basic ethical response, the wrongness of strife, hatred, murder, stealing, homosexuality, drunkenness, and sexual immorality of every kind. These are not cultural issues; these are core issues! The New Testament bears regular witness in these areas, there is nothing unclear. While there are many cultural issues involved in the Bible as there are today, that does not mean we cannot learn from those situations.
4. Make a habit of reading through the whole letter in one sitting; it is how everyone reads a letter and the Bible should be no different. Read the letter aloud, this will help you as you see and hear the word of God.
5. Read through the letter again, taking note of the verse and the general flow of the letter. In this reading you want to see if you can identify the original reason for the letter being written. The clue comes not only in the things that are written but also in the questions that are asked.
6. A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his/her readers. While this rule does not necessarily help us find what the text means it does help us to find what the text does *not* mean.

7. Whenever we share the same circumstances with the first century hearers, God's Word to us is the same as His Word to them. For example, it is true that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23) and that "by grace we have been saved, through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Clothing ourselves with "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:12). Each of these is still God's word to everyone today.

Assignment

1. Read through all of Romans again noting everything you can about the recipients.
2. What are the attitudes expressed by Paul?
3. What does the letter tell you specifically about why the letter was written?
4. Notice where there seem to be natural breaks in thought and divide the sections into paragraphs.
5. Write a one-sentence summary of each chapter.

X.

REVELATION

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

John is in exile for his testimony of Jesus, because of his Christian witness, and he is writing to churches that he says are companions; they, like him, are being persecuted for their Christian witness. The one thing that is clear is that the church is undergoing severe persecution from the outside. This is being written to a church where people are suffering and they are dying.

The second thing that is clear is that he is on the Isle of Patmos because the state, the government that has put him there. The church and the state are on a collision course. Chapters 13-14 talk of where the state is forcing Emperor worship on all people, and Christians are not willing to bow to the Emperor.

Asia Minor and especially Ephesus was one of the centers of Emperor worship. The church had gone along for a long time without going to worship the Emperor. Caesar claimed to be Lord and Christians said only Jesus is Lord. The Jews had found a way to keep peace; they would burn incense *for* the Emperor and say they were praying *for* the Emperor but not *to* the Emperor. The Romans accepted this, however the Christians made a distinction and refused to burn incense *for* the Emperor.

To burn incense before the Emperor would mean they would have to say, "Caesar is Lord" and they could not do it. They could not say Lord in an earthly sense because *Curios* (Greek) meant LORD in the ultimate sense. John is making a clear warning; you cannot bow before the Emperor.

The prophetic element of this writing is that John is sitting at a specific point in history and is recognizing what is about to happen. He is not only speaking a word to the church but he is speaking a word to the church about what is soon going to happen.

We must make a distinction between the words *tribulation* and *wrath*. 2 Thess. 1 Paul speaks of *tribulation* and then speaks of *wrath*. *Tribulation* has to do with suffering, persecution, trials and tribulations and this is a common theme throughout the New Testament. This is something that Christians are going to experience in this lifetime.

Wrath is the word that has to do with God's divine judgment directed at disobedience, disobedience as in not accepting Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. God's people never experience God's wrath. Tribulation is to be expected by God's people on this earth, but not wrath. Wrath will be experienced by the state because of its persecution of the Church. God's people experience the persecution of the state precisely because they are God's people and God has promised that He will pour out His divine wrath on those who are responsible.

So we have the seals telling us of all the conquest in warfare of famine and death, followed by two seals that tell us the two crucial elements of the book; the first is of the martyrs under the altar and they asked the question, "*How long will we have to endure Lord?*" (6:10). The second crucial element is that the redeemed in Christ each were given a "*white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer*"(6:11); the redeemed will not face the wrath of God! We are encouraged to be

patient, to continue to trust the Lord because that is how it is going to be.

The sixth seal is a response to the fifth seal, the great earthquake, which is the wrath of God. The kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich in the earth all of those who stand over and against the people of God, are going to experience God's wrath.

THE NATURE OF REVELATION

Revelation is a fine blend of three different literary types, 1) *apocalypse*, 2) *prophecy*, and 3) *letter*, and it is designed to function in two other types. The first type is an *apocalypse*. This is a very distinct literary type with its main pattern being judgment and salvation.

1. *Apocalypses* were *written* from the beginning, unlike the Prophets or the Gospels, which were first *spoken* records and later put into writing. This work was never spoken it was written from the beginning.

The material that makes up the apocalypses is visions and dreams, full of mysterious, hidden, symbolic language. A special thing about the apocalypse is its images, which are uniquely different from the Prophets. In the Prophets, the images looked like real things whereas in the Apocalypse, they are nowhere near reality. The best word used to describe the imagery in the Apocalypse is *fantasy*.

Fantasy is where the image does not reflect reality—it is *fantastic*! We all understand beasts, and heads, and we understand beasts having horns; that is all real; what we don't understand is when beasts have seven heads and ten horns. This does not belong to reality. We understand a woman and we understand the Sun but we do not understand a woman clothed with the Sun.

2. John calls this book a *prophecy* (1:3) but it is different from former prophecies, it is not a spoken word, it is written. However, what has happened is the Prophetic Spirit, after a long period of silence, has once again come and is now speaking to the church (Rev. 1.3; 22:18; 1:10-11). John was speaking in the Spirit, God's word to God's people announcing salvation. This is a prophetic word first written to the people for whom it was intended and also a word for all Christians of all time!

He says the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (19:10). The message of Jesus is the clear evidence of the *already* and the *not yet*. Meaning, the Spirit has *already* come but we have *not yet* arrived at the fullness of the Spirit. The people knew that the Spirit had arrived even though they were going through such severe persecution and the questions are, "How long will this happen" and "How can this happen if the Spirit has come"?

Revelation is the word of God to the church in that day; the church that is suffering persecution from without and decay from within. John recognizes that it is going to get much worse before it gets better and the church needs to be ready. John is addressing the different situations in different churches and exposes the evidence demonstrating the fact that they are not ready for this extreme persecution.

3. The Third form is a *letter*. So we had *apocalypse*, *prophetic* and now *letter*. He begins with *Grace and peace to you* (1:4), that's how a letter begins. You look at the end of the work it ends with "*the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen*"(22:21) the way a letter ends.

The point is, there is a reason for this letter, it is an occasional document, it is written to a specific situation in a specific time. This work is in *form*: apocalyptic, in

intent: prophetic, and final *expression*: letter. They are to receive this as a letter and to hear this as a prophetic word but it comes to them in this written prophetic apocalyptic imagery.

EXEGESIS OF REVELATION

First, believe it was expected that the people for whom it was written would read and understand the letter. That is absolutely crucial. You must do with the Revelation what you do with everything else in Scripture and that is to start back there to see what the intent was in the day it was written.

Second, we must be very careful in using what is called the *analogy of Scripture*; that is, we interpret Scripture by Scripture. In the analogy of Scripture we find out what words meant somewhere else, and from there, we can get an idea of what they might mean here, this is a valid discipline.

Third, the images are of many different kinds and they come from a variety of sources. John borrowed images from the Old Testament, apocalyptic, and ancient Pagan mythology. The point is that the images don't mean the same thing when John uses them as they did from where they were borrowed. John takes these varieties of images, then crushes and re-forms them to make the points that he wants to make.

John took some images right out of Ezekiel, and others from Daniel, but he does not come anywhere near intending to say what Daniel or Ezekiel was saying with the same images. The important thing to remember is to see what John does with the image, balancing this with how we see them being used in the other texts, rather than try to explain it by looking at its original use.

Some of the images are fixed images that everyone would have known. When you have beasts coming out of

the sea (13:1), this is commonly known as an Empire. Other images are not as clear or commonly acknowledged, for example the woman who is clothed with the sun in 12:1 is not the same woman as sits on the beast in 17:3,4,6,7,9,18. "Woman" does not always mean the same thing; it is an image that means different things at different times.

Sometimes John will directly tell us what the images are, for example when John says the 'Dragon is Satan' (12:9; 20:2), don't try to make it something else. God says that the 'figure standing in-between, in the midst of the Golden Candle sticks is Jesus Christ and that the candlesticks are the churches' (1:17-20); don't make them say something else.

In chapter 17 we have the beast with the seven heads and the woman sitting on the beast, and John says "*The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while*" (17:10) and when that woman is sitting on seven hills which have also been interpreted (17:18), what could that possibly mean? Take John's word for it, let John be the interpreter when he interprets.

Visions need to be understood as a whole. For example in the vision of the earthquake and the sixth seal (6:12ff), the sky, the lake, and the sea doesn't mean anything in themselves rather the whole image is designed for us to see the enormity of the situation.

OVERVIEW OF REVELATIONS

Chapters 1-3 set the stage and introduce us to the most significant players. First, John (1:1-11) is the "seer", the one who's going to tell the story throughout the book.

Then, the mighty figure of Jesus Christ (1:12-20); the picture is trying to tell the church that God has not lost control. Jesus Christ is in the midst of His church and

He has the churches in the palm of His hand and in His power. Jesus is the one who holds the key to death and Hades. God is telling the church; Rome¹ is not in control of eternity, Jesus Christ is. He is the Lord of the church and He is the Lord of history. It may look like He's lost control but remember He is in control; He is the one who controls your destiny.

Chapters 4-5 are the picture of the heavenly vision, a picture of the magnificence and glory of God. Chapter 4 tells us of the mighty God and His power, chapter 5 tells us of the Redeeming Lamb. He turns to look at the lion and sees the Lamb slain. The slain Lamb is God's purposes for mankind.

Chapters 6-7 the drama unfolds. Three times throughout the book, visions are presented and carefully structured in sets of seven (6-7, 8-11, 15-16).

Chapters 8-11 reveal the content of God's temporal judgments on Rome. Here are seven different ways of trying to express the enormity, the certainty and the power of judgment when it comes. When the seventh trumpet finally sounds it declares that the kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of the Lord and He will reign forever and ever and the people respond with Thanksgiving.

In Chapter eleven the question is how long and God says that before His wrath comes the people of God will be sealed; they will not face His wrath. They have been sealed by the blood of the Lamb and taken out of every nation and tribe and tongue, and God has placed His stamp on them. This simply means God's ownership; they belong to God. Because God has sealed them, they will not experience God's wrath.

In chapters 8-11 we have been given the big picture; chapters 12-22 expand in huge detail what has been summarized in chapters 1-11 and offers details of this judgment and triumph.

1 Representing all earthly power

Chapter 12 is the theological key to the book; God has triumphed over Satan but he (Satan) is not yet destroyed. In two visions we are told of Satan's attempt to destroy Christ and of his own defeat instead. Thus, within the recurring New Testament framework of the already/not yet, Satan is revealed as a defeated foe (already) whose final end and has not yet come. Therefore, there is rejoicing because "*now (has) come the salvation... of our God,*" (12:10) yet there is woe to the church because Satan knows his time is limited and he is taking vengeance on God's people.

Chapters 13–14 give us the clues to the book regarding Emperor worship and then show how for John's church this vengeance took the form of the Roman Empire, with its emperors who were demanding religious allegiance. However, the Empire and the emperors are doomed (chs.15–16).

Chapters 15-16 we come to the great finale in the form of the seven seals. We have the judgment of God now upon Rome.

The book concludes as a "tale of two cities" (chs.17–22). The city of earth (Rome) is condemned for its part in the persecution of God's people. This is followed by the city of God, where God's people dwell eternally. Chapter 18 is a funeral dirge, or a funeral meter, in the past tense. Here is John in the midst of Rome's greatest glory while on the Isle of Patmos and he sings the funeral song for Rome.

He stands in the face of this great empire and declares;
God is in control!

FINAL SUMMARY

There are 2 main points I want us to remember as we read the revelation. First, no matter what our world may seem like, ***God is in control!*** Second, tribulation is something, as Christians, we can expect will happen,

however, God's wrath is reserved for the enemies of God and Christians will never face God's wrath. Jesus Christ took God's wrath upon Himself on the cross. Our lives are hidden in Him and while there will be a judgment for believers and we will be held accountable for what God has entrusted to us, we need not fear God's wrath.

There is also in Scripture a theme, a recurring recommendation for believers to stand firm and remain vigilant in their faith until the end; we see this here in Rev. 2:7,11,22.

In writing to Christians Paul says, "*we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God... Each of us shall give account of himself to God*" (Rom. 14:10, 12). He tells the Corinthians, "*for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad*" (2 Cor. 5:10; Cf. Ro. 2:6–11; Rev. 20:12, 15). It is important to realize that this judgment of believers will be a judgment to evaluate and bestow various degrees of reward, but the fact that they will face such a judgment should never cause believers to fear that they will be eternally condemned. Jesus says, "*he who hears my word and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life*" (Jn. 5:24). Here "judgment" must be understood in the sense of eternal condemnation and death, since it is contrasted with passing from death into life. At the day of final judgment more than any other time, it is of utmost importance that "*there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Ro. 8:1). The Day of Judgment can thus be portrayed as one in which believers are rewarded and unbelievers are punished (see Rev. 11:18).²

However, the picture of the final judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 includes Christ separating the sheep from the

² Grudem, Wayne, pg. 1142 *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. 1994 Zonderban, Grand Rapids Michigan

goats, and rewarding those who receive His blessing while sending others to hell for eternity. It seems that this final judgment concerns both believers and unbelievers. This remains a strong warning for believers to remain faithful to the Gospel they have received and which they proclaim to the world. On the one hand, we are told that some believers will be surprised to be counted among those who are blessed by the Father for having served the Lord through care for the needy and vulnerable in their midst (Matt. 25:37-40). On the other, we learn that some self-confident believers, whose deeds didn't match their profession of faith in the Gospel of Christ, will be damned (Matt. 7:15-23). Therefore, while we may well celebrate the fact that we will forever be with Christ, we still need to heed the warnings in Scripture about the perils of falling away (Heb. 6:1-8). Peter tells us that there are those who know they way but later fell away (2 Pe. 2:21) Others who may insist they are Christian yet persist in behaving as un-Christian as anyone could imagine. We need to direct them to Heb. 10:26ff and encourage them to repent and seek the Lord.

Referring to the perilous circumstances of the end times Jesus says, *"unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short"* (Matt. 24:22). In a parable about heaven (Matt. 13:24 30:7) Jesus refers to the wheat and the tares. We are instructed here to not pull out what are obviously weeds since in doing so we might inadvertently pull out the wheat. We must remember our responsibility is to care for the flock. However, we must not be naïve enough to believe that everyone who declares him/herself to be Christian is indeed a Christian. Hebrews 11 is a wonderful encouragement to persevere in the face of the most extreme persecution. We must encourage each other to examine ourselves, to see whether not we are in the faith, whether or not we are walking in obedience to

the Lord (2 Cor. 13:5), to God's revealed Word and then encourage each other with the hope of Jesus Christ. Even perseverance to the end is a gift from God.

Assignment

Read through the book of Revelation and make observations. Notice the letters to the seven churches, where do we fit in this picture?

Read through the book of Revelation. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you today, write down what you hear Him saying and discuss this with your personal Pastor.

XI

DIFFICULT PASSAGES/ INTERPRETATION/APPLICATION

As I was growing up, the custom was for men to have short hair, and for women to have long hair. As television was introduced into our community, the world came into our homes. It was here that as a young teenager I saw men with long hair. The length of a man's hair became an issue. I even remember at the local sporting event where a group of men with "short" hair attacked a man wearing a wig of "long" hair; the attackers felt justified and proclaimed that they were acting as 'agents of the Lord'.

"Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?" (1 Cor. 11:14) was a verse regularly quoted whenever there was a discussion or debate about "hair". What seems to be clear from this Scripture is that men and women need to be aware that they should look different from each other, and hair length is an important part in this. The problem of course is that Scripture is not clear about what exactly is "long" or what is "short". As a man's hair would grow, at what point did it become "sin"? If a woman would trim her hair, when did the "trim" become "short hair" and thus become sin?

Over time I have observed different faith groups who have "absolute laws" about things where the Bible is silent or where the biblical basis is weak at best. For example, there are Christian groups who teach that it is "sin" to

drive a motor vehicle; it is sin for a man to wear a tie, for a married man to not have a beard, for a woman to not have her head covered, for any use of electricity, the use of any musical instrument, or any use of jewelry. “*Do not be conformed to this world,*” (Ro. 12:2a) is the portion of Scripture often connected to such dogmatic statements. I remember asking those in authority over me, “What does the Bible teach about this?” and I do not remember the question receiving a satisfying response, too often it came back as, “That is what the elders say, submit, do not rebel!”

WE ALL MAKE JUDGEMENTS ON HOW TO APPLY THE SCRIPTURES

The problem we may have with applying the Scripture is transferring from the historical particular and its application to our current situation and application. The difficulty comes when their situation and our situation are clearly not the same. We need to know *why* we do certain things. There are many areas which Scripture either does not speak to, or areas in which it just is not clear. We need some confidence that it is okay to do what we're doing even if it is not directly addressed in the Word.

Each of us is in a different culture, have a different life experience and we approach Scripture from our own culture. The problem comes when we use Scripture as a proof text for what we believe to be true rather than going to Scripture and asking the Holy Spirit what *is* truth. All things need to be examined in light of the Scripture as did the Bereans and they were commended for it. (Ac. 17:11)

We come to the text and read it assuming that how we experience life is how it has always been or how it ought to be. So when missionaries came to Africa they would instruct the Africans that they needed to sit on benches

facing the front when worshiping. Whereas the more natural approach for most African cultures might be to sit in a circle gathered under a large tree. “The problem was that the missionaries’ view of Christianity was wedded to the story of their nation”¹ or their own expression in worship.

Many were taught that the drum was a satanic instrument. There is nothing satanic about the drum; or that an organ, a guitar, or a keyboard was God’s preferred instrument. There is nothing in Scripture to prove this, rather Scripture refers to a variety of instruments including the drum and recommends we use each of them to worship the Lord. This shows what can happen when culture is taught as Scripture, or when Scripture is quoted to add strength to a teaching, even though it may be incorrect.

I know of brothers, who as young men would play their instruments in their conservative church on a regular basis. The people enjoyed the music so much that they would tap their feet; this was determined by the leadership to be “sin”. The brothers were asked to not play in such a manner as to encourage the tapping of feet, thereby causing the people to “sin”.

PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD APPLICATION

Wherever we have particulars and life settings that are the same in our era as the particular settings that existed then, the word of God for us is exactly the same as it was for them.

1 Cor. 3:16,17 *“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”* Using this as an example, we ask the questions: “Do we still have

1 Katongole, Emmanuel, *MIRROR of the CHURCH, Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*. Zondervan Publishing, 2009 pg. 72

churches? Do we still have leaders in the churches? Should the church still be a temple of the living God inhabited by the Holy Spirit? Is it possible to split the church by division?" The answer to all of these questions is, "Yes". The point is, *their* particular situation was comparable to *our* particular situation, and therefore God's word for them will be God's word for us.

We must ask, "Are the particulars represented in the text the same as the particulars for us today?" We find this is generally quite often true, especially as it refers to ethical texts, (1 Pet. 4:9) "*be hospitable to one another;* (Rom. 12:10); *love each other;* (Rom. 12:9-21) *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

We can all agree that this is for us today the same as it was for them. These are standard ethical concerns now as they were then. With many of the ethical commands in the epistles we get an immediate sense that that is how we *ought* to be. God's concern is that the Holy Spirit

reproduce the life of Christ *in* each of us and so these commands are just as relevant today as they were when they were first written.

Eph. 4:2.3 “*With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” Again, all of this applies directly to each of us today, in every cultural setting. The analyses is correct, the interpretation is accurate, the problem may come in the application, are we willing to obey?

DANGER ZONES—WHERE THE PAST IS NOT CLEAR

1 Cor. 11:23–25; Matt. 26:26–28; Mk. 14:22–24; Lk. 22:17–20; each gives an account of the Lord’s Supper. In none of these accounts are we told at what age someone may participate in Holy Communion. The past is simply not clear.

Acts 2:38; 8:16; Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 1:13, 15ff; Gal. 3:27; Matt. 28:19 are each speaking about baptism. Nowhere are we told at what age a person may get baptized. Many have a common belief that one must have a clear understanding before they may get baptized, while others contend Scripture supports infant baptism. The past is not clear.

So different families of faith develop practices and policies, which is fine. We need to differentiate between what God’s Word says and what we feel is good practice. We believe the apostle Paul’s words had the same weight and authority as our Lord Jesus Christ, yet even he (1 Cor. 7:25; 1 Cor. 7:40; 2 Cor. 8:10) makes a point to ensure we do not assume Christ said something when He did not. This does not discredit or discount Paul’s words; it is simply a matter of clarity. If Paul felt it was important to be clear

on what was his opinion and what were Christ's words, we certainly should do the same.

DANGER ZONES—EXTENDED APPLICATION

Sometimes we take a statement, make a principle out of it, and after that we apply the principle anywhere and everywhere in any kind of way.

Is it permissible to take 1 Cor. 3:16,17 "*Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are*" which applies to the church community, and then apply it to the individual life? Basically the answer is "no". We end up with an *extended* application that is personal and miss the *intended* application, which is to the church community. Does not the Bible teach the physical body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Yes it does, (1 Cor. 6:19) but not here!

Don't try to make this portion say something that, even though it is biblically true, it is not said here. Rather go to where that biblical truth *is* stated and use *it* as a proof text. As long as we're willing to go and use extended application just because it is true someplace, we set ourselves up to miss the intended application of the text, which we are misapplying!

We may think (2 Cor. 6:14) "*Do not be bound together with unbelievers*" is a warning against Christians marrying non-Christians, or a warning to not form business partnerships with unbelievers. The only problem is it is *not true*! The text probably has to do with not joining pagans in idolatrous worship. The entire context leads to that. Now these principles can be supported by many Scriptures, it is not wise for a Christian to marry a non-Christian or to join a partnership with a non-Christian; where values are

so different that surely there will be problems. However, this portion does not say that.

DANGER ZONES—NON-COMPARABLE DETAILS

This is *where their details are simply different from our details*. (1 Cor. 8:10) God does not care what kind of food we eat. However, in the culture of that day most festivities were around idolatrous activities, especially those involving food. The issue being addressed is participating in events intended to promote fellowship with demons.

There may be no place today where we have the opportunity to go to an idol temple and eat foods, which is what Paul here specifically forbids. The point of this teaching is *we cannot participate with demons and fellowship with the Lord at the same time*. We must make sure to stay clear of whatever “participate with demons” looks like for us today in our culture. If anything, this portion can be used as instruction on mixing occult spirituality, superstition, or witchcraft fetishes and practices with Christianity. Christians need to avoid anything that invites participating with demons.

DANGER ZONES—CULTURAL RELATIVITY

What the relevant application was for them may not be relevant for us today. The problem is God’s word was given in a historical situation and we read it in *our* historical situation.

Sometimes literally obeying a text can have the effect of us disobeying the intent of the text. For example on the issue of head coverings (1 Cor. 11:6,7), in some cultures women don’t have their heads covered. The reason for women being instructed to have their head covered was

to promote humility. Paul wanted Christian women not to be assimilated with women priests who used to have long hair and would use them in some ecstatic practices in their temples. Today some of the head coverings can become quite elaborate, and in many cultures for a woman to wear a head covering would make her the center of attention and would be most distracting.

So here we see obeying the text literally, can result in us disobeying the intent of the text. The question is, "What do we do in a culture when the situation addressed in the Scripture is not an issue in our culture today?"

Culture is neither sinful nor Godly; it simply *is* culture. If we insist that our culture today must be what it was when the Bible was written we indeed have another problem. Of which culture in the Bible are we speaking? Are we speaking of the Jewish culture? Are we speaking of the farming based culture? Are we speaking of the Hellenistic² culture? Paul is speaking to an absolutely Greek culture whereas Jesus is speaking to a Jewish culture.

We want to hear the Word of God but we do not want to bring *culture* as God's word.

DIFFICULT PASSAGES³

Peter, in 2 Peter 3:14-18 cautions the Christians about getting caught up in difficult passages or issues, encouraging them to remain diligent in their work. He further cautions them that the Scripture "*in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.*" It is not wise to attempt to conceal the fact that these difficulties exist. It is wisdom,

² *Hellenistic* is a word describing the Roman culture

³ Torrey, R. (1998). *Difficulties in the Bible : Alleged errors and contradictions*. Willow Grove: Woodlawn Electronic Publishing.

as well as of honesty, to openly face them and consider them.

The Bible is a revelation of the mind, will, character, and being of an infinitely great, perfectly wise and absolutely Holy God. God Himself is the Author of this revelation. This revelation is made to finite beings who are imperfect in intellectual development and in knowledge, and who are also imperfect in character and in spiritual discernment. When the finite tries to understand the infinite, there is going to be difficulty.

There must be, in any complete revelation of God's mind and will and character and being, things hard for the beginner to understand; and the wisest and best of us are but beginners.

The second thing to be said about these difficulties is that *a difficulty in a doctrine, or a grave objection to a doctrine, does not in any way prove the doctrine to be untrue.*

He is a very shallow Bible scholar who gives up his belief in the divine origin and inerrancy of the Bible because there are some supposed facts that he cannot reconcile with that doctrine. There are in the theological world today many shallow thinkers of that kind.

For example Jn. 3:16 and Jn. 10:28 affirm God's love for us, and the fact that He does not anyone to perish. Yet in Rom. 9:22 Paul says, "*What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?*" How can a loving God, who is not willing for any to perish, prepare some for destruction? Some would say that since they do not understand this, they reject God as the God of love.

Also: the fact that you cannot solve a difficulty does not prove it cannot be solved, and the fact that you cannot answer an objection does not prove at all that it cannot be answered. Any man should have a sufficient amount of

modesty, being so limited in knowledge, to say, "Though I see no possible solution to this difficulty, someone a little wiser than I might easily find one."

Also, the difficulties in the Bible seem to *have far more weight with superficial readers than with profound students*. It is also noteworthy how the difficulties in the Bible seem to *rapidly disappear upon careful and prayerful study*.

We must remember *the language in which the Bible was written*. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. The Bible is a book of all ages and for all kinds of people, and therefore it was written in the language that was understood by all, the language of the common people.

We need to accept that we have an *imperfect knowledge of the history, geography and usages of Bible times*. This does not mean we cannot grasp what God wants us to grasp, for the same Spirit who inspired the writers of the Bible is living in each of us and, together we can have confidence in the Word of God!

HOW SHALL WE DEAL WITH THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE BIBLE?

1. *Honestly*: Whenever we find a difficulty in the Bible openly acknowledge it. If we cannot give a good, honest explanation, let's not attempt any at all.
2. *Humbly*: Recognize the limitations of our own mind and knowledge, and do not for a moment imagine that there is no solution just because we have found none.
3. *Determinedly*: Make up our mind that we will find the solution by any amount of study and hard thinking. The difficulties of the Bible are our heavenly Father's challenge to us to set our brains to work.

4. *Fearlessly*: Let's not be frightened when we find a difficulty.
5. *Patiently*: Let's not be discouraged because we do not solve every problem in a day.
6. *Scripturally*: If we find a difficulty in one part of the Bible, look for another Scripture to bring clarity. Nothing explains Scripture like Scripture.
7. *Prayerfully*: It is simply wonderful how difficulties dissolve when one looks at them on his knees. Not only does God open our eyes in answer to prayer to behold wonderful things out of His law, but He also opens our eyes to look straight through a difficulty that seemed impenetrable before we prayed. One great reason why many modern Bible scholars have learned to be destructive critics is because they have forgotten how to pray.

Applying God's Word

As you read Scripture, make a note of difficult passages, study them, ask the Lord to lead you, and discuss them with your peers.

Choose one of the passages listed in this chapter, examine it and discuss it with your peers—searching the Scripture, asking the Lord for His wisdom.

XII.

ETHICS, THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

We were in a church meeting where a woman shared the story of how Christ had healed her from extreme childhood sexual abuse. Her teaching included a drama entitled “Blankets of Shame”.¹ It told the story that after each incidence of childhood abuse, beginning at the earliest age possible, the reaction and response of those in authority over her, effectively put on blankets of shame. As the story unfolded, this young girl, now a woman, told of how the blankets of shame were systematically removed, one at a time, as people in authority over her responded to her, as the Holy Spirit directed, in a Christ-like manner.

After she finished testifying to Christ’s wonderful work of healing in her life, a few of the older ladies spoke to her. These ladies, demonstrating deep pain within their hearts, said, “You can tell your story, we may not; it is not permitted.” When asked why they could not share their story, they said they were told² to be “*forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead*” (Phil. 3:13).

Christian ethics is about the truth of Jesus Christ washing our minds and penetrating our hearts to affect

1 See Appendix II, *Blankets of Shame*

2 Another example of using a Scripture completely out of context and completely void of its original meaning or intent and using it to abusively suppress the truth and continue to keep the victims of abuse in bondage.

everything we say and do; it is about God's Kingdom coming to earth, and His will being done on earth (Matt. 6:10). Our actions reveal what we really believe. The kingdom ruling our hearts is revealed in our actions.

Each country has in their history some event that demonstrates gross injustices either brought on by Christians or tolerated by Christians. In most cases the Christians try to find non-Christian people to blame for the atrocities. We are reminded of what happened in the spring of 1994.

If Christians³ in Rwanda had been slaughtered by non-Christians, it would have been tragic—but perhaps easier to comprehend. However, Christians killed other Christians, often in the same churches where they had worshiped together. Christianity seemed little more than an add-on—an inconsequential relish⁴ that did not radically affect people's so-called natural identities, nor the goals or purposes they pursued. Purposes and goals were dictated to Christians and non-Christians alike by radio personalities and political figures.⁵

When we look at Rwanda as a mirror to the church, it helps us realize what little consequence the biblical story has on the way Christians live their lives in the West.⁶ We have to live with our feet on

3 I believe a huge error is made in simply calling someone "Christian" or in assuming that someone who calls himself or herself "Christian" is indeed that. Christ instructed us to "make disciples", I believe none who are genuine disciples of Jesus Christ would either participate in or tolerate such atrocities—discipleship is the issue!

4 Relish is a mixture of cucumbers and onions often added to a dish to give it flavor, it is not a necessary part of the food, only to make it look or taste more pleasant.

5 This looked different in Rwanda than it does in the West. The West seems to be controlled by public figures and personalities, by movies and music. The trends in society become normalized through the news and entertainment media, thereby defining our very culture.

6 My personal note: it often seems easier to condemn another culture or the activity of 'others'. We must learn to practice Paul's instruction to, "*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?*" (2 Cor. 13:5)

the ground, devoted to our calling to serve God in this place.⁷

THE HEART OF ETHICS

Ethics is not merely the response for the grateful heart to what God has done for someone or for community. Ethics is the necessary outworking of what God has worked in the community and its individual members. Christian ethics does indeed have to do with human behavior, the chosen behavior of a person saved and empowered by grace to respond to God's commands and emulate behavior of the samplers such as Christ and His apostles.⁸

In the New Testament we have instruction on the law of Christ, which Paul refers to as (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2) a law that is composed of three elements:

1. Emulating the pattern of Christ's life;
2. Obedience of faith, which includes obeying Christ's teachings (including His reaffirmation of some Old Testament teachings) as reapplied to the Christian community;
3. Obeying the new apostolic teaching, which builds upon the example and teaching of Christ. *Ultimately, New Testament ethics is about the imitation of Christ.*

Ethics is not just about attitude or gratitude; it is about a necessary walking in the right direction, having heard the clear call of Jesus to "walk this way." The clearer the image we have of Jesus and His character in our mind, the

7 Katongole, Emmanuel, *MIRROR of the CHURCH, Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*. Zondervan Publishing, 2009 pg. 12,68,72,85,89,116,142,156

8 Witherington III, Ben. *The Indelible Image, The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament*. Inter Varsity Press, 2010. Pg. 423

more clearly we may be able to discern how to imitate His character and behavior. Jesus' ministry was the beginning of the Kingdom on earth, the divine saving reign of God upon the earth, where God's will, is at last done for one and all.⁹

As the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost the disciples were empowered, not only for mission but also for obedience to God, for walking in a Holy way that is pleasing to the Lord, for they are filled with God's Holy Spirit. The ethics of the Kingdom now became a possibility for them, not just a dream that only Jesus could live out. They were pilgrims empowered to pray, praise, proclaim, and walk as Jesus walked, heading for the Kingdom goal.¹⁰

If the Bible is, as I believe, the living Word of God, then when we identify with the meaning of this text, we are in touch with the very mind of the living God. God is still around to define and defend the meaning of the text by His Holy Spirit, who leads the believer into all truth (Jn. 16:13). Between listening intently to the text and listening to the still small voice of the Spirit, it is reasonable to believe we are able to get the meaning of the text. What we may well hear is, "What I said is still what I am saying, and what I meant is still what I mean."

There's a reason for this. God, in Christ told the truth in the first place, and it requires no improvements. What it requires is learning and applying the truth to our lives. What it requires is not only a spirit of questioning and examining but also an attitude of submission, and if we are able to do that, we may hope to hear the final approval, "*Well done, good and faithful servant, inherit the kingdom.*" (Matt. 25:21)¹¹

Christian ethics are based on God's will. An ethical duty is something we *ought* to do. It is a divine *prescription*. God never wills anything contrary to His unchanging

9 Ibid Pg. 427

10 Ibid Pg. 428

11 Ibid Pg. 772

moral character. When Christ gave the great invitation, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*” (Matt. 28:18-20) He was not speaking to the professional Christian worker; He was speaking to everyone!

The Apostle Paul, giving instructions on how to live says, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*” (Col. 3:17). So every action, every interaction and activity is designed by God to bring glory to God.

Paul follows this with teaching on family relationships and then with guidelines for employers and workers. God’s intent is for His Word and His Spirit to be present in every area of human life and interaction. “*The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us*” (Jn. 1:14) shows how God wants to be present in everyday life. To ensure this would happen, God sent the Holy Spirit to live in us and give us the “power” (Ac. 1:8) to be His witnesses at home and throughout the earth.

The Spirit is clearly seen as Jesus’ agent, just as Jesus is seen as the agent of the Father on earth (Jn. 16:13–15). Jesus is the advocate¹² of the Father, and the Spirit is the advocate of the Son.¹³

CHRIST, OUR EXAMPLE

When Jesus called us to be His disciples, to take up our cross daily and follow Him, (Lk. 9:23) He really meant

12 One speaking or interceding on behalf of another, similar to a lawyer speaking on behalf of a defendant in court

13 Witherington III, Ben. *The Indelible Image, The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament*. Inter Varsity Press, 2010nPg. 366

we were to follow His example of how He lived. You do not take up the cross unless you are a condemned person. The story of the Master was to become the story of the disciple. The ethics of Jesus is all about self-sacrifice and servant-hood, not merely denying *one's self* something in particular, but actually denying *oneself*, giving up one's life to Christ. The ultimate test of obedience is seen as the willingness to assume the yoke of discipleship to Jesus.¹⁴

Money, possessions, and our attitudes towards them have a way of revealing what is in our hearts. The ethics of Jesus, when it comes to the issue of wealth and its accumulation can be summed up in a few key sentences:

1. Money is not the ultimate goal of existence; it is a clear and present danger to a fallen person's soul and spiritual life.
2. Money can be called "unrighteous Mammon" (Lk. 16:11) or, as we might say, "filthy lucre" (1 Pe. 5:2). Jesus' greatest concern about it is that it not become the master of those who think they have mastered it; humans are made so that they cannot serve two masters.
3. The followers of Jesus should live with the fundamental trust in God, (Phil. 4:19) who will take care of the basic necessities in life.
4. There is no problem with doing one's religious or civic duty when it comes to taxes (Rom. 13:7), to get money, or tools, (Phil. 4:19) but one's ultimate loyalty must be to God.
5. The basic principle of giving for Jesus' followers is sacrificial, joyful giving (2 Cor. 9:7), not tithing, which

¹⁴ Ibid Pg. 455

is a practice for those under the Mosaic covenant, not the new one.

When it comes to having been wronged, or taken advantage of, Jesus asks His disciples to think differently from the world. They need to think what they *ought* to do (Eph. 4:32), not merely what was legal to do. Our response to a given situation is based on our thinking and deciding what our ethical guidelines will be, before the situation happens, we do not simply respond as the situation might naturally call for. For example, if I purpose in my heart to not speak ill of anyone then when I am tempted to speak ill of someone I need not try to discern what I should do, my conviction will direct my action.

Disciples are to respond in a helpful way even to those who have no power over them (Jam. 2:1-13), giving generously to a beggar. Self-sacrifice replaces self-interest, as the basis of ethics in the kingdom because it is assumed that Jesus has indeed established a new way of living. Jesus is talking about behavior, not feelings or experience.

Carrying a heavy cross requires that we lay down everything else to pick it up, including laying down our weapons, desire to retaliate, grudges, unwillingness to forgive, lack of love for our neighbour, much less for our enemy. Jesus knew this was humanly impossible, and so He came to change human beings from the inside out, He believed that the new Kingdom foreseen by Isaiah (Is. 9:7) was coming and had now arrived.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS IS ABSOLUTE¹⁵

Since God's moral character does not change (Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17), it follows that moral obligations flowing from His nature are absolute. They are always binding

¹⁵ Geisler, Norman, L. *Christian Ethics 2nd Edition* Baker Academic, Grand Rapids Michigan. 2010 pgs. 97-115

everywhere on everyone. They are not something we can discuss and decide if we like them, the only choice is to obey or to disobey. Murder is wrong at all times and all places and for all people. This is true because humans are created in the *image of God* (Gen. 1:27; 9:6) and this includes a moral likeness to God (Col. 3:10; Jam. 3:9), and whatever reflects God's unchanging moral character is a moral absolute.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS; BASED ON GOD'S REVELATION

Christian ethics are based on God's commands, the revelation which is both general (Rom. 1:19–20; 2:12–15) and special (Rom. 2:18; 3:2). God has revealed Himself both in nature (Ps. 19:1–6) and in Scripture (Ps. 19:7–14). General revelation contains God's commands for all people; special revelation declares His will for believers. In any case, the basis of human ethical responsibility is divine revelation.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS IS PRESCRIPTIVE¹⁶

Since a moral God *prescribes* moral rightness, it is *prescriptive*. From a Christian point of view, a purely *descriptive*¹⁷ ethic is no ethic at all. I may have a degree in theology, be a Reverend with a position and title and be well respected in the community yet; perhaps our prayers seem hindered? Peter may give us some insight here, "*You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.*" (1 Pe.

¹⁶ A *prescription* is what we need to do; a *description* is simply describing something.

¹⁷ *Descriptive* is simply telling what is, simply an account of what happened, similar to a news report.

3:7) I may even lecture my wife about how she needs to submit and my children that they need to honour me all the while I may be overlooking God's directive given in the same chapter of Eph. 5:22-33 for the husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" or to "*not provoke your children to anger*"(6:4). Ethics must be seen and felt by those around us or they have no merit. It does not work to say, "Do as I say and not as I do".

CHRISTIAN ETHICS IS DUTY-CENTERED

The Christian ethic is duty-centered and insists that even some acts that fail, are good. The result does not determine whether the action was good, *goodness* has determined the response, whatever the result may be. So how do we determine what the Biblical Christian response or action is to be?

Some have wrongly supposed that simply because Jesus said that one can lust and even murder *in his heart* (Matt. 5:28), that this means it is equally evil to *imagine* a sin as it is to *do* it. In the same sermon, Jesus rejected this view, indicating there are at least three levels of sin with corresponding judgments (Matt. 5:22).

Indeed, the whole concept of degrees of punishment in hell (Matt. 5:22; Rom. 2:6; Rev. 20:12) and graded levels of reward in heaven (1 Cor. 3:11–15) indicates that sins come in degrees. The fact that some Christians' sins call for excommunication (1 Cor. 5) and others for death (1 Cor. 11:30) also supports the general biblical pattern that all sins are not equal in weight. There is one sin so great as to be unforgiveable (Mk. 3:29).

Perhaps the clearest indication of higher and lower moral laws comes in Jesus' answer to the lawyer's question about the "*greatest commandment*" (Matt. 22:34–4).

Jesus clearly affirms that the “*first and greatest*” is above the *second*, that loving God is of supreme importance, and then below that comes loving one’s neighbor. This point is reaffirmed when our Lord says, (*whoever*) “*loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me*” (Matt. 10:37). Numerous other scriptural passages may be cited to support this point (Pr. 6:16–18 Matt. 5:22; 1 Tim.1:15; Jm. 2:13; 1 Jn. 5:16). All sins are not equal, for there are clearly higher and lower moral laws. However, all sin is an offense to God and to His holiness and as such, all sins are equal, as we see in James 2:9-13. One of the effects of sin is that it destroys human relations and in this way, restoration from one sin to another varies. To be reconciled to a woman whose child one has murdered requires a completely different measure of grace than does becoming reconciled with someone who has been lied too.

NO GUILT IS IMPUTED FOR THE UNAVOIDABLE

First, God does not hold the individual responsible for personally unavoidable moral conflicts, providing that one keeps the higher law. Second, persons are not morally responsible if they failed to keep an obligation they could not possibly keep without breaking a higher obligation. Third, the Bible includes many examples of persons who were praised by God for following their highest duty in situations of conflict.

Daniel (Dan.6) and the three young Hebrew youths (Dan.3) received divine approval for their disobedience of human government. God blessed the Hebrew midwives for their disobedience to the king’s command (Ex.1). David and his men—who entered *the house of God*, asked

the priest for bread, and (1 Sam. 21:3–5) “*ate the consecrated bread*” which was clearly (Lev. 24:5–9) proclaims to be consecrated, and they were declared guiltless by Christ (Matt. 12:3–4). In each case there was no divine condemnation for the law they did not keep, instead, there was clearly divine approval.

LOVE FOR GOD OVER LOVE FOR HUMANKIND

Jesus explicitly declares the commandment to love God to be the *first and greatest*. Further, He teaches (Matt. 22:36–38) that one’s love for God should be so much more than one’s love for parents; that the love for parents would look like *hate* by contrast (Lk. 14:26).

OBEY GOD OVER GOVERNMENT

Once again as we look at Scripture, it is important to remember the biblical context. When Romans, for instance, was written, the Roman Imperial rule is somehow commended for its role of a social regulator. Its power is used to repress evil and provide security to its citizens including the Christians. However, towards the end of the 1st century CE when the book of Revelation is composed, the Roman Empire has become an oppressing power against the Christian Church. Thus, the author of Revelation does not hesitate to call it a beast and its capital Babylon whose fall, as a divine punishment, is unavoidable (Rev. 18).¹⁸

God ordained human government and commands the Christian to *submit* to and *obey* those in authority, even if they are evil rulers (Rom. 13:1–2; Tit. 3:1). Peter goes so far as to say we should submit to “*every human institution*

¹⁸ Viateur Habarurema, received in an email on July 22, 2013 as a comment on my notes.

for the Lord's sake" (1 Pe. 2:13). The attempt of some to make a difference between submission and obedience—and thus claim that Christians need only to submit to but not to obey government—fails for several reasons.

First, it is plainly opposed to the spirit of the passages that strongly call Christians to follow the laws of the land. Second, the word *submission* as used in the New Testament implies *obedience*. It was, for example, what slaves were to do toward their masters (Col. 3:22). Finally, the words *submission* and *obedience* are used in parallel in Titus (3:1); thus Christians are told, *to be obedient to governmental authorities*.

Clearly God commands Christians to obey government. Hence, when God approves disobedience to government, it is in view of a higher moral law. Several biblical instances illustrate this point. First, worship of God is higher than any command of government (Dan. 3). Second, no governmental law against private prayer should be obeyed (Dan. 6). Further, if a government commands a believer not to preach the gospel (Ac. 4–5), or if it decrees participation in idolatry (Dan. 3) or even the murder of innocent victim's (Ex. 1), it should *not* be obeyed. In each case the moral obligation to pray, worship God, preach the gospel, and go forth is a higher duty than the one to obey the government.

MERCY TRUMPS OVER JUSTICE

In the story of the Hebrew midwives we have a clear case of divinely approved lying to save a life. For Scripture says, "*God was good to the midwives; and... He established households for them*" (Ex. 1:20–21). Nowhere in the text does God ever say they were blessed only for their mercy and in spite of their lie. Indeed, the lie was

part of the mercy shown. For mercy sometimes surpasses justice (Jam. 2:13).

This concludes the main points of this ethical view. This view stands firmly on moral principles based in the absolute, unchanging character of God. These moral principles are absolute in their source, absolute in their sphere, and absolute in their order of priority. They are objective, clearly stated, and with practical importance in content. God's moral laws are specific and are known before the situation, that is, they do not change with the situation, they are eternal and absolute. Furthermore, there are no exceptions to them; they apply to all people in all places and all times.

This view neither closes its eyes to the reality of moral conflicts nor blames an individual because the conflicts are unavoidable. This view makes sense of the cross. There is no moral justification for the cross unless there are higher and lower moral laws. Mercy may be more important than justice. The one (Christ) can suffer for the many that they may be saved (Rom. 5:6–18). However, if mercy and love are not higher moral values than justice (Jam. 2:13), then what God did to Christ when it pleased Him to *bruise* His Son (Is. 53:5), was a great injustice; but God cannot be unjust.

Applying Ethical Principals

1. Mark 2:27,28 “*Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*”

What does it mean to have a *Sabbath*?
Do we take a day of rest?

2. 1 Pet. 2:13 *“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority.”*

What does it look like to *submit* to those in authority over us? What if we are being asked to mistreat people? What if we simply don’t like what we are being asked to do?

3. Eph. 4:1-3 *“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

Does this describe how I am with people around me?
Discuss this with your spouse and friends.

IN CONCLUSION

Jesus doesn’t turn 5000 stones into whole loaves so that each man can have one for his family. No, the multiplication is in the fragments. We engage in mission to establish friendships that lead to the formation of a new people in the world.¹⁹

God bless
Dave Kehler
Calvary Chapel
Steinbach Manitoba Canada

¹⁹ Katongole, Emmanuel, *MIRROR of the CHURCH, Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*. Zondervan Publishing, 2009 pg.156

APPENDIX I.

The following is a classic account of the importance of first-hand observation, and careful, intense, focused study. It teaches lessons that apply to almost any discipline. Indeed, it is widely used in colleges and universities across the U.S. as a teaching tool in both the humanities and the sciences.

Its lessons certainly apply to studying the Bible. Too often students of the Bible rely on second-hand, derivative knowledge, acquired from pastors, teachers, parents, books *about* the Bible, or other secondary sources. While all of these have their place, there is no substitute, in the end, for one's *own* first-hand study and experience of the Scriptures, and for the joy of discovery.

THE STUDENT, THE FISH, AND AGASSIZ²⁰ by the Student [Samuel H. Scudder]

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

“When do you wish to begin?” he asked.

“Now,” I replied.

This seemed to please him, and with an energetic “Very well,” he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.

20 <http://people.bethel.edu/~dhoward/resources/Agassizfish/Agassizfish.htm>

“Take this fish,” he said, “and look at it; we call it a *Haemulon*²¹; by and by I will ask what you have seen.”

With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me.

“No man is fit to be a naturalist,” said he, “who does not know how to take care of specimens.”

I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray, and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly. Those were not the days of ground glass stoppers, and elegantly shaped exhibition jars; all the old students will recall the huge, neck less glass bottles with their leaky, wax-besmeared corks, half-eaten by insects and begrimed with cellar dust. Entomology was a cleaner science than ichthyology, but the example of the professor who had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish was infectious; and though this alcohol had “a very ancient and fish-like smell,” I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts, and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water. Still I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. My friends at home, too, were annoyed, when they discovered that no amount of *eau de cologne* would drown the perfume which haunted me like a shadow.

In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the professor, who had, however, left the museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting-fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of a normal, sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began

21 Any fish that makes a “grunt” like sound—sometimes known as “grunt fish”.

to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face -- ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters view -- just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour, I concluded that lunch was necessary; so with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the museum, but had gone and would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my fingers down its throat to see how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me -- I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.

"That is right," said he, "a pencil is one of the best eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked."

With these encouraging words he added --

"Well, what is it like?"

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknown to me; the fringed gill-arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshy lips, and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fin, and forked tail; the compressed and arched body. When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment:

"You have not looked very carefully; why," he continued, more earnestly, "you haven't seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly

before your eyes as the fish itself. Look again; look again!" And he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish? But now I set myself to the task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor's criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and when, towards its close, the professor inquired,

"Do you see it yet?"

"No," I replied. "I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before."

"That is next best," said he earnestly, "but I won't hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish."

This was disconcerting; not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be, but also, without reviewing my new discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.

The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

"Do you perhaps mean," I asked, "that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?"

His thoroughly pleased, "Of course, of course!" repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically -- as he always did -- upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.

"Oh, look at your fish!" he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned and heard my new catalogue.

“That is good, that is good!” he repeated, “but that is not all; go on.” And so for three long days, he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid. “Look, look, look,” was his repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had -- a lesson whose influence was extended to the details of every subsequent study; a legacy the professor has left to me, as he left it to many others, of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we cannot part.

A year afterwards, some of us were amusing ourselves with chalking outlandish beasts upon the blackboard. We drew prancing star-fishes; frogs in mortal combat; hydro-headed worms; stately craw-fishes, standing on their tails, bearing aloft umbrellas; and grotesque fishes, with gaping mouths and staring eyes. The professor came in shortly after, and was as much amused as any at our experiments. He looked at the fishes.

“*Haemulons*, every one of them,” he said; “Mr. _____ drew them.”

True; and to this day, if I attempt a fish, I can draw nothing but *Haemulons*.

The fourth day a second fish of the same group was placed beside the first, and I was bidden to point out the resemblances and differences between the two; another and another followed, until the entire family lay before me, and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves; the odor had become a pleasant perfume; and even now, the sight of an old six-inch worm-eaten cork brings fragrant memories!

The whole group of *Haemulons* was thus brought into review; and whether engaged upon the dissection of the internal organs, preparation and examination of the bony framework, or the description of the various parts, Agassiz’s training in the method of observing facts in their orderly arrangement, was ever accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them.

“Facts are stupid things,” he would say, “until brought into connection with some general law.”

At the end of eight months, it was almost with reluctance that I left these friends and turned to insects; but what I gained by this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation in my favorite groups.

-- from *American Poems* (3rd ed.; Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1879): pp. 450-54

APPENDIX II.

BLANKETS OF SHAME

Script for a demonstration of effects of abuse, shame and recovery!

Sarah is 38 years old. She has been married for 18 years and has 2 children. She grew up in a Christian home and is a committed, born-again Christian.

[Sarah—lying in the fetal position]

When Sarah was six years old, she was at her uncle's house for the holidays. When Sarah was asleep, her uncle came into the room, woke her up, and gave her something to drink which made her dozy but awake. He took her into the living room and there, Sarah's uncle and aunt together played with her private parts and did things that hurt her. He said, "Mommy and daddy both know about this and it was okay, because he loved her." Is this love? She cried. He said, "Good girls don't cry and that she was a good girl, wasn't she?" When he put her to bed her uncle said, "If you tell anyone, they wouldn't believe you and you will be in big trouble!"

[As the storyteller says, "When he put her to bed" a man and a woman start to bind her hands and gagged her mouth.]

When Sarah got home she said she did not want to go back to her uncle's house. Her dad asked her, "Why not?" Sarah said, "I didn't like how my uncle kissed me". Her dad said, "Okay" and she never went back. Nobody asked and she never told anyone what really happened.

[#1—man covers Sarah with a blanket]

During the next few months Sarah changed; she no longer answered to “Sarah” because she said, “Sarah is dead”. Now she would only answer to “Joanne”—which was her middle name. Sarah’s parents, teachers and Sunday school teachers were frustrated and angry at Sarah’s new behavior; because she was a middle child, and that explained it all—a November child no less, that explained it all—didn’t it?

[#2—woman covers with another blanket]

Sarah was now 11 years old. Coming home from school one day, some boys jumped out from behind the house and attacked her. They were kissing her and touching and they said they loved her. Is this love? Sarah fought for all she was worth—and she had become a pretty good fighter. She got away, bruised and bloody and with torn clothes. Her only thought was of how she would need to sneak into the house, quickly get cleaned up and never say a word to anyone, because if anyone found out, she would be in big trouble. They would say, “What did you do? Why were you there? What did you say?”

[#3—two youths put on another blanket]

Now Sarah is a teenager. Her parents aren’t sure what to do. Sarah is disruptive in church, rides on motorcycles, she smokes, she does poorly in school, gets in trouble with teachers, does not do her chores and generally seems distant and inattentive yet she has lots of energy. Dad and mom decide that strict discipline is the only answer. Dad is a very strict disciplinarian, an elder in the church—we must mold her. Is this love?

[#4—man covers with a blanket]

During college, Sarah rededicates her life to the Lord. The new freedom and joy last only 2 weeks and then the loneliness and emptiness come back. Pray more—give yourself more—memorize more Scripture—all seems to work for everyone else, why not for Sarah? It seems as though God is not there for her.

[#5—college student, caring study books and Bible covers with another blanket]

Sarah gets married. Now she will be safe. However, over the years she struggles with addictions—food, tobacco, pills—pills for pain, pills for sleep—but the pain inside just won't go away. After 10 years, intimacy and close relationships and meaningful fellowship with God are all things for someone else but not for Sarah. Her husband, her friends and her church all have very neat answers—Pray more—rededicate one more time, *you* must be the problem! Is this love?

[#6—2 women the friends cover with a blanket]

After many years, desperate, helpless and hopeless, Sarah gives up. She withdraws and crawls into herself. Even her marriage is a prison cell. She feels no hope because she is the bad one—she is the problem. Everyone has told her that and she believes them.

[#7—Another blanket]

Feeling hopeless himself, Sarah's husband goes to see his pastor, he starts to pray and he starts to change. After years, he slowly starts to pursue his wife and accept her as she is, as a wounded and hurting little girl. Is this love?

[#1&2—man takes off 2 blankets]

Sarah has a friend who listens to her and asks her, “What is behind the mask?” People are praying for Sarah and friends aren’t accepting a phony relationship. They start fighting to free Sarah and invite her to come out. It’s very scary for her and it takes a lot of time and patience. Is this love?

[#3&4—two women friends, at, “They start fighting” start to nudge and shake Sarah. Sarah starts moving under the blanket and helps—a little—to take off another blanket]

Sarah talks to someone who knows what she is going through. She starts remembering her painful past. Slowly Sarah begins to “feel” again. She has friends who listen to her and hold her and her husband who accepts her as she is. What a safe place. Sarah continues to become free.

[#5—blanket off—Sarah continues to struggle under the blanket]

Now Sarah moves into the church family. Again she asks for help. This time a group of people accept her, listen to her, and value her opinion. They begin to believe Sarah. Together they move toward God. She learns what love really means and relationships blossom.

[#6—man and woman with Bibles take off a blanket]

Now Sarah wants to minister to others who are hurt. Will we allow her to minister? Will we start to listen to Sarah and other hurting people in our church and care for them and love them as God calls us to or will we continue to bind them? Will we remove the chains?

[#7—remove blanket at “Will we start too”]

[Two people come and remove bindings at the end]

[Worship music begins as they dance and Praise together]

“My Redeemer Lives”

I know He rescued my soul
His blood has covered my sin
I believe
I believe

My shame He’s taken away
My pain is healed in His name
I believe
I believe

I’ll raise a banner
Cause my Lord has conquered the grave
My redeemer lives
My redeemer lives

You lift my burden
I’ll rise with You
I’m dancing on this mountain top
To see Your Kingdom come

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APPENDIX III.

52 WEEK BIBLE READING PLAN

	Epistles	The Law	History	Psalms	Poetry	Prophecy	Gospels
Week	(Sunday)	(Monday)	(Tuesday)	(Wednesday)	(Thursday)	(Friday)	(Saturday)
1	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 1-3	<input type="checkbox"/> Josh 1-5	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 1-6	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 1-2
2	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom 3-4	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 4-7	<input type="checkbox"/> Josh 6-10	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 3-5	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 3-4	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 7-11	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 3-4
3	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom 5-6	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 8-11	<input type="checkbox"/> Josh 11-15	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 6-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 5-6	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 12-17	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 5-7
4	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom 7-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 12-15	<input type="checkbox"/> Josh 16-20	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 9-11	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 7-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 18-22	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 8-10
5	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom 9-10	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 16-19	<input type="checkbox"/> Josh 21-24	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 12-14	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 9-10	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 23-28	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 11-13
6	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom 11-12	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 20-23	<input type="checkbox"/> Judge 1-6	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 15-17	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 11-12	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 29-33	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 14-16
7	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom 13-14	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 24-27	<input type="checkbox"/> Judge 7-11	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 18-20	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 13-14	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 34-39	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 17-19
8	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom 15-16	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 28-31	<input type="checkbox"/> Judge 12-16	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 21-23	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 15-16	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 40-44	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 20-22
9	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Cor 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 32-35	<input type="checkbox"/> Judge 17-21	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 24-26	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 17-18	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 45-50	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 23-25
10	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Cor 3-4	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 36-39	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruth	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 27-29	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 19-20	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 51-55	<input type="checkbox"/> Matt 26-28
11	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Cor 5-6	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 40-43	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Sam 1-5	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 30-32	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 21-22	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 56-61	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark 1-2
12	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Cor 7-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 44-47	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Sam 6-10	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 33-35	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 23-24	<input type="checkbox"/> Isa 62-66	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark 3-4
13	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Cor 9-10	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen 48-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Sam 11-15	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 36-38	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 25-26	<input type="checkbox"/> Jer 1-6	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark 5-6
14	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Cor 11-12	<input type="checkbox"/> Ex 1-4	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Sam 16-20	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 39-41	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 27-28	<input type="checkbox"/> Jer 7-11	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark 7-8
15	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Cor 13-14	<input type="checkbox"/> Ex 5-8	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Sam 21-25	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 42-44	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 29-30	<input type="checkbox"/> Jer 12-16	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark 9-10
16	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Cor 15-16	<input type="checkbox"/> Ex 9-12	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Sam 26-31	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 45-47	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 31-32	<input type="checkbox"/> Jer 17-21	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark 11-12
17	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Cor 1-3	<input type="checkbox"/> Ex 13-16	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Sam 1-4	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 48-50	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 33-34	<input type="checkbox"/> Jer 22-26	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark 13-14
18	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Cor 4-5	<input type="checkbox"/> Ex 17-20	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Sam 5-9	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 51-53	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 35-36	<input type="checkbox"/> Jer 27-31	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark 15-16
19	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Cor 6-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Ex 21-24	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Sam 10-14	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 54-56	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 37-38	<input type="checkbox"/> Jer 32-36	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 1-2
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21	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Cor 11-13	<input type="checkbox"/> Ex 29-32	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Sam 20-24	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 60-62	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 41-42	<input type="checkbox"/> Jer 42-46	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 5-6
22	<input type="checkbox"/> Gal 1-3	<input type="checkbox"/> Ex 33-36	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Ki 1-4	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 63-65	<input type="checkbox"/> Prov 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Jer 47-52	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 7-8
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24	<input type="checkbox"/> Eph 1-3	<input type="checkbox"/> Lev 1-3	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Ki 10-13	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 69-71	<input type="checkbox"/> Prov 4	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezek 1-6	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 11-12
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26	<input type="checkbox"/> Phil 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Lev 7-9	<input type="checkbox"/> 1Ki 19-22	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 75-77	<input type="checkbox"/> Prov 7	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezek 13-18	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 15-16
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42	<input type="checkbox"/> Heb 11-13	<input type="checkbox"/> Deut 1-3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Chr 21-24	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 120-121	<input type="checkbox"/> Prov 31	<input type="checkbox"/> Nahum	<input type="checkbox"/> Acts 7-8
43	<input type="checkbox"/> James 1-3	<input type="checkbox"/> Deut 4-6	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Chr 25-28	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 122-124	<input type="checkbox"/> Eccel 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Habakkuk	<input type="checkbox"/> Acts 9-10
44	<input type="checkbox"/> James 4-5	<input type="checkbox"/> Deut 7-9	<input type="checkbox"/> 2Chr 29-32	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 125-127	<input type="checkbox"/> Eccel 3-4	<input type="checkbox"/> Zephaniah	<input type="checkbox"/> Acts 11-12
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52	<input type="checkbox"/> Jude	<input type="checkbox"/> Deut 32-34	<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 6-10	<input type="checkbox"/> Ps 149-150	<input type="checkbox"/> Song 7-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Rev 18-22	<input type="checkbox"/> Acts 27-28

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APPENDIX II. — BLANKETS OF SHAME

Dave Kehler

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