

BST 305 Principles of Biblical Interpretation

Purpose: The purpose of this course is to help students develop an understanding of principles and techniques important to the study, interpretation, and application of the Scriptures.

Recommended Textbook: The recommended textbook for this course is *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th Edition. The authors are Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. Paperback, 304 pages. ©2014, Zondervan. ISBN-13: 9780310517825. We also suggest that students have a copy of *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* by the same authors.

Meet Your Professor

Dr. David Watson is the Academic Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Associate Professor of New Testament at United Seminary in Ohio. David is an ordained elder in the West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church. He has worked in the local church and in a United Methodist campus ministry. He currently serves on the Miami Valley District Committee on Ordained Ministry and the West Ohio Inclusive Body of Christ Ministry Team for Persons with Disabilities. As Academic Dean, Dr. Watson oversees the academic program of the school and is a member of United Seminary's Executive Staff.



We are pleased to have Dr. Watson lead the Principles of Biblical Interpretation course. Dr. Watson says, "I believe that the New Testament is the definitive revelation of the love of God made present in Jesus Christ. As such it is deeply relevant for our lives in the twenty-first century.

Yet the works of the New Testament have been influenced by the social and historical situations of the communities that produced them. They therefore bear the marks of first-century composition. Striking a balance between understanding these works as ancient texts and as present-day sacred scripture is a difficult but important process. To the greatest extent possible, we must hear the texts on their own terms while being open to the ways in which God works through these texts to lead us in the Christian life."

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this study, students should be able to:

1. Recognize literary structural elements in a Biblical text.
2. Apply principles of detailed observation to a verse, a paragraph, and to longer units of text.
3. Determine word meanings within texts, and demonstrate the proper use of concordances.
4. Explain the role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical interpretation.
5. Describe the history of our English Bible and explain the differences in modern translations.
6. Discuss the issue of "reader response" versus "authorial intent" approaches to biblical interpretation.
7. Discuss the role of context and historical / cultural background in determining meaning.
8. Interpret and apply texts from the various genre categories found in the Bible.

Structure: This course is divided into three sections. Each section has several Areas of Study which correspond to the chapters of the recommended textbook

BST 305.1 Foundations of Biblical Interpretation

First Area of Study: Introduction: The Need to Interpret

Second Area of Study: The Basic Tool: A Good Translation

Third Area of Study: The Epistles: Learning to Think Contextually

Fourth Area of Study: The Epistles: The Hermeneutical Questions

BST 305.2 Concepts in Biblical Interpretation Part I

First Area of Study: The Old Testament Narratives: Their Proper Use

Second Area of Study: Acts: The Question of Historical Precedent

Third Area of Study: The Gospels: One Story, Many Dimensions

Fourth Area of Study: The Parables: Do You Get the Point?

BST 305.3 Concepts in Biblical Interpretation Part II

First Area of Study: The Law(s): Covenant Stipulations for Israel

Second Area of Study: The Prophets: Enforcing the Covenant in Israel

Third Area of Study: The Psalms: Israel's Prayers and Ours

Fourth Area of Study: Wisdom: Then and Now

Fifth Area of Study: The Revelation: Images of Judgment and Hope

Earning Academic Credit

Academic credit is earned at Myrtle Beach Christian College and Pilgrim Theological Seminary by passing subject specific proficiency examinations and sometimes through papers or projects. Because adult students learn in many different ways, our emphasis is not so much on how a person has learned something but on the student's ability to demonstrate his or her knowledge. The successful completion of an examination requires a minimum score of 70%.

Less than 70% = Incomplete 71-80% = C, 81-90% = B, 91-100% = A

A record of a completed course is added to a student's academic record only when an examination has been successfully completed and all course requirements have been met. Incomplete grades are not placed on a transcript.

To ensure academic integrity, we require that all exams be taken at an authorized MBCC or Pilgrim Seminary Testing Center or, when necessary, be proctored by an adult unrelated to the student. A proctor must be a person of high moral character and be willing to oversee the taking of a series of exams. Paper exams are provided for incarcerated students.

Incarcerated students are reminded that in most prisons one must have permission to take college or seminary correspondence courses. We will provide a form for students to have completed by an appropriate prison official verifying that the student has permission to participate in the college or seminary program.

Please remember that individual proctors must be approved in advance.

Academic Integrity Policy

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of personal and academic honesty and integrity. Academic dishonesty, plagiarism, or cheating on exams will not be tolerated. Should a student be found in violation of the academic integrity policy, he or she will be prohibited from taking additional courses and his or her entire academic record will carry a permanent notation of dismissal for academic dishonesty.

How to Take This Course

There are four basic steps to follow in taking this course. First, thoroughly read one chapter of the textbook and review the chapter outline. Second listen to the lectures, if they are available to you. Third, prepare a written response to each learning objectives. Copy the learning objective first, then write your response. You must complete this written work before you will be permitted to take the exam. Fourth, take the practice quiz. If you do well on the quiz, move on to the next lesson.

BST 305.1 Foundations of Biblical Interpretation

First Area of Study: Introduction: The Need to Interpret

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 1 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Describe why the goal of interpretation is not uniqueness.
2. Explain the goal of good interpretation.
3. Define exegesis.
4. Define hermeneutics.
5. Describe the reasons that we must carefully attend to interpretation.
6. Identify the different ways that all readers interpret the Bible, whether they know it or not.
7. Explain the dual nature of the Bible.
8. Identify the different types of communication used in Scripture.
9. Identify the important questions in interpretation that require assistance from experts.
10. Identify the important questions in interpretation that require no assistance from experts.
11. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the types of tools available to students of the Bible.
12. Identify the most important question in interpreting the Bible.

Presentations

We will begin with a series of initial presentations related to this chapter and to the course in general. All of the presentations throughout the course are less than one half hour in length. Please listen to all of the presentations. We encourage you to take notes.

[Presentation One:](#) This is the first presentation for the Principles of Biblical Interpretation course. In this introductory presentation Dr. Watson explores the question of “What is the Bible and its purpose?”

[Presentation Two:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses the historical context of the Bible and tools that may be used to interpret it.

[Presentation Three:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson continues the conversation on Biblical historical context and tools for interpretation.

[Presentation Four:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson introduces the concept of the canon and explains how parts of the Bible were formed and canonized.

[Presentation Five:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson continues the conversation of the previous presentation.

[Presentation Six:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses different approaches to Biblical interpretation and how how differences can be reconciled within the Christian community of faith.

[Presentation Seven:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses the authority of the Bible.

[Presentation Eight:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses the importance of the Church as a community of faith.

[Presentation Nine:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses modernity and post-modernity and its affects on views of God and religion in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Presentation Ten: This is a continuation of Dr. Watson's discussion on modernity and post-modernity and its affects on the views of God and religion in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Key Points

- Everyone who reads the Bible is taking part in interpretation.
- The point of good interpretation is not to be unique, but to get at the plain meaning of the text.
- The Bible is both eternally relevant and historically particular. Therefore, good interpretation must incorporate the then and there as well as the here and now.
- Exegesis is the first step on the way to good interpretation.

Key Terms

interpretation	hermeneutics	translation
intended meaning	eternal relevance	historical particularity
exegesis	biblical languages	historical context
literary context		

Chapter One Outline

I. The Need to Interpret

- A. Misconception: “You don’t have to interpret the Bible; just read it and do what it says.”
- B. The Bible is not an obscure book. The problem is often not in understanding—but obeying the Bible.
- C. The aim of good interpretation is not uniqueness. The true aim of good interpretation is to get at the “plain meaning” of the text.
 - 1. The “plain meaning” is the author’s intended meaning.
 - 2. The most important ingredient is an enlightened common sense.
 - 3. Good interpretation makes good sense of the text.
- D. But the “plain meaning” is not always so easily available for the modern reader.
 - 1. Because of the nature of the reader
 - 2. Because of the nature of Scripture

II. The Reader as an Interpreter

- A. Every reader is, at the same time, an interpreter.
 - 1. We read with the assumption that we understand.
 - 2. We tend to think that our understanding is the same as the Holy Spirit’s or human author’s intent.
- B. Anytime we pick up an English Bible we are already involved in interpretation—our beginning point is the end result of much scholarly work.
 - 1. Translators have to take many factors, including the problem of language differences into consideration.
- C. Not all “plain meanings” are plain to everyone.
 - 1. Some think women should keep silent in church—some do not.
 - 2. Some deny the validity of speaking in tongues—some affirm them.
 - 3. Some believe the Bible only teaches baptism by immersion—some argue for infant baptism.
 - 4. Cults are often marked by the select way in which they use Scripture.
 - 5. Some think the “good news” of the Bible is about wealth and prosperity.
- D. The antidote is not “no interpretation”, but good interpretation.

1. Even using all of the same methods, not everyone will come to the same conclusions.
2. The reader of the Bible should be aware of problems inherent to different genres—at least in order to be able to tell good interpretation from bad.

III. The Nature of Scripture

- A. The Bible is both human and divine.
 1. The Bible is God's message, therefore it has eternal relevance.
 2. But God spoke through human words in history, so every book in the Bible has historical particularity—conditioned by time, language, and culture.
 - a. Some conceive of the Bible as merely human—the task of interpretation is limited to historical inquiry.
 - b. Some conceive of the Bible only in terms of eternal relevance—it is simply a collection of propositions to be believed and imperatives to be obeyed.
 - c. The Bible is so much more than a series of propositions and imperatives.
 - i. God spoke to us within the particular circumstances of particular people in history.
 - ii. We are confident, then, that it also speaks to us in our circumstances.
- B. The fact that the Bible has a human side is a challenge for us in two ways:
 1. God chose nearly every kind of human communication in order to speak his word to us. One must be conscious of the special rules that apply to different genres.
 2. Over nearly 1,500 years, God spoke in the vocabulary and thought patterns of people who were conditioned by their time, language, and culture.
- C. Thus the task of interpretation operates at two levels:
 1. The then and there—exegesis.
 2. The here and now—hermeneutics.

IV. The First Task: Exegesis

- A. Exegesis is the careful, systematic study of the Bible to discover the original, intended meaning.
 1. This is primarily an historical task.
 2. While this task often calls for the help of an expert, by no means does one have to be an expert to do good exegesis.
- B. Two common issues:
 1. Exegesis tends to only be employed when there is an obvious difficulty in the text rather than as the immediate, first step.
 2. It is important, when consulting experts, to consult good sources.
- C. Learning to Do Exegesis
 1. We can do good exegesis even if we aren't experts.
 2. The key to good exegesis is to read carefully and ask the right questions.
 3. There are two basic types of questions: context and content.
 - a. Historical Context: Refers to the time and culture of the author and audience and the historical occasion of the book.
 - i. Some of these questions require use of outside help (Bible dictionaries, etc.).
 - ii. The more important question is usually the occasion of the book, which can usually be found within the book itself.
 - b. Literary Context
 - i. Refers to the fact that words only have meaning within sentences, in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences
 - ii. The most important question of all: What's the point?

D. The Questions of Content

1. Refers to the meanings of words, grammatical relationships in sentences, and choice of text where manuscripts disagree.
 - a. These issues typically require some outside help. The Tools:
 - i. A good translation—the most important tool!!
 - ii. A good Bible dictionary.
 - iii. Good commentaries.

V. The Second Task: Hermeneutics

- A. “Hermeneutics” typically covers the whole field of interpretation, but here it will only refer to the Bible’s meaning in the here and now.
 1. The only proper control for hermeneutics is to begin with exegesis.
 2. The Holy Spirit cannot be brought into the process in a way that contradicts the “plain meaning.”
 3. A text cannot mean what it could never have meant for its original readers/hearers.

Chapter Summary

Why do we try to interpret the Bible? When done well, interpretation aims to get us to the ‘plain meaning’ of the text, that is, the author’s intended meaning. Interpretation is not meant to help us find unique meanings that no one has ever seen before, but to clear away the obstacles to understanding God’s Word rightly.

In fact, we all are interpreters, and we all make decisions about the Bible as we read it that affect our understanding of its meaning. The importance of this is exemplified in the way we tend to confuse our understandings with the Holy Spirit’s or human author’s intent. We bring all of our experience, cultural baggage, worldviews, and prior understandings of biblical words and ideas to the table when we read the Bible. Without even being conscious of it, we are interpreters—for good or ill. In fact, the choice of a particular English translation already places us at the end of a long process of interpretation performed by the translators.

It is just as evident that the ‘plain meanings’ we read from the texts are not equally plain to everyone. All of us are reading the same Bible, and yet we all too often come up with ‘plain meanings’ that are in opposition to one another. So what can we do? It is impossible not to interpret when reading the Bible, so our aim must be to be good interpreters of Scripture.

Scripture has a dual nature as both the eternally relevant Word of God and the historically particular words of humans living in time and history. This tension between the divine and human activity in writing Scripture is of central importance for its interpretation. The Bible is not simply a series of divine propositions handed down to us from Heaven, nor is it simply the history of an ancient culture. God spoke through people at particular times and in particular places over a period of nearly 1,500 years in a way that demonstrates His love for His creation. In fact, God spoke through nearly every available form of written communication: narrative history, genealogy, laws, poetry, proverbs, prophecy, riddles, drama, biography, letters, sermons, and even apocalypse.

Therefore, it is critical that we pay close attention to the then and there of the text through exegesis. Exegesis is the process of figuring out what the text meant in the original time and place where it was written and read. We must figure out the then and there before we can figure out how it affects us here and now. Exegesis is primarily an historical task aimed at finding out the author’s intended meaning of the Bible, and it is the first step (of many) in good interpretation. Interpretation quickly spins out of control when we attempt to force the text to say something it could not have meant when it was written.

The key to good exegesis is to learn to read the text carefully and to ask the right questions. It

doesn't require one to turn to the experts at all points, but to know when such help is needed and for what purpose. Historical context and the actual content of the text involve questions that typically require some expert help. Literary context, however, is how a particular word, sentence, or paragraph fits into the larger body of the text. A careful reader can answer most of these questions on their own, including the most important question for any reader: what is the point of this text?

The second task of interpretation is hermeneutics, or, the way we ask questions about the Bible's meaning in the here and now. We all want to know what the Bible means for us, but it is also important to remember that good hermeneutics begins with good exegesis. The true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken or written. This book attempts to set forth guidelines for working out what the Bible means for us from the starting point of what it meant in its original setting.

Practice Quiz

The following quiz is to help you assess how well you are grasping the material presented in this chapter. It has no bearing on your final grade for the course.

True/False

1. Unique interpretations of the Bible are usually wrong.
2. Our understanding is the same as the Holy Spirit's meaning.
3. Any reader of the English Bible is already involved in interpretation.
4. Not all plain meanings are plain to everyone.
5. It is possible to read and understand without interpreting.
6. The Bible has a dual nature.
7. The Bible is a series of propositions and imperatives.

Fill in the Blank

8. The aim of good interpretation is to get at the _____ intended meaning.
9. Exegesis is primarily a _____ task
10. The _____ context is what most people mean when they talk about reading something in its context.
11. A text cannot mean what it could never have meant for its _____ readers/hearers.

Multiple Choice

12. What is the most crucial question in interpretation?
 - A) What does this text mean to me?
 - B) What's the point of this text?
 - C) Which commentary should I consult?
 - D) Who was the author of this text?
13. Which of the following is not something that we bring to the text when we read?
 - A) Our prior understandings of what words mean
 - B) Our experiences
 - C) Our grocery list
 - D) Our culture
14. Which of the following is not a Biblical language?
 - A) Hebrew
 - B) Greek
 - C) Syriac
 - D) Aramaic

15. Which of the following are tools used for exegesis?

- A) A good translation
- B) A good Bible dictionary
- C) Good commentaries
- D) All of the Above

Answer Key

- 1. T
- 2. F
- 3. T
- 4. T
- 5. F
- 6. T
- 7. F
- 8. author's
- 9. historical
- 10. literary
- 11. original
- 12. B
- 13. C
- 14. C
- 15. D

Second Area of Study: The Basic Tool: A Good Translation

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 2 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Identify the three main types of translation theory.
2. Identify problem areas for translators attempting to bridge historical distance.
3. Discuss the basic issues that factor in textual criticism.
4. Identify where the best ancient manuscript evidence comes from for the Greek NT.
5. Define Masoretic text.
6. Discuss how the setting and particular use of the Bible makes a difference in choosing a good translation.
7. Identify good modern translations and their particular translational theories.
8. Discuss the types of internal evidence that text critics use in their work.
9. Identify the original languages of the Bible.
10. Define “receptor language.”
11. Discuss the issue of historical distance.
12. Discuss and explain how one should choose a good Bible translation for personal study.

Presentation

There is one presentation related to this chapter. All of the presentations are less than one half hour in length. Please listen to all of the presentations. We encourage you to take notes.

[Presentation Eleven:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses different translations for the Bible.

Key Points

- The basic tool for understanding and interpreting the Bible is the translation one chooses.
- For memorization and daily use one should use one good translation, but for study one should use several good translations of differing translation theories.
- Bible translation requires knowledge and expertise in biblical languages and textual criticism as well as a good understanding of how meaning is conveyed from one language to another.
- There are many good translations, so choosing one requires the reader to have a basic understanding of the different translation theories employed by translators.

Key Terms

NKJV	NASB	NIV	NEB;
variant	textual criticism	Masoretic text	Dead Sea Scrolls
Septuagint	internal evidence	external evidence	Coptic
original language	receptor language	historical distance	formal equivalence
functional equivalence		free translation	

Chapter Two Outline

I. The Basic Tool

- A. The Bible was originally written in three different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek
 - 1. The vast majority of people need to use a translation.
 - 2. To read in translation is not a bad thing.
- B. The practice of reading translations well:
 - 1. One good translation should be used for consistency and memorization.
 - 2. For study one should use multiple good translations which will differ from one another.

II. The Science of Translation

- A. Translators must make two kinds of choices:
 - 1. Textual—the actual wording of the original text.
 - 2. Linguistic—the application of a translation theory in order to render the text into English.
- B. The Question of Text
 - 1. What Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic text is the right one?
 - 2. No original copies of the books of the Bible are in existence today.
 - 3. Thousands of hand copied manuscripts exist.
 - 4. Later manuscripts often significantly differ from earlier ones.
- C. Translators use textual criticism to reconstruct the text.
 - 1. A science that uses careful controls
 - 2. Weighs out both external (quality and age of the manuscript) and internal (the tendencies of copyists and authors) evidence.
 - 3. The best external and internal evidence yields a high degree of certainty about the original text.
- D. Although it is a science, textual criticism is not an exact science.
 - 1. There are situations where the evidence is not clear one way or another.
 - 2. In these cases, “the point” of the text most often does not depend on the text critical decision.
 - 3. A note about the KJV and NKJV:
 - a. When it was translated the best Greek text available was from very late sources which had thousands of copyist mistakes and alterations.
 - b. While few of these mistakes affect doctrine, they often make a difference in the interpretation of specific texts.
 - c. You should not study from the KJV or NKJV.

III. The Question of Language

- A. There are several technical terms with which we must be familiar
 - 1. Original language: the language in which the text was originally written.
 - 2. Receptor language: the language into which one is translating the Hebrew or Greek.
 - 3. Historical distance: differences between languages in time, culture, and history.
- B. There are several technical terms with which we must be familiar
 - 1. Formal equivalence: more wooden translations—attempt to retain historical distance.
 - 2. Functional equivalence: attempts to keep the meaning of the original while also rendering it into normal English idioms.
 - 3. Free translation: translating original ideas into the receptor language.
- C. There are several additional technical terms with which we must be familiar
 - 1. Theory of translation: the degree to which one puts primary emphasis on formal or functional equivalency.
 - 2. The best translation theory is one that remains as faithful as possible to both original

and receptor languages

3. Where one of these has to give, priority should be given to receptor language.

D. Problems with translation theories:

1. Formal equivalence tends to keep historical distance in language and grammar and often makes the
2. English ambiguous where the original was very clear.
3. Free translations eliminate so much of the original that they are more like commentaries.

IV. Some Problem Areas

A. Common issues that highlight translational difficulties and differences between translations:

1. Weights, measures, money
2. Euphemisms
3. Vocabulary
4. Wordplay
5. Grammar and syntax
6. Matters of gender

V. On Choosing a Translation

A. It is far better to use multiple translations, but where you have to pick one:

1. Use a good functional equivalent translation (NIV, HCSB, NAB).
2. When using multiple translations, also use a formal equivalent translation (NRSV, NASB) and one or more free translations (REB, NJB).

Chapter Summary

The very fact that we read the Bible in English means that we are already involved in interpretation—whether we want to or not. It is necessary for the reader of the English Bible (or a translation in any other language) to recognize that we are at the mercy of translators. As a result, when we read only one translation of the Bible, we are already committed to the particular exegetical and translational choices of that particular translation. While good translations are generally very reliable, there are points when the particular way something is phrased in English may be misleading to the English reader. Things get lost in translation.

Therefore, while it makes perfect sense that we use one main translation for our daily devotional reading or even memorization, the situation changes when we devote ourselves to serious study. At these times we should make use of several well-chosen translations—and these should vary according to translational theory. Doing so allows the English Bible reader to gain access to translational difficulties and exegetical decisions that would otherwise be hidden if we only use one translation.

Bible translation is a rather complex science, but it is also an art form that requires a great deal of wisdom and understanding. There are two basic issues that confront Bible translators: textual and linguistic. The textual issues have to do with the translators' responsibility to be sure the Hebrew and Greek texts they are using come as close as possible to the original text. Since we have no access to the original texts themselves, the translator needs to sift through all the many manuscripts and fragments of the Bible in a process called textual criticism in order to make their best attempt to translate the original text of Scripture.

Textual criticism attempts to work with careful controls. In this process, the translator weighs external evidence (the quality and age of the manuscript evidence) and internal evidence (what variants best account for the others in a given passage). Some evidence is weighted more because it comes from an early and generally reliable manuscript tradition. On the other hand, some evidence is weighted

more heavily because it helps explain how other variants might have come into the text (copyist error, theological motives, attempts by copyists to correct perceived mistakes in the manuscripts, etc.). As you might imagine, the careful controls of the science of textual criticism require a great deal of wisdom and understanding to interpret the evidence well.

Linguistic issues are of a different sort, and have more to do with transferring words and ideas from one language to another. Aside from the typical difficulties associated with translating well from one language to another, the Bible also demands attention to the historical and cultural distance between the ancient text and the modern reader.

As we might imagine, there are a number of theories of going about this task. Formal equivalence is the attempt to keep as close to the “form” of the Hebrew or Greek in a way that accentuates the particular vocabulary, cadence, and syntax of the original. These are what are typically referred to by publishers as “literal” translations.

Functional equivalence is the attempt to keep the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek but to put their words and idioms into what would be more normal ways of saying the same thing in English. These translations are sometimes referred to as “dynamic equivalent” translations. These attempt to bridge historical distance in grammar, syntax, and style.

Free translations attempt to translate the ideas from one language to another, with less effort spent on using the exact words of the original. The purpose of these translations is to eliminate as much of the historical distance as possible, while still remaining faithful to the text. These translations seek to convey the meaning of the original in a way that is most easily understood by the modern reader, regardless of the way in which the original author wrote it.

In the end, the more historical distance that is left in the text, the more it affects the ability of the modern reader to understand rightly. On the other hand, the more a translator attempts to eliminate historical distance, the more the individual exegetical and linguistic decisions of the translator become the focus of the text. The best theory of translation, therefore, is the one that remains as faithful to both the original and receptor languages. When it comes to difficult points, the best translations favor making the text understandable in the receptor language (without losing sight of the meaning of the original, of course).

So, what Bible translations are the best? In the opinion of the authors, a good translation using a functional equivalence approach, like the NIV, GNB, HCSB, or NAB, is the best start. However, the English Bible student should also make use of good formal equivalent translations like the NASB or NRSV as well as good free translations such as the REB or NJB. While a good functional equivalent translation is very helpful for personal devotional reading, a variety of translations of differing translational theories are a great help when in deep study of the Scriptures.

Various English Translations

The following translations are available on Bible Gateway. (www.biblegateway.com)

- 21st Century King James Version (KJ21)
- American Standard Version (ASV)
- Amplified Bible (AMP)
- Amplified Bible, Classic Edition (AMPC)
- BRG Bible (BRG)
- Common English Bible (CEB)
- Complete Jewish Bible (CJB)
- Contemporary English Version (CEV)
- Darby Translation (DARBY)
- Disciples’ Literal New Testament (DLNT)

Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition (DRA)
 Easy-to-Read Version (ERV)
 English Standard Version Anglicised (ESVUK)
 Expanded Bible (EXB)
 1599 Geneva Bible (GNV)
 GOD'S WORD Translation (GW)
 Good News Translation (GNT)
 Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)
 International Children's Bible (ICB)
 International Standard Version (ISV)
 J.B. Phillips New Testament (PHILLIPS)
 Jubilee Bible 2000 (JUB)
 King James Version (KJV)
 Authorized (King James) Version (AKJV)
 Lexham English Bible (LEB)
 Living Bible (TLB)
 The Message (MSG)
 Modern English Version (MEV)
 Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament (MOUNCE)
 Names of God Bible (NOG)
 New American Bible (Revised Edition) (NABRE)
 New American Standard Bible (NASB)
 New Century Version (NCV)
 New English Translation (NET Bible)
 New International Reader's Version (NIRV)
 New International Version (NIV)
 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)
 New King James Version (NKJV)
 New Life Version (NLV)
 New Living Translation (NLT)
 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)
 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition (NRSVACE)
 New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE)
 Orthodox Jewish Bible (OBJ)
 Revised Standard Version (RSV)
 Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (RSVCE)
 Tree of Life Version (TLV)
 The Voice (VOICE)
 World English Bible (WEB)
 Worldwide English (New Testament) (WE)
 Wycliffe Bible (WYC)
 Young's Literal Translation (YLT)

Practice Quiz

The following quiz is to help you assess how well you are grasping the material presented in this chapter. It has no bearing on your final grade for the course.

True/False

1. The choice of translation is best resolved by using the one you like best or find most readable.
2. To read the Bible in translation is a bad thing.
3. We have no access to the original, handwritten manuscripts of the Bible.
4. Sometimes, changes were introduced to the text of Scripture because of theological reasons.
5. Bible translation is both a complex science and an art form that requires patience and wisdom.
6. For the NT, the best external evidence for the original text was preserved in Rome.
7. For studying the Bible, you should use the KJV or NKJV.

Fill in the Blank

8. The places where the manuscripts differ in their readings are called _____.
9. The Hebrew Old Testament was preserved in the _____.
10. The attempt to keep as close to the “form” of the Hebrew or Greek is called _____.
11. _____ is the attempt to keep the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek but to put their words and idioms into normal English.

Multiple Choice

12. Which of the following is a good way to use a translation?
A) Read one main translation for personal devotional time and memorization
B) Use several good translations for studying the Bible
C) Both A and B
D) None of the above
13. Which of the following would be considered a formal equivalent translation?
A) NIV
B) NASB
C) REB
D) GNB
14. Which of the following are *not* criteria used in textual criticism?
A) Translation theory
B) External evidence
C) Internal evidence
D) None of the above
15. Which of the following are problem areas for bridging historical distance in translation?
A) Weights, measures, money
B) Euphemisms
C) Wordplay
D) All of the above

Answer Key

F 2. F 3. T 4. T 5. T 6. F 7. F 8. variants 9. Masoretic Text 10. formal equivalence
11. functional equivalence 12. C 13. B 14. A 15. D

Third Area of Study: The Epistles: Learning to Think Contextually

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 3 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Define real letter.
2. Define epistle.
3. Discuss the difficulties that face someone who interprets an epistle.
4. Identify and discuss the variety of forms in the NT Epistles.
5. Identify the six basic parts of ancient letters.
6. Discuss the importance of understanding epistles as occasional documents.
7. Understand the difference between theological treatise and task theology.
8. Identify and carry out Fee and Stuart's steps of understanding a particular passage of an epistle.
9. Understand and develop the ability to pick up on contextual clues that inform historical context.
10. Understand the importance of thinking in paragraphs.
11. Identify the problems associated with attempting to interpret difficult passages.
12. Understand how to choose a good commentary when needed.

Presentations

There are two presentations related to this chapter. All of the presentations are less than one half hour in length. Please listen to all of the presentations. We encourage you to take notes.

[Presentation Twelve:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses the importance of thinking contextually when reading the epistles.

[Presentation Thirteen:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson continues the discussion about thinking contextually when reading the epistles.

Key Points

- The ease of interpreting epistles can be quite deceptive.
- In the NT, there are a variety of epistles and letters, some more closely resembling true letters and some directed more generally to the church as a whole.
- The Epistles are all occasional documents, and so it is important to consider the occasion and what issues were being addressed for the original audience.
- The student of the Bible may not be able to answer every question on their own, but they can certainly understand the point of the argument through careful reading.

Key Terms

Epistle	Adolf Deissmann	occasional document	task theology
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Chapter Three Outline

I. The Nature of the Epistles

A. The Epistles are not all the same form.

1. Some are closer to real letters.
2. Some are written to a more general audience and are more artistic, literary forms (epistles).

B. The basic form of ancient letters:

1. Name of writer
 2. Name of recipient
 3. Greeting
 4. Prayer wish or thanksgiving
 5. Body of letter
 6. Final greeting and farewell
- C. These formal elements vary throughout the NT
1. Hebrews is largely written as a tract, though it certainly contains some formal structure of a letter.
 2. 1 John has none of the formal elements of a letter, but it was clearly written to a specific group of people.
- D. *All* New Testament letters/epistles are occasional documents
1. They all arise out of and are intended for a specific occasion.
 2. All are from the first century.
 3. This occasional nature must be taken seriously.
 4. The occasion was typically on the readers end, so we are not always privy to the exact circumstances.
 5. They are not primarily theological treatises, but examples of “task theology.”

II. The Historical Context

- A. The first thing to do is to tentatively reconstruct the occasion:
1. Consult a Bible dictionary or introduction to a commentary as much as possible.
 2. Develop the habit of reading the letter through as a whole.
- B. While reading and re-reading the letter through, jot down a few notes:
1. What do you notice about the recipients?
 2. What is the author’s attitude?
 3. What specific clues are given for the letter’s occasion?
 4. What are the natural, logical divisions in the letter?
- C. Form a working outline of the letter and look more closely at its specific parts.
1. We will have a general idea of the occasion by this point, but each of the distinct sections must be studied to understand the precise nature of all of the problems addressed.

III. The Literary Context

- A. Trace the argument:
1. You **MUST** learn to think paragraphs when studying the NT epistles.
 2. Remember that the most important question is to find out the point of the text.
 3. You do not have to go outside the text to understand the flow of thought.
 4. There is nothing in the paragraph that does not fit the argument.
 - a. All of this makes good sense of the argument.

IV. The Problem Passages

- A. Guidelines for dealing with problem passages:
1. Remember that we are outsiders looking into a specific situation, but God has told us what he wants us to know.
 2. One must be able to distinguish between what is certain and what is merely possible.
 3. Even if things are unclear, the main point is still typically within your grasp.
 4. Consult a good commentary when it is necessary.
 5. Keep in mind that scholars do not have all the answers either.

Chapter Summary

All of the NT Epistles were written to particular people, at particular times, and in particular places. Though these portions of Scripture seem straightforward in many ways, they address people of a different time and place who were living and worshiping in situations that are very foreign to us. This being the case, it is necessary that those studying the Epistles first consider what was God's word to *them*—the original audience. Because of the theological weight of the Epistles and the concomitant important hermeneutical issues, we begin our discussion of interpreting the Bible here. The interpretive skills gained here will be used throughout the rest of the book.

There is a slight distinction between an epistle and a letter. A real letter is not written for public use or the use of posterity. On the other hand, an epistle was an artistic literary form meant for the general public. The NT Epistles all vary on the spectrum from “real letter” and epistle. In its basic form, an ancient letter consists of six parts: 1) name of the writer; 2) name of the recipient; 3) greeting; 4) prayer or thanksgiving; 5) body of the letter; 6) final greeting and farewell. Some contain all these elements (like Romans) or only a couple of them (like Hebrews). Despite this variety, the one thing that is common to all the NT Epistles is that they are occasional documents—they arise out of and are intended for a specific occasion and they are all from the first century.

Above all else, it is this occasional nature of the Epistles that must be taken seriously. We are basically privy to one side of a conversation, so it takes work to listen carefully enough to hear the other side of the conversation. The NT Epistles respond to particular situations, so it is easy to interpret poorly when we don't pay attention. Furthermore, though the Epistles contain a great deal of theology, they are not theological treatises. They display a “task theology,” or a theology brought to bear for the task at hand. This is true of even the most theologically rich sections of the Epistles. There is always a real life reason for discussing the theological matters at hand.

So how does one go about the task of paying attention to the occasional nature of the Epistles? The first thing one must attempt is to form a tentative (but informed) reconstruction of the situation to which the author is speaking. To begin, one should consult a Bible dictionary or introduction of a commentary to find out as much about the place and people to which the epistle was written.

Second, one should develop the habit of reading the Epistles through from beginning to end as would be done with any other letter. Doing this aloud is even more preferable. As the letter is read through, brief notes can be taken on what is noticeable about the recipients, the attitudes of the writer, specific items that indicate the occasion for the epistle, and the natural divisions of the epistle. More often than not, one can pick up on simple contextual clues (vocabulary, logical transitions, etc.) that identify these things and make it easier to develop a tentative outline of the epistle.

At this point, it is possible to look more closely at smaller sections. After re-reading the section a couple of times, one can then develop a more detailed list of everything in the passage that suggests something about the recipients or their problems. After this, one can also develop a list of key words and phrases that indicate the subject matter of the epistle. These exercises will grant the reader a wealth of understanding of the particularities of the situation at hand.

The careful reader will also pay close attention to the literary context as well as the historical. Basically, this means that the reader will attempt to trace carefully the argument of the text. A great deal of the difficulty that readers have in studying the literary context is because they don't understand the importance of thinking *in paragraphs*. The most important question in interpretation is “what's the point?” The reader can largely answer this question by studying and restating the content of a particular paragraph, and then also *why* the writer writes what he writes. A great deal of poor interpretation can be avoided by simply thinking carefully in paragraphs. When this is done, we notice that often we do not have to go outside the passage to understand it, there is little or nothing in the paragraph that does not fit the argument, and good sense can be made of everything in a given paragraph.

Nevertheless, there are certain passages that require us to get help. There are a number of reasons for this. The fact that these Epistles were not written directly to us makes it easy to get confused about the content. Even so, what God wants us to know has been communicated to us and what God has not told us, while interesting, should cause us to be humble in our conclusions. It is also necessary in such problem passages to separate what is certain about the passage from what is possible.

Moreover, even if we aren't sure about the details, we can often grasp the point of the passage as a whole. We may not know what Paul meant by discussing baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians, but we do know he brings it up in relation to the necessity of the resurrection of the body. These points are where it may be necessary to consult a good commentary—one that lists and discusses the various options. Commentaries aren't always correct in their conclusions, but at least readers of the Bible can find most of the interpretive options in a good commentary.

Paul's Epistles

1. Romans--A systematic examination of justification, sanctification, and glorification. Examines God's plan for the Jews and the Gentiles.
2. 1 Corinthians--This letter deals with factions and corrections due to immorality, lawsuits, and abuse of the Lord's Supper. Also mentions idols, marriage, and the resurrection.
3. 2 Corinthians--Paul's defense of his apostolic position.
4. Galatians--Paul refutes the errors of legalism and examines the proper place of grace in the Christian's life.
5. Ephesians--The believer's position in Christ and information on Spiritual warfare.
6. Philippians--Paul speaks of his imprisonment and his love for the Philippians. He exhorts them to godliness and warns them of legalism.
7. Colossians--Paul focuses on the preeminence of Jesus in creation, redemption, and godliness.
8. 1 Thessalonians--Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians. Teachings on purity and mention of the return of Christ.
9. 2 Thessalonians--Corrections on the Day of the Lord.
10. 1 Timothy--Instructions to Timothy on proper leadership and dealings with false teachers, the role of women, prayer, and requirements of elders and deacons.
11. 2 Timothy--A letter of encouragement to Timothy to be strong.
12. Titus--Paul left Titus in Crete to care for the churches there. Requirements for elders.
13. Philemon--a letter to the owner of a runaway slave. Paul appeals to Philemon to forgive Onesimus

General Epistles and Revelation

1. Hebrews--A letter to the Hebrew Christians in danger of returning to Judaism. It demonstrates the superiority of Jesus over the O.T. system. Mentions the Melchizedek priesthood. (Hebrews may be of Pauline origin. There is much debate on its authorship).
2. James--a practical exhortation of believers to live a Christian life evidencing regeneration. It urges self-examination of the evidence of the changed life.
3. 1 Peter--Peter wrote this letter to encourage its recipients in the light of their suffering and be humble in it. Mentions baptism.

4. 2 Peter--Deals with the person on an inward level, warnings against false teachers, and mentions the Day of the Lord.
5. 1 John--John describes true fellowship of the believers with other believers and with God. God as light and love. Encourages a holy Christian walk before the Lord. Much mention of Christian love.
6. 2 John--Praise for walking in Christ and a reminder to walk in God's love.
7. 3 John--John thanks Gaius for his kindness to God's people and rebukes Diotrephes.
8. Jude--Exposing false teachers and uses O.T. allusions to demonstrate the judgment upon them. Contends for the faith.
9. Revelation--A highly symbolic vision of the future rebellion, judgment, and consummation of all things.

Source: Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry

Practice Quiz

The following quiz is to help you assess how well you are grasping the material presented in this chapter. It has no bearing on your final grade for the course.

True/False

1. The ease of interpreting epistles can be deceptive.
2. The book of Hebrews is a good example of a NT letter that contains all of the major parts of an ancient letter.
3. 1 John has none of the formal elements of an ancient letter.
4. Almost all of the NT letters were occasioned from the author's side.
5. The Epistles are all theological treatises.
6. Generally speaking, a careful reader of the Bible can understand the point of most particular sections in the Epistles.
7. There are thousands of ancient letters outside of the NT that are available to us today.

Fill in the Blank

8. "What is the _____" is the most important exegetical question one asks when studying the Bible.
9. A letter written as an artistic exposition to a wide audience is called an _____.
10. The fact that NT Epistles arise out of and are intended for specific circumstances make them _____ documents.
11. In order to find out general information on the setting of an epistle, one can read the _____ of a commentary.

Multiple Choice

12. Which of the following is a step you should take to understand the historical context of an epistle?
 - A) Read the whole epistle in one sitting several times
 - B) Ask your mailman
 - C) Consult an introduction on systematic theology
 - D) Just guess
13. Which of the following should you do when reading through an epistle?

- A) Write down what you notice about the recipients
 - B) Write down the attitudes of the author
 - C) Write down where the epistle has natural divisions
 - D) All of the above
14. Which of the following are common elements of ancient letters?
- A) Body
 - B) Name of the Author
 - C) Both A and B
 - D) Neither A nor B
15. Which of the following is true about what God reveals to us in his Word?
- A) God has communicated what He wants us to know in the Bible
 - B) God expects us to know everything that is not discussed in Scripture
 - C) Both A and B
 - D) Neither A nor B

Answer Key

- 1. T
- 2. F
- 3. T
- 4. F
- 5. F
- 6. T
- 7. point
- 8. epistle
- 9. occasional
- 10. introduction
- 11. A
- 12. D
- 13. C
- 14. A

Fourth Area of Study: The Epistles: The Hermeneutical Question

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 4 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Identify guidelines for determining whether the particulars in a given passage are comparable to the modern day.
2. Identify and explain the two basic rules for establishing a consistent hermeneutic for the Epistles.
3. Explain the importance of good exegesis for the sake of hermeneutics.
4. Define hermeneutics.
5. Identify and explain how one might go about using an extended application of a particular text.
6. Explain the difference between a “timeless” principle and a contextually applied principle.
7. Define matter of indifference.
8. Identify and explain the guidelines for determining whether something is or is not a matter of indifference.
9. Identify the seven guidelines for determining whether a text is or is not culturally relative.
10. Explain why it matters if there was only one cultural option for a biblical writer, and how we might use this information.
11. Explain how we can limit our theological understandings to what is revealed in Scripture, and how we might properly ask questions that are peripheral or dependent on the texts of Scripture.
12. Define and explain the term biblical theology.

Presentations

There are two presentations related to this chapter. All of the presentations are less than one half hour in length. Please listen to all of the presentations. We encourage you to take notes.

[Presentation Fourteen:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses the application of the epistles within their historical context.

[Presentation Fifteen:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson continues the discussion of how the epistles can be applied in our present day.

Key Points

- Many hermeneutical problems occur because of a general lack of consistency.
- A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or readers.
- When we share comparable particulars with the first century hearers, God’s word to us is the same as his word to them.
- The modern reader must always be mindful to distinguish between matters of indifference from matters that count.

Key Terms

cultural relativity

matters of indifference

biblical theology

Chapter Four Outline

I. Our Common Hermeneutics

- A. We all bring our own form of common sense to the Bible—we apply what we can to our situations and leave the rest in the first century.
- B. Our problems often stem from disagreements over what applies today and what should be left in the first century.
- C. We must realize that culture, church tradition, language, and personal experience all affect our understanding.

II. The Basic Rules

- A. A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or readers.
 - 1. This does not tell us what a passage does mean, but tells us what it doesn't mean.
- B. The Second Rule
 - 1. Whenever we share comparable particulars with the first-century hearers, God's word to us is the same as his word to them.
 - 2. Most of the theological texts and community-directed ethical imperatives are good examples.
 - a. We MUST do exegesis well here!

III. The Problem Areas

- A. The Problem of Extended Application
 - 1. Where there are comparable particulars, God's word to us should be limited to its original intent.
 - 2. We must be wary of using what we only learn from extended applications for all times and places.
- B. The Problem of Particulars that Are Not Comparable
 - 1. What do we do with texts that address issues that have no modern counterpart?
 - a. we must take care to hear God's word to them.
 - b. Principles derived from such texts must be applied to genuinely comparable situations.
- C. Matters that matter vs. matters of indifference:
 - 1. What are specifically said to be matters of indifference are still matters of indifference.
 - 2. Matters of indifference are inherently cultural, not moral.
 - 3. Sin lists are never matters of indifference.
- D. The Problem of Cultural Relativity
 - 1. The recognition of a degree of cultural relativity is a valid hermeneutical procedure.
 - 2. One should distinguish between the central message of the Bible and that which is peripheral.
 - 3. One must distinguish between what the NT sees as moral and what it does not.
 - 4. One must make special note of where the NT is uniform and where it reflects differences.

IV. One must distinguish in the NT between principle and application.

- A. We should attempt to determine the cultural options open to the NT writer.
- B. Be alert to cultural differences between then and now that are not immediately apparent.
- C. Exercise Christian charity.
- D. The Problem of Task Theology
 - 1. One must always be forming and re-forming a biblical theology on the basis of good exegesis.
 - 2. Due to the occasional nature of epistles we must sometimes be content with some

limitations to our understanding.

3. We must be sure to ask the same questions that the original authors and audiences were asking.

Chapter Summary

Everyone who reads the Bible participates in hermeneutics, the process by which we decide what content applies to our current circumstances and how that content applies. We all bring a form of commonsense to the text that allows for great unity in how we understand and interpret Scripture. Nevertheless, we most often run into problems in our collective lack of consistency when we disagree about what applies directly to us and what should be left to the time in which the Bible was written. Our theological traditions, personal experience, cultural norms, and existential concerns all create a certain hermeneutical selectivity for us that others do not share. We sometimes even find ourselves concerned about “getting around” problem passages that conflict with our previous understandings.

Therefore, we need to set forth some guidelines that establish more consistency for us as we seek fidelity to God’s Word. First, a text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or readers. This doesn’t necessarily tell us what a passage does mean, but it can certainly provide limits and an understanding of what it cannot mean.

Second, whenever we share comparable particulars with the first-century hearers, God’s word to us is the same as his word to them. There is immediacy for us as we read most of the theological texts and community-driven ethical imperatives because these particulars largely apply directly to our situation as much as they did in the first-century. This requires that we do our exegesis well so that we have confidence that our situations and particulars are genuinely comparable to theirs. We even might extend application to other contexts provided that we limit such application to its original intent, though we should recognize the degree to which these applications are related to the original intent of other passages of Scripture.

We run into a distinct problem, however, when we run into passages with particulars not generally comparable to the modern church. Again, in each of these cases we must do our exegesis with particular care so that we hear clearly what God’s Word was to them. There is often an overriding principle involved in such texts that does apply to us, though these principles are not timeless or to be applied at random.

Along the way, we must constantly attempt to distinguish between matters of indifference from matters that count. There are several indicators that alert the reader that something might be a matter of indifference: 1) the Epistles sometimes specifically say certain things are matters of indifference; 2) when the issue is not inherently moral but are cultural, and 3) a recognition that “sin-lists” never include matters of indifference.

Therefore, because there is no such thing as single, divinely ordained culture, we must also recognize a certain degree of cultural relativity as an inevitable corollary of the occasional nature of the Epistles. To avoid confusion we should follow some guidelines here.

- First, we need to distinguish between the central core of the message of the Bible and what is dependent on or peripheral to it. In other words, we must recognize the central message of the Bible as the norm for interpretation.
- Second, we must attempt to distinguish between what the NT sees as inherently moral and what is not.
- Third, we must take note of where the NT has a uniform and consistent witness and where it does not.
- Fourth, we need to distinguish within the NT between what is a principle and what is a specific application.

- Fifth, we must (with great care) attempt to determine what cultural options were available to the writers and hearers. Where there is only one available option, there is an increased probability of a culturally relative issue.
- Sixth, we must be on the alert for cultural differences between the first and twenty-first centuries that are not immediately apparent. Seventh, we must do all these tasks with Christian charity, recognizing that the problems are difficult and we gain much from discussing them in Christian fellowship.

At the end of these tasks we must set ourselves to the task of forming—and re-forming—a sound biblical theology on the basis of sound exegesis. Though the Epistles are not works of systematic theology, we should set ourselves to the task of systematically presenting the theology we find in these works. Still, we need to do so with a few words of caution. Because the Epistles are occasional documents, we must develop the ability to live with the limitations of the theology that is developed in the texts. We must also be aware that we run into many problems with the Epistles from asking our questions rather than the questions the texts are addressing.

Practice Quiz

The following quiz is to help you assess how well you are grasping the material presented in this chapter. It has no bearing on your final grade for the course.

True/False

1. All people do hermeneutics when reading the Bible.
2. Most of the matters in the Epistles fit nicely into a commonsense hermeneutic.
3. Matters of indifference are sometimes found in the so-called “sin lists” of the Epistles.
4. There is no such thing as a single, divinely ordained culture.
5. God’s Word gives us all we could ever want to know.
6. God’s Word gives us all we need for salvation and living before Him as his people.
7. The Epistles are timeless works of literature.

Fill in the Blank

8. It is vital that we perform sound _____ so that we have confidence that our situations and particulars are genuinely comparable to the first-century.
9. _____ are never included among the various lists of Christian imperatives in the Epistles.
10. A culturally _____ text is one where a passage is so thoroughly conditioned by its first-century setting that the particulars cannot be made to compare to the situation of modern reader.
11. _____ theology is a systematic expression of the theology contained *in* and expressed by the Bible.

Multiple Choice

12. Which of the following is a basic rule of consistent hermeneutics in the Epistles?
 - A) A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or readers
 - B) Whenever we share comparable particulars with the first-century hearers, God’s word to us is the same as his word to them
 - C) Both A and B
 - D) None of the above
13. Which of the following is a proper guideline for determining how texts with incomparable particulars apply to a twenty-first century setting?
 - A) Any principle found in the text must be applied to genuinely comparable situations as in the

text

- B) Go with your feelings
 - C) Look for timeless principles in the text
 - D) All of the above
14. Which of the following about cultural options available to the original hearers of the text is true?
- A) A situation in which there is only one cultural option decreases the possibility of the cultural relativity of such a position
 - B) A situation in which there are multiple cultural options decreases the possibility of the cultural relativity of such a position
 - C) A situation in which there is only one cultural option increases the possibility of the cultural relativity of such a position
 - D) A situation in which there is only one cultural option ensures the cultural relativity of such a position
15. Which of the following is *not* a good example of a matter of indifference?
- A) Matters pertaining to food, drink, or the observance of days
 - B) Matters that are inherently cultural
 - C) The length of a woman's dress
 - D) The sin lists in the Epistles

Answer Key

- 1. T
- 2. T
- 3. F
- 4. T
- 5. F
- 6. T
- 7. F
- 8. exegesis
- 9. Matters of indifference
- 10. relative
- 11. Biblical
- 12. C
- 13. A
- 14. C
- 15. D

Examination Opportunity

Academic credit is earned at Pilgrim Seminary by successfully completing examinations. If you are taking this course for credit, you should take the first part of a three part exam at this time.

If you feel you have a good grasp of the material in this and the other Areas of Study, you are probably prepared to take the [Examination for BST 305.1 Foundations of Biblical Interpretation](#). Please review the study resources for each Area of Study before you take the exam.

Upon the successful completion of your exam, please proceed to the next section.

Notes and Reminders

BST 305.2 Concepts in Biblical Interpretation Part I

First Area of Study: The Old Testament Narratives: Their Proper Use

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 5 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Identify the books of the OT that are largely or entirely composed of narrative.
2. Explain the nature of narrative as a genre.
3. Identify the three levels of narrative in the OT.
4. Identify common misunderstandings of OT narrative.
5. Identify and explain the characteristics of Hebrew narrative.
6. Describe the role of the narrator in OT narrative.
7. Identify the difference between scenic and character driven plots.
8. Understand the peculiar features of characterization in Hebrew narrative.
9. Explain the role of dialogue in plot and characterization in Hebrew narrative.
10. Identify the features of structure in OT narrative.
11. Understand how to identify implicit teaching in narratives.
12. Identify and explain the common errors people make when trying to apply OT narratives to their own lives.

Presentations

In the [first presentation](#) related to this chapter Dr. Watson discusses the nature of Biblical narrative. In the [second presentation](#) he offers insight into their proper use.

Key Points

- The most common type of literature in the Bible is narrative.
- The OT narratives are purposeful retellings of historical events that are intended to give meaning and direction for a people in the present.
- The OT narratives are primarily about God.
- There are three levels of OT narrative: meta-narrative; the overall story of redemption, and the individual stories found in the texts.
- One should seek what is implicit in the narrative, but “implicit” never means private or mystical.

Key Terms

narrative
allegory
moralizing
misappropriation
redefinition

metanarrative
inclusion
selectivity
false appropriation

typology;
decontextualizing;
personalizing;
false combination;

Chapter Five Outline

I. The Nature of Narratives

A. Narratives are purposeful stories that retell historical events from the past in order to give

meaning and direction for people in the present.

1. Biblical narrative tells God's story, which becomes ours as he writes us into it.B.
All narratives have three basic parts: characters, plot, and plot resolution. They typically contain a protagonist, antagonist, and agonist.
2. How does this relate to the biblical narrative?
 - a. God is the protagonist.
 - b. Satan and opposing people/powers are the antagonists.
 - c. God's people are the agonists.

II. The Plot

- A. God has created a people for his name who, as his image bearers, were to be stewards over the earth.
- B. An enemy entered the picture and convinced the people to bear his image instead, and thus become enemies of God.
- C. The Plot Resolution
 1. The long story of redemption—how God rescues his people from the enemy's clutches, restores them back into his image, and will restore them in a new heaven and new earth.

III. Three Levels of Narrative (The story is told on three levels)

- A. The metanarrative: the whole plan of God worked out through his creation and focusing on his people.
- B. The story of God redeeming a people for his own name.
- C. Hundreds of individual narratives that make up the other two levels.

IV. What Narratives Are Not

- A. The OT narratives are not:
 1. Allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings.
 2. Intended to teach moral lessons—at least on the level of individual story.
 3. Explicit teaching—they are, however, illustrative of what is taught elsewhere.

V. The Characteristics of Hebrew Narrative (Hebrew narrative has some distinct features that are not necessarily found in all narratives in other times, places, and cultures.)

- A. The Narrator
 1. The role of the narrator
 - a. Acts as the relatively omniscient voice in the text.
 - b. Responsible for the point of view.
- B. The Scene
 1. Hebrew narrative is predominantly scenic rather than character driven.
 2. Action is built around a collection of individual scenes.
- C. The Characters
 1. The characters are the central element within the scenic nature of the narratives.
 2. Rarely does characterization have anything to do with physical appearance.
 3. Characters often appear either in contrast or in parallel with other characters.
 4. Characterization occurs in the words and actions of the character, not the narrator's descriptions.
- D. Dialogue
 1. One of the chief methods of characterization.
 2. First point of dialogue is often a significant clue to the plot and character of the speaker.
 3. Contrasting dialogue functions as a characterizing element as well.
 4. Characters will often repeat crucial parts of the narrative in speech form.

E. Plot

1. The story must have a beginning, middle, and end, which together focus on a buildup of dramatic tension that is eventually released.
2. Hebrew narratives tend to be more fast paced, so a slower pace is the narrator's way of drawing attention.
3. Features of Structure
 - a. Hebrew narratives were primarily designed for hearers not readers.
 - b. Repetition tends to be a frequent feature of Hebrew narrative.
 - c. Inclusions: form of repetition where a narrative is begun and brought to conclusion on the same note or same way.

VI. A Final Word

A. The one crucial item to keep in mind as you read any Hebrew narrative is the presence of God in the narrative—he is the ultimate protagonist.

B. On Reading Between the Lines

1. Implicit teaching is that which is clearly present in the story but not stated in so many words.
2. It is a matter of the assumptions of the author, not hidden meanings.
3. It is also not a matter of guessing the unstated thoughts or feelings of the characters.

C. Some Final Cautions

1. The tendency to “flatten out” the stories of the Bible as though it was written directly to me is the cause of great misunderstanding when it comes to narrative.

D. Some Common Errors:

1. Allegorizing: trying to find hidden meanings in all the elements of the story.
2. Decontextualizing: ignoring the full historical and literary contexts.
3. Selectivity: picking and choosing specific words and phrases while ignoring others.
4. Moralizing: the assumption that moral principles can be derived from all passages.
5. Personalizing: assuming that any part of Scripture applies only to oneself.
6. Misappropriation: to use a narrative for very different reasons than for which it was written.
7. False appropriation: reading back contemporary culture into the biblical narrative.
8. False combination: Combining elements of the story that were not combined by the author.
9. Redefinition: presuming the Bible means something it doesn't because what it says is displeasing.

E. Some Final Cautions

1. Final recommendations:
 - a. Don't assume that a character in the Bible is supposed to be an example for your life.
 - b. Characters are sometimes good and sometimes evil—we must seek God's word about them.

Chapter Summary

The most common type of literature (genre) in the Bible is narrative. Hebrew narrative has commonalities with all narratives: characters, plot, and plot resolution. Thus, reading the OT narratives occupies many of the same reading skills that we use for all stories. However, there are particular aspects that are helpful to understand when attempting to read, understand, and, ultimately, interpret OT narratives.

God is the protagonist of the biblical story, Satan and powers that oppose God are the

antagonists, and God's people are the agonists. The basic plot, or metanarrative, is that God created humanity in his image in order to be his stewards of creation, but an enemy persuaded these people to become enemies of God. The plot resolution is God's redemption of his people and creation from the clutches of the enemy. This is the first level of the biblical story.

The second level is the more specific story of God saving and redeeming a people for his name. The hundreds of individual narratives that make up the other two levels comprise the last level of biblical narrative. Biblical narratives are neither allegories nor intended to teach moral lessons, but they do often illustrate what is taught explicitly and categorically elsewhere.

Hebrew narrative contains several distinctive features as well. The narrator tells the story, is comparably omniscient in the story, and is responsible for the point of view of the story. Hebrew narrative tends to be "scenic," that is, it is not built around a particular character, but, rather, the action is moved along by a series of scenes. Characterization in Hebrew narrative is performed through setting characters in parallel or contrast to one another. This means that understanding a particular character in the OT means understanding them in *relation to* the other person.

Furthermore, the predominant mode of characterization occurs in words and actions, not in the narrator's descriptions. Someone's character is defined by what they say and do. Dialogue has a large role here. Dialogue is often an important clue to the plot and the character of the speaker, and important points are emphasized through repetition. The reader will also notice that Hebrew narrative often moves the plot at a much faster pace than modern narrative. Furthermore, we should take note of the fact that Hebrew narrative is geared toward hearers rather than readers.

The narratives of the OT contain a fair amount of implicit teaching, and thus require us to pay attention to a number of aspects of the story. To be clear, implicit teaching is that which is *clearly present* in the story but not stated in so many words. It is never private, secret, or mystical. We must take care to read teaching out of the text rather than into it. The dialogue and shifts in scenes tell us a great deal about the character and position of the characters and the overall movement of the plot.

One aspect of this implicit teaching of the story that requires particular attention is the collective issues and problems that inform the story when read in the wider biblical text. For instance, a great deal can be inferred from the dialogue and actions of people in Bethlehem when compared to the general character of the tribes during the period of the judges. To get at this, we must not only read Ruth, but also the book of Judges.

There are a few tendencies that people have when reading OT narratives that are not very helpful. Most of these are related to the idea that each individual narrative is somehow to be understood as a direct word from God for each of us individually or as teaching us moral lessons by examples. These are tendencies toward allegorizing, personalizing, misappropriating, or redefining narratives in order to fit our own personal needs. The problem here is not the thought that God speaks to us, but rather the way we silence what he is saying to us with such practices. Narratives are precious to us because they so vividly demonstrate God's involvement in the world and illustrate his principles.

Practice Quiz

The following quiz is to help you assess how well you are grasping the material presented in this chapter. It has no bearing on your final grade for the course.

True/False

1. Narrative is the most common genre in the Bible.
2. Genesis, Ruth, and Nahum are largely or entirely narrative.
3. If you are a Christian, the OT is your spiritual history.
4. Abraham is the protagonist of the Old Testament.

5. When Jesus taught that the Scriptures testify about him, he was speaking certainly of every individual story in the OT.
6. Characterization in the OT has little to do with physical appearance.
7. Hebrew narrative moves at a much slower pace than modern narrative.

Fill in the Blank

8. _____ are stories retelling historical events that are intended to give meaning and direction to a given people in the present.
9. The story of the Bible is _____ story.
10. _____ teaching is that which is clearly present in the story but not stated in so many words.
11. _____ is a type of interpretation that seeks to get at the meaning behind the text, the hidden meanings.

Multiple Choice

12. Which of the following biblical books contain substantial narrative portions?
 - A) Exodus
 - B) Jeremiah
 - C) Isaiah
 - D) All of the above
13. Which of the following are not basic parts of a narrative?
 - A) Characters
 - B) Plot
 - C) Poems
 - D) Plot resolution
14. Which of the following are levels of narrative in the OT?
 - A) Metanarrative
 - B) Individual stories
 - C) Both A and B
 - D) None of the above
15. Which of the following is true about OT narratives?
 - A) OT narratives are not intended to teach moral lessons
 - B) The good guy always wins
 - C) Every single story has a hidden meaning about Jesus
 - D) OT narratives rarely illustrate what is taught explicitly elsewhere in the Bible

Answer Key

1.T 2.F 3.T 4.F 5.F 6.T 7.F 8. Narratives 9. God's 10. Implicit 11. Allegory 12.D 13.C 14.C 15. A

Notes and Reminders

Second Area of Study: Acts: The Question of Historical Precedent

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 6 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Understand what constitutes a biblical precedent.
2. Explain the difference between biblical precedent and historical illustration in the process of interpretation.
3. Identify the characteristics and purposes of ancient Greek and Roman historiography.
4. Identify the major theological purposes of the book of Acts.
5. Identify a basic outline for the book of Acts.
6. Explain how Luke's overall purposes affect the way in which we understand biblical precedent.
7. Understand who the Hellenists were.
8. Understand how to ask questions that the text is suggesting.
9. Explain the pitfalls of asking questions of the text that it is not addressing.
10. Explain how or why a biblical precedent can be normative.
11. Identify and explain the three basic categories of doctrinal statements.
12. Understand the difference between "normal" and "normative."

Presentation

[Presentation 18:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses the Book of Acts, the early church, and the Holy Spirit in the life of the church after Christ's resurrection.

[Presentation 19:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson discusses the question of historical precedent as it relates to the Book of Acts.

Key Points

- Many readers of Acts have a distinct tendency to adopt the narrative as biblical precedent for the church throughout the ages.
- It is vital to discern the author's interests while reading the book of Acts—both the what and the why.
- The key to understanding Acts is Luke's interest in the Spirit-led movement of the church out from Jerusalem to the ends of the Earth.
- Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated is not normative except where it can be demonstrated that the author intended it to be so.

Key Terms

biblical precedent Hellenists	Thucydides Diaspora	Hellenistic Period
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Chapter Six Outline

I. The Exegesis of Acts

A. Interpretation of Acts is especially liable to selectivity.

1. Understanding the book of Acts must drive us to look at the book in terms of Luke's interests, not our own.

B. Acts as History

1. Luke was a Gentile, whose writing is a good example of Hellenistic historiography.
2. Written to encourage and/or entertain, inform, moralize, or offer an apologetic.
 - a. It was, therefore, purposeful—in this case, purposefully theological.

C. Our interest is in the what and the why.

1. The First Step

- a. Read the whole book in one sitting.
- b. As you read, make observations and ask questions.
- c. Key people and places
- d. Recurring motifs
- e. Continue to ask questions of why Luke wrote this book and why any particular story is included.

II. Acts: An Overview

A. Luke divides the narrative by pausing momentarily to recap and then moving on.

1. Luke divides the story up into six sections.
2. The Holy Spirit is always the absolutely critical factor in moving and expanding the church.

B. Luke's Purpose

1. We can tell a few things about Luke's purpose from what he did and also did not do:
 - a. Interested in the Holy Spirit led movement from a Jewish and Jerusalem based movement to its becoming a worldwide, Gentile phenomenon.
 - b. Luke has no interest in writing biographies of the apostles.
 - c. He has little or no interest in church organization or polity.
 - d. There is no other geographical expansion discussed except the movement from Jerusalem to Rome—though the apostles went out in all directions.
 - e. He has no interest in standardizing things or bring things into uniformity.
 - f. The book serves as a model in that it is an example of the proclamation of the Gospel to the entire world—not necessarily in specific examples.

III. The Hermeneutics of Acts

A. How do the narratives of Acts function as precedents for the later church?

1. Nearly all Christians tend to treat precedent as having a normative authority in one way or another.

B. Some General Principles

1. What is only narrated or described is not normative unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.
2. There are three types of doctrinal statements:
 - a. Christian theology (what we believe)
 - b. Ethics (how we ought to live)
 - c. Christian experience and practice (what we do)
3. There are also primary statements (those explicitly taught in the Bible) and secondary (derived by implication or precedent).
4. Nearly everything we derive by precedent is in the realm of Christian experience and practice and always at the secondary level.
 - a. God's word to us must be found in the intent of Scripture.
 - b. Therefore, Luke was setting forth a model for the worldwide expansion of the church.
 - c. Luke was not setting forth the normative pattern for how this had to be accomplished.

IV. Principles with regard to hermeneutics of Acts:

- A. What is normative about any given narrative is that which it intended to teach.
- B. What is incidental to the story is not primary, though it can help to support clear teaching from other places in Scripture.
- C. Precedent is normative where it is clear that the narrative was intending to establish a definite precedent.
 - 1. It is not normative just because it was normal.

V. Some Specific Principles

- A. It is probably never valid to use an analogy based on biblical precedent alone as biblical authority for present-day actions.
- B. Biblical narratives have pattern value, but not in the sense that they establish a norm for a specific action.
- C. Biblical precedents can be repeatable patterns without being normative for all places and all times.

Chapter Summary

As Christians in the twenty-first century, we have a tendency to read the book of Acts differently than the rest of Scripture. As we read of the growth and spread of the church, we tend to seek out biblical precedent for what the church should look like now, even to the extent of explicitly seeking to restore the church to what it looked like in Acts. However, it is vitally important that we do not read in a selective manner, but seek out what Luke's interests were in writing the book.

The book of Acts certainly fits into the genre of Hellenistic historiography and seeks to encourage, inform, and even moralize. However, we must keep in mind that Luke's interests reach beyond this. For Luke, the ministry of Jesus and the spread of the church are confirmation of the divine activity that began in the OT. Exegesis of Acts is not simply concerned with the historical questions, but also Luke's theological purpose in the way he selected and shaped his material.

The key to understanding Acts is in Luke's interest in the movement of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the Earth. He narrates the movement from a Jerusalem-based, Judaism oriented beginning to its Holy Spirit guided movement toward a predominantly Gentile phenomenon. This is emphasized by the fact that Luke does *not* write biographies of the apostles, nor is there much interest in church polity, nor is there discussion of the spread of the church outside of the movement from Jerusalem to Rome.

Luke shows little interest in standardizing things or bringing everything into uniformity. The church is described as quite diverse in race, culture, and communal life. Nevertheless, in the overall picture he presents, Luke did intend to give the church a model. However, the model is one of a church that is intended to preach the Gospel to the entire world and the decisive and all-encompassing power of the Spirit of God to accomplish this purpose.

Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described is not normative unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way. There are basically three categories of doctrinal statements derived from Scripture: 1) Christian theology, 2) Christian ethics, and 3) Christian experience and practice.

Each of these categories has primary and secondary level statements. For instance, Jesus' full divinity and humanity is primary, how the two natures concur is secondary (not *unimportant*). Nearly everything we derive from Scripture by way of precedent has to do with Christian experience and practice. We must take care, therefore, when the biblical precedents that we use are contained in details that are incidental to the main point of the narrative—particularly because such details are typically ambiguous in nature.

Therefore, it is probably best to keep these principles in mind when interpreting matters of biblical precedent. It is never valid to use an analogy based on biblical precedent as giving absolute biblical authority for present-day actions. Furthermore, though it may not have been the primary purpose, narratives do have illustrative value even though the precedent does not establish a norm for a specific action in the present. Even when there is something demonstrated to be *normal*, it is not necessarily normative.

In matters of Christian experience and practice, biblical precedents can provide for us repeatable patterns even if they are not normative. They provide permission for certain actions, though they do not demand that all believers everywhere repeat them. The decision on whether an action is repeatable, then, is guided by the following: 1) if there is only one pattern there is more justification to repeat it; 2) where a pattern occurs only once it needs to be supportive by teaching elsewhere in Scripture; 3) what is culturally conditioned is not repeatable or must be translated to the current context.

Practice Quiz

True/False

1. Almost all biblical Christians tend to treat precedent as having normative authority to one degree or another.
2. Christians tend to read Acts the same way they read the book of Judges.
3. Lack of hermeneutical precision in the interpretation of Acts has served to unify the church.
4. Luke makes it clear for us who Theophilus was and why he was writing to him.
5. The work of the Holy Spirit is the crucial factor in the movement of the narrative of Acts.
6. Acts sets forth one, normative model for Christian experience and church life.
7. Not every sentence in every narrative or speech is necessarily trying to tell *us* something when we read Acts today.

Fill in the Blank

8. The book of Acts belongs generally to the genre of ancient _____.
9. The Greek-speaking Jewish Christians are known as _____ in the book of Acts.
10. The Jews who did not live in Palestine, but were spread across the Greek and Roman world were known as the _____.
11. According to Luke, the forward movement of the gospel in Acts happened because God willed it and the _____ carried it out.

Multiple Choice

12. Which of the following is not a typical reason that someone would study the book of Acts?
 - A) Historical details
 - B) Apologetics
 - C) Devotional reasons
 - D) To help plan dinner
13. Hellenistic historiography was used for what purpose?
 - A) Keep records
 - B) Chronicle the past
 - C) Encourage and entertain
 - D) All of the above

14. Which of the following is not true about Luke's purpose in Acts?
- A) He does not seem to be interested in standardizing or bringing things to uniformity
 - B) He is interested in the movement of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome
 - C) He is very interested in church polity and organization
 - D) None of the above
15. Which of the following are types of doctrinal statements derived from Scripture?
- A) Christian theology
 - B) Christian ethics
 - C) Christian experience and practice
 - D) All of the above

Answer Key: 1.T 2.F 3.F 4.F 5.T 6.F 7.T 8. historiography 9. Hellenist 10. Diaspora 11. Holy Spirit
12.D 13.D 14.C 15.D

Notes and Reminders

Third Area of Study: The Gospels: One Story, Many Dimensions

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 7 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Discuss the importance of the kingdom of God for interpreting the Gospels.
2. Identify the stated purpose of the gospel of John.
3. Explain the difference between a book about Jesus and a book by Jesus.
4. Understand the basic importance of the relationship between the Gospels.
5. Explain the difference between the historical context of Jesus and the context of the gospel writers.
6. Understand how the genre of the Gospels differs from the rest of the Bible.
7. Understand how to read a given story or staying within its present context.
8. Understand how to read the individual parts of the Gospels in light of the whole of each gospel narrative.
9. Understand how to compare a pericope in one gospel to the use of the same pericope in other gospels.
10. Understand the difference between paying attention to historical context and the attempt to reconstruct the historical Jesus.
11. Identify the terms selectivity, arrangement, and adaptation as they relate to the writing of the Gospels.
12. Identify the difference between an illustration and a direct imperative.

Presentations

[Presentation 20:](#) In this presentation Dr. Watson compares and contrasts the Gospels.

[Presentation 21:](#) First presentation on the Gospel of Mark.

[Presentation 22:](#) Second presentation on the Gospel of Mark.

[Presentation 23:](#) First presentation on the Gospel of Matthew.

[Presentation 24:](#) Second presentation on the Gospel of Matthew.

[Presentation 25:](#) First presentation on the Gospel of Luke.

[Presentation 26:](#) First presentation on John.

[Presentation 27:](#) Second presentation on John

Key Points

- Reading the Gospels is not like reading other forms of literature.
- Exegesis of the Gospels requires us to think both in terms of the historical setting of Jesus and the historical setting of the authors.
- Interpretation of the Gospels requires us to read the teaching and stories in light of the other Gospels (horizontally) and with an awareness of the historical contexts of both Jesus and the evangelist (vertically).
- The gospel writers were *authors*, not simply compilers of historical data.
- Reading the Gospels *requires* an understanding that the kingdom of God has already come in Jesus, but has not yet been consummated—the notion of inaugurated eschatology.

Key Terms

Synoptic selectivity;	Justin Martyr arrangement	pericope adaptation	pronouncement story; inaugurated eschatology
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Chapter Seven Outline

I. The Nature of the Gospels

- A. Almost all the difficulties in interpreting the Gospels stem from two facts:
 - 1. Jesus did not write a gospel.
 - 2. There are four gospels in the Bible.
- B. Jesus did not write a gospel or any of his teachings.
 - 1. They are not by Jesus, but about Jesus.
 - 2. We have large blocks of teaching within a narrative of Jesus' ministry (not his whole life).
 - 3. Gospels are written by others in Greek, though Jesus probably spoke Aramaic.
 - 4. God gave us what we know about Jesus' earthly ministry in this way, not in another way that satisfies all our curiosity.
- C. There are four gospels:
 - 1. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as Synoptic, while John is quite different.
 - 2. At least one reason for this is that different Christian communities had a need to write about Jesus.
 - 3. The four gospels are equally valid and inspired—interest in Jesus is at two levels.
 - a. Historical: what Jesus said and did.
 - b. Theological: what does Jesus mean for us?

II. The Historical Context Because there are four gospels, we have to think in terms of the time of Jesus and the time of the authors.

- A. The Historical Context of Jesus—in General
 - 1. We need to understand the first-century Jewish world of Jesus.
 - 2. We need the help of good secondary sources here.
 - 3. Do not overlook the form of Jesus' teaching:
 - a. Parable, hyperbole, proverbs, simile and metaphor, questions, etc.
- B. The Historical Context of Jesus—in Particular
 - 1. Jesus' words and deeds were orally transmitted over about thirty years before the Gospels were written.
 - 2. The difficulty here is that so many of Jesus' teachings and saying were transmitted without specific reference to the contexts in which they were said.
 - 3. We must also note that the evangelists used certain sayings/teachings, and not others.
 - 4. Even if it can't be completely answered, we must always ask ourselves who Jesus' audience was in a given text (disciples, crowds, opponents, etc.).
- C. The Historical Context of the Evangelist
 - 1. We can be fairly sure of the evangelist's interests and concerns by the way he selected, shaped, and arranged his material.
 - 2. Ancient traditions about the origins of each gospel can be instructive (though not infallibly so).

III. The Literary Context

- A. The literary context has to do with the place of a given pericope (per- *ik* -o-pay) within the context of any one of the Gospels—often fixed by the historical context (but not always).
- B. Interpreting the Individual Pericopes
 - 1. Think horizontally and vertically.

2. It is not quite as important in the Gospels to think paragraphs like in the Epistles.

C. Think Horizontally

1. Read a pericope in one gospel with awareness to the way that pericope is used in the other gospels.
2. This is not meant to get us to harmonize.
3. The parallels often give us appreciation for the distinctives of any one of the Gospels.
4. Gives us an awareness of the different contexts in which the pericope is used.
5. The Gospels are clearly not written independently of one another.
6. Though John clearly represents an independent retelling of the story, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are clearly interdependent.
7. The best explanation is that Mark wrote his gospel, Luke and Matthew had access to Mark and independently used it as a source for their own (they also used other material about Jesus too).

D. Think Vertically

1. Read a pericope with awareness of both Jesus' and the evangelists' contexts.
2. This is not primarily to study the life of the historical Jesus.
3. A saying in its original context is a prelude to understanding it in its present canonical context.

E. Interpreting the Gospels as Wholes

1. The gospel writers were authors in the sense that, with the Spirit's help, they creatively structured and rewrote the material to meet the needs of their readers.
2. Selectivity: the choice of material
3. Arrangement: where it is placed in the story
4. Adaptation: how it is made to fit into the story.

IV. Some Hermeneutical Observations

A. The Teachings and Imperatives

1. Jesus' imperatives are not laws that we need to get around
2. They describe the lived-out love of our new life as God's loved and redeemed children.

B. The Narratives

1. The narratives function in more than one way in the Gospels.
2. Where possible, we should use the stories of the Gospels in the same way they used them.

C. One Final, Very Important Word

1. An understanding of the concept of the "kingdom of God" is vital to the interpretation of the Gospels.
2. The basic framework of the entire NT is eschatological—the end-time has begun with the coming of Jesus, but it has not yet been consummated.
 - a. The key to much in the NT—especially the ministry and teaching of Jesus—is to be found in this tension.

Chapter Summary

The Gospels are, at the same time, collected teachings *of* Jesus and stories *about* Jesus. Therefore, they neither completely fit the genre of historiography nor that of biography. The uniqueness of the Gospels is what presents us with the majority of our exegetical problems. These problems stem from two obvious facts: 1) Jesus did not directly write any, or even part, of the Gospels, and 2) we have four gospels, three that are very similar and one that is quite distinct.

It is absolutely essential to recognize that the four gospels are not books *by* Jesus, but are books

about Jesus—and not written at the time in which Jesus lived. The fact that there are four of them, all of them received by the church as equally the word of God, just adds to the complexity of interpretation. For these reasons, we must think carefully in terms of the historical setting of Jesus *and* the historical setting of the authors. The authors are clearly trying to write about Jesus, but it is equally clear that they retold these stories according to the needs of their own contexts.

In general, understanding the first-century background during the life of Jesus and the time in which the Gospels were written requires us to seek some good outside help. However, the even more difficult aspect of exegeting the Gospels lies in the way in which the sayings and stories were transmitted orally throughout the early decades of the Christian church, and how this relates to the written Gospels that we have. Many sayings that we have of Jesus are given to us apart from their original contexts. While these matters tend to involve a great deal of informed conjecture, we can better understand the point of Jesus' sayings if we try to pay careful attention to *whom* Jesus is speaking when he gives a particular teaching.

The literary context has to do with the place of a given pericope in the context of any one of the Gospels. While this context was, to some extent, fixed by its original historical context, many of the materials in the four gospels owe their present context to the evangelists themselves, according to their own inspiration by the Spirit. The evangelists were authors, and not simply compilers of sayings and stories. Furthermore, unlike the Epistles, the Gospels do not generally unfold paragraph to paragraph (outside of longer bodies of Jesus' teaching). Rather, the interpreter needs to think "horizontally" (how a pericope in one gospel relates to the use of the same pericope in other gospels) and "vertically" (awareness of the historical contexts of both Jesus and the authors).

The four gospels have a unique relationship to one another, but they were also each written about Jesus (at a particular time) by later authors (at a completely different time and in a different context). Each gospel is a product of the authorial selectivity, arrangement, and adaptation of the life and words of Jesus. The authors selected material to suit their present purposes, they arranged the material to better speak to these purposes, and they adapted material to meet these purposes. These compositional concerns are not always easy to trace, but are of great use to us as we attempt to understand each of these four witnesses and what they are trying to say about Jesus.

All of these things aside, it is absolutely vital that one understands the Gospels' use of the concept of the "kingdom of God." It is very difficult to understand them rightly without this notion in the background. The gospel writers clearly understood that the kingdom of God and the "end times" began with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God's kingdom, as the goal of His work of salvation, is begun in Jesus, carried through to the church by the procession of the Spirit, and sets the context for how the church lives and moves in this world. Nevertheless, this work of God has not yet been consummated. The gospel writers understand themselves to be living in the overlap of the ages. The new age of God's kingdom has begun in and through Christ, but has yet to be consummated. This is the context in which the four gospels must be read.

Practice Quiz

True/False

1. The Gospels do not fit completely into any of the other genres that appear in the Bible.
2. The Gospels are not books *by* Jesus, but books *about* Jesus.
3. The amount of material found exclusively in the gospel of Mark would scarcely fill two pages of print.
4. Contextual reading and studying of the Gospels is as important as it is for the Epistles.
5. There is too much evidence that the Synoptic Gospels are directly related to ignore as you interpret.

6. The gospel of John directly states the reason that the author wrote.
7. The purpose of thinking “vertically” is not primarily to study the life of the historical Jesus.

Fill in the Blank

8. The difficulty in understanding how the Gospels are related to one another is known as the _____ problem.
9. It is not as important to “think _____” in the Gospels as it is in the Epistles.
10. To understand the imperatives in Jesus’ teaching as _____ is to misunderstand them.
11. The basic theological framework of the entire NT is _____.

Multiple Choice

12. The major hermeneutical difficulty with understanding the Gospels is:
 - A) Understanding why Jesus didn’t write
 - B) Figuring out what Jesus ate
 - C) Identifying precisely how the Gospels are related to one another
 - D) Understanding the concept of “the kingdom of God”
13. Almost all of the difficulties one encounters in interpreting the Gospels stems from:
 - A) Jesus did not write a gospel Himself
 - B) There are four gospels
 - C) The Gospels are in Greek
 - D) A and B only
14. When interpreting the Gospels, historical context has to do with:
 - A) The context of Jesus
 - B) The context of the writers
 - C) The context of the original readers
 - D) All of the above
15. Because of the unique nature of the Gospels, you must:
 - A) Order KFC
 - B) Think horizontally and vertically
 - C) Know which author borrowed from the other
 - D) Give out flyers at a hockey game

Answer Key: 1.T 2.T 3.T 4.T 5.T 6.T 7.T 8. synoptic 9. paragraphs 10. law 11. eschatological
12.D 13.D 14.D 15.B

Notes and Reminders

Fourth Area of Study: The Parables: Do You Get the Point?

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 8 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Explain the difference between allegory and parable.
2. Identify the major types of parables that occur in the Gospels.
3. Describe the importance of the concept of the kingdom of God for understanding the parables.
4. Identify and explain the intended response of a given parable.
5. Understand the relationship between literary context and intended response.
6. Identify the audience of a given parable.
7. Understand how to identify the points of reference of a given parable.
8. Move from the meaning of a parable to a modern day translation of the parable that highlights its meaning and intended response.
9. Understand the relationship between intended response and points of reference in a given parable.
10. Identify points of reference in a parable when the audience is ambiguous.
11. Understand the importance and urgency of the message of the kingdom of God.
12. Discuss any given parable within its present context in the Gospels.

Key Points

- One of the most common problems in church history is to interpret a parable as though it were an allegory.
- The point of parables is to call forth a response in the hearer.
- The force of a parable depends on understanding the points of reference, which in turn causes one to recognize the unexpected turn in the story.
- The majority of the parables are *parables of the kingdom*, which illustrate the nearness of God's kingdom and call forth a response.

Key Terms

allegory	true parable	similitude	metaphor	epigram
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Chapter Eight Outline

I. The Parables in History

- A. Misinterpretation of the parables is largely due to the tendency to read them as allegories.
 1. While there are certain allegorical features of some parables, a parable is not meant to have every detail pressed to find hidden meanings.

II. The Nature of Parables

- A. The Variety of Kinds
 1. Parables come in a variety of types:
 - a. True parable (good Samaritan)
 - b. Similitude (yeast and the dough)
 - c. Metaphor ("You are the salt of the earth")
 - d. Epigram ("Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes...")
 - e. Some approach allegory, but parables do not function like allegories.

- B. How Parables Function

1. Parables function as a striking way of calling forth a response in the hearer.
2. Parables are kind of like jokes—you need to catch the meaning for it to have its intended effect.

III. The Exegesis of the Parables

A. Finding the Points of Reference

1. The two items that one needs to recognize in order to get a parable are the points of reference and the unexpected turn in the story.
2. Points of reference: parts of the story with which one automatically identifies as it is being told.
3. The point of the parable is not the points of reference, as would be the case with allegory.

B. Identifying the Audience

1. The audience is identified for many of the parables. We should:
2. Listen to the parable again and again.
3. Identify the points of reference that would have been picked up by the audience.
4. Try to determine how the original hearers would have identified with the story.

C. The “Contextless” Parables

1. Some parables do not have a specifically identified audience. We should:
2. Listen to the parable again and again.
3. Identify the points of reference in the parable.
4. Typically, the points of reference will be a clue to the audience.

D. The Parables of the Kingdom

1. “The kingdom of God is like ...” is better rendered “it is like this with the kingdom of God.”
2. These are still primarily seeking a response, though they do teach us some important things about the kingdom.
3. They proclaim the already/not yet nature of the kingdom, with the emphasis on the already.

IV. The Hermeneutical Question

- A. We lack the immediate understanding of the points of reference that is so vital to getting the parable.
- B. We must pay attention to their present biblical contexts and then translate that same point into our own contexts.
- C. We must be immersed in the meaning of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus.

Chapter Summary

For all the charm and simplicity of the parables, they have suffered a great deal of misinterpretation. At least part of the reason for this seems to lie in the way Jesus explains the parables in the Synoptic Gospels. Because Jesus spoke of “mysteries” given to insiders and withheld from outsiders, the parables came to be considered simple stories to the outsiders with hidden meanings to believers that could only be uncovered through allegory. However, the Gospels indicate that most of the parables were not directed to “insiders” at all. The problem that people in the Gospels have with the parables does not typically seem to be with knowing what they mean, but with letting them alter their behavior.

Parables come in a variety of forms. True parables tend to be stories, with beginning and end, which have some sort of plot. A similitude, like the parable of the yeast and dough, is more like an illustration taken from everyday life to make a point. Some parables act like metaphors or similes, and some even act like epigrams, where Jesus makes terse, interesting, and even satirical points. There are

certain parables that certainly have features of allegory—certain points of reference of the parable correspond to something else in real life—but, even in these cases, only a limited number of the elements of the parable are intended to be interpreted in this way. Parables are *not* allegories.

The general function of parables is to call forth a response in the hearer or reader. Like a joke, the parable itself *is* the message. If you explained all of the points of a joke it would likely no longer be funny. The hearer either gets it or they do not. It is similar with parables. The point of the parable is not in the points of reference themselves (as in a true allegory), but in the intended response. If a person doesn't have the intended response, then they don't "get it"—even if the meaning is plainly evident. Thus, understanding a parable is a combination of reading and re-reading again and again, identifying the points of reference intended by Jesus that would have been clearer to the original hearers, and determining how the original hearers would have identified with the story.

This focus on the intended response remains true even given the varying forms and contexts in which parables appear. The same parable sometimes occurs in multiple gospels, but in different contexts or even very ambiguous contexts. Nevertheless, understanding them remains a very similar task. They remain the same parables, with the same points, but given to varying audiences. Amongst the parables, there is a large group we call *Parables of the Kingdom*. Such parables give us insight into the nature of the kingdom of God. Although they teach us a great deal, they still focus on an intended response. They herald the breaking in of God's kingdom at the coming of Jesus and demand response to Jesus' invitation and call to discipleship. Often these parables emphasize the "already" of the inaugurated end-time, and urge the hearers to understand the urgency and lateness of the hour.

So, how do we properly understand the parables when the distance of time, culture, and language make it difficult to understand the points of reference? It is extremely important to pay close attention to the broader context of the gospel where the parable appears. Parables don't have one intended response no matter who the audience is. The parables are important aspects of how the gospel writers tell their stories of Jesus, and they are not always trying to make exactly the same point. When we understand this, it is possible to translate the same point to our context. It is absolutely vital in reading the parables to immerse ourselves in the concept of the kingdom of God, how it is used throughout the Gospels and NT, and what it would have meant to the original audience. The urgent message of the kingdom as present and soon to be consummated is still needed in our own day.

Practice Quiz

True/False

1. The "real meaning" of the parables is hidden and only for those with special knowledge. **False**
2. Parables are not all of one kind.
3. If one misses the points of reference in a parable, then it is still likely that they will understand the point.
4. In some ways, explaining a parable can be like explaining a joke—it lessens the force of the point.
5. The point of an allegory is in the points of reference.
6. All parables are given in contexts that make it clear who the original audience was.
7. The parables are often about the already/not yet nature of the kingdom of God—with the emphasis on the "not yet."

Fill in the Blank

8. The function of a parable is to call forth a _____.
9. The parables of the kingdom describe for us the nature of the _____.
10. The _____ are the parts of a parable with which one automatically identifies as it is being told.

11. Because of the distance of time, culture, and language it is difficult to understand the points of reference heard by the original _____.

Multiple Choice

12. Which of the following parables is an example of a “true parable”?
- A) Yeast and the dough
 - B) Mustard seed
 - C) Pearl of great price
 - D) Good Samaritan
13. Which of the following is a type of parable in the Gospels?
- A) Similitude
 - B) Poem
 - C) Allegory
 - D) Pronouncement story
14. Which of the following is *most* true of parables?
- A) They are teaching vehicles
 - B) They intend to illicit a response
 - C) They are simple stories
 - D) They tell us a lot about how Jews made bread
15. How can we overcome the interpretive difficulties of understanding the parables?
- A) Carefully read the parables within their literary contexts
 - B) Study the concept of the kingdom of God
 - C) Neither A nor B
 - D) Both A and B

Answer Key: 1.F 2.T 3.F 4.T 5.T 6.F 7.F 8. response 9. kingdom of God 10. points of reference
11. hearers / readers 12.D 13.A 14.B 15.D

BST 305.3 Concepts in Biblical Interpretation Part II

First Area of Study: The Law(s): Covenant Stipulations for Israel

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 9 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Identify the six parts of ancient covenants.
2. Identify the problems faced by Israel at the time when God gave the law.
3. Understand that the law is a *gift* and *blessing*.
4. Understand that keeping the law is nowhere in the OT the basis for being saved.
5. Explain the way the covenantal nature of the law demonstrates God's character.
6. Identify the various ways in which "law" is used in the Scriptures.
7. Discuss the options available to the Christian for understanding the relationship of the OT law to the present day.
8. Define covenant.
9. Explain the concept of paradigm as it relates to OT law.
10. Identify and discuss the different types of laws that occur in the OT.
11. Discuss the relationship between OT law and other ancient law codes.
12. Identify at least five ways that the OT law is a benefit to Israel and five that describe its benefit to us.

Presentations

In [Presentation 28](#) Dr. Watson begins a discussion about Israelite Law and how we as Christians relate to it. The discussion continues in [Presentation 29](#) and [Presentation 30](#).

Key Points

- The OT Law is God's gift to His people Israel.
- The OT Law is not God's direct commandment *to* us, but is God's Word *for* us.
- The covenant itself is a blessing to God's people.
- The OT Law is only binding on Christians where it is explicitly renewed in the NT.
- The OT Law functions for us paradigmatically, giving us examples and for the full range of how to live before God.

Key Terms

covenant	preamble	prologue	stipulations
witnesses	sanctions	document clause	civil laws
ritual laws	paradigm	apodictic law	casuistic law

Chapter Nine Outline

I. The Law

A. After leaving Egypt, Israel needed:

1. Direction as to how they were to be God's people.
2. To figure out how to deal with the rapid assimilation of non-Israelites, ethnically and

religiously.

- B. The law was God's gift to his people to establish the ways they were to live in community with one another and in relation to God.

II. What is the Law

- A. The word "law" has several meanings in Scripture:

1. The 600 plus commands
2. In the singular:
 - a. All the laws collectively
 - b. The Pentateuch
 - c. The entire OT
 - d. The OT law as interpreted by the rabbis

- B. The commandments are found mixed in with a great deal of narrative.

- C. The laws could not be properly understood apart from their narrative contexts.

1. It can be very difficult for Christians to understand how these legal formulations apply to us today.

III. Christians and the Old Testament Law

- A. How does the OT law function for Christians?

1. The OT law is a covenant—a binding agreement that makes relationship possible.
2. The OT is not our covenant—we should assume that none of its stipulations are binding unless renewed in the new covenant.
3. Civil and ritual laws have clearly not been renewed in the new covenant.

IV. How does the OT law function for Christians?

- A. Part of the old covenant is renewed in the new, mostly ethical laws and the principles behind them.

1. All of the old covenant is the word of God for us, even if not to us.
2. Only what is explicitly renewed can be considered part of the law of Christ.

- B. The Role of the Law in Israel and in the Bible

1. Though these are not our laws, they are still valuable to us today.
2. Nowhere does the OT suggest that anyone was saved by keeping the Law.
3. Israel's problem in the OT was not their inability to keep the law, but their choosing not to do so.
4. The Law set parameters for relationships between God and his people.

V. The Old Testament Law and Other Ancient Law Codes

- A. Other ancient nations had similar law codes as well.

1. When compared, it is obvious that the OT law was a definitive ethical advancement.

- B. The Old Testament Law as Benefit to Israel

1. The law is inadequate only if one expects it to make a person truly righteous ... but this was never its intent
2. If we don't make that mistake, we can see it as the merciful and gracious gift that it is.

VI. Types of Laws

- A. Apodictic Law

1. Direct commands, usually imperatives and generally applicable—they tell the Israelites how to fulfill their covenant with God.
2. The law is paradigmatic—it sets a standard by example rather than mentioning every circumstance.
3. These are not exhaustive legal codes, but closer to the Constitution.
4. Though limited in wording, they are very comprehensive in spirit.
5. Although not their intent, they do show us how impossible it is to please God on our

own.

B. Casuistic Law

1. Case-by-case laws

- a. These laws are conditional and don't apply at all times to all people in all situations.
- b. The recipients of the law were expected to understand that they had broader implications.
- c. None of these laws are renewed in the NT.

C. The Food Laws

1. Not arbitrary restrictions—most of the foods prohibited were:

- a. More likely to carry disease.
- b. Foolishly uneconomical.
- c. Foods favored for idolatrous sacrifices by surrounding nations.

D. Laws about the Shedding of Blood

1. Set the standard that sin deserves punishment.

- a. God's provision for the person who sins to be forgiven.
- b. Set a precedent for the final and perfect sacrifice of Christ.

E. Unusual Prohibitions

1. Laws such as "do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk," were meant to keep Israel from adopting specifically idolatrous practices from the surrounding nations.

F. Laws Giving Blessings to Those Who Keep Them

1. Such laws were not punitive, but vehicles for good practice. They taught the Israelites to live out the blessings that God had given them.

VI. In Summary: Some Do's and Don'ts

A. See the OT law as God's word for you.

1. Don't see the OT law as God's direct command to you.

B. See the OT law as the basis for the old covenant.

1. Don't see the OT law as binding on Christians.

C. See God's justice, love, and high standards.

1. Don't forget to see that God's mercy is equal to his standards.

D. See the OT law as a paradigm.

1. Don't see the OT law as comprehensive.

E. Remember that the essence of the law is repeated in the Prophets and in the NT.

1. Don't expect the OT law to be cited frequently by the Prophets or NT.

F. See the OT law as a generous gift to Israel.

1. Don't see the OT law as an arbitrary collection of regulations that limit freedom.

Chapter Summary

The covenant is God's *gift* to His people Israel. God gave the Law to Israel at the point when they were most vulnerable. As they left Egypt they were suddenly in a position that required them to learn to be warriors and, at the same time, learn to be a community of *God's* people. They had to learn how to relate to one another and to God while they also shed the ways and culture of Egypt and sought not to become like the Canaanites. Furthermore, they had to learn how to deal with the rapid assimilation of non-Israelites, both ethnically and religiously. This was the historical role of the law in the OT. It established how they must live before God, with one another, and with regard to the cultures around them. Of utmost importance to us is that this law was a covenant—it was not simply a code of laws, but the basis of relationship with God himself!

In the OT and NT the word "law" can refer to individual laws, the whole collection of laws, the Pentateuch, the entire OT, or even the OT law as interpreted by the rabbis. This chapter focuses on both

the collection of laws and individual laws found in the Pentateuch. It is important from the outset to recognize that the “Law” contains laws, extensive narratives, and even poetry. The law is not simply a set of rules, but a covenant within a story that demonstrates a God that personally relates to his people.

Even so, it is difficult to understand in the present Christian context how this law applies to us. There are several things to remember along these lines. The OT law is a covenant, a binding contract between two parties—both of whom have obligations. The rules of the covenant establish the basis of the relationship. A covenant (which was a well-known form of writing in the ancient world) has six parts: preamble, prologue, stipulations, witnesses, sanctions, and a document clause. This standard format sets forth the defining terms of the relationship between a suzerain and a vassal.

This covenantal format essentially informs our understanding of how a gracious and holy God can relate to his people. The OT covenant is not our covenant, so we should assume that none of it is binding on us unless explicitly renewed in the NT. There are two major types of law that were not renewed in the NT: civil laws (specify laws for various crimes for which one may be punished) and ritual laws (rules for carrying out worship and dealing with sin). Nevertheless, all of the OT law is God’s word *for* us, though it is not the command of God *to* us.

It is important to note that keeping the law is never in the OT the way someone gets “saved”—that is always the work of God alone. The law was a gift to Israel, and defined what being God’s people should look like in the ancient world. Israel’s problem was not that they could not keep the law, but their continual choosing not to do so. Even though they might have been unable to keep it, God made provision for forgiveness and restoration—even when Israel continually rejected both the law and God’s grace.

The OT law contains both apodictic laws (direct commands) and casuistic laws (case-by-case laws). In both cases, the law does not seek to exhaust all possibilities in which one might break or keep the covenant. Rather, the law is paradigmatic—it sets a standard by using examples. This point is critical to understanding how the OT law applies to us today. It sets paradigms for us that guide every aspect of life to humble obedience to God. Far from being an oppressive legal code, the OT covenant is God’s gift to Israel and was of great benefit for all aspects of life. It is also to our benefit, for it is also the setting for the emergence of the new covenant by which we receive all the blessings of Christ!

Practice Quiz

True/False

1. Apart from the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, the three defining narratives for Israel as a people are found in Leviticus.
2. The word “law” has more than one connotation in the Bible.
3. If we are going to read and understand the law well, we must begin with understanding its role in Israel’s history.
4. Christians are not expected to express their loyalty to God by keeping the OT law.
5. Nowhere in the OT is it suggested that anyone was saved by keeping the law.
6. The primary function of the law was to set out parameters of relationships and establish loyalty between God and his people.
7. The OT law is no more ethically advanced than its ancient counterparts.

Fill in the Blank

8. The covenant format has _____ parts.
9. The _____ nature of the law makes it so critical to our understanding of the OT and God.
10. All of the OT law is still the _____ for us.
11. The OT law is not God’s command _____ us.

Multiple Choice

12. Which of the following is a part of the covenant format?
 - A) Stipulations
 - B) Prayer
 - C) Narrative
 - D) Epistle
13. Which of the following was true of Israel's historical situation coming out of Egypt?
 - A) They needed to learn how to be warriors
 - B) They needed to learn how God expected them to relate to one another
 - C) They needed to learn how God expected them to relate with other nations
 - D) All of the above
14. Which of the following is a type of OT law:
 - A) Constitutional
 - B) Apodictic
 - C) Legal Precedent
 - D) All of the Above
15. Which of the following is an example of an ancient counterpart to the OT law?
 - A) Code of Hammurabi
 - B) The Command of Seth
 - C) The Reluctance of Gertrude
 - D) None of the above

Answer Key: 1.F 2.T 3.T 4.T 5.T 6.T 7.F 8. six 9. covenant 10.word of God 11. to 12.A 13.D 14.B 15.A

Notes and Reminders

Second Area of Study: The Prophets: Enforcing the Covenant in Israel

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 10 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Identify and describe the functions of the OT prophets.
2. Describe how the OT prophets used the Pentateuch.
3. Identify and discuss the reasons that the period of the writing prophets was situated between 760 and 460 BC.
4. Describe the process by which one might “think oracles.”
5. Identify and explain the various forms of OT prophecy.
6. Discuss the function and form of poetry as used by the Israelite prophets.
7. Discuss the hermeneutical issues that come up when interpreting a prophecy that was already fulfilled in the OT period.
8. Identify the periods and contexts in which the prophets wrote.
9. Discuss the relationship of the non-writing prophets to the writing prophets.
10. Define and discuss the issue of *sensus plenior*.
11. Discuss the relationship between Moses and the other prophets.
12. Identify and use outside helps for study when necessary.

Key Points

- OT prophecy rarely refers to *our* future.
- The primary function of OT prophets was to speak for God as covenantal enforcers.
- The prophets were God’s direct representatives, speaking God’s word—though this word was always rooted in the covenant.
- The difficulty of historical context requires the reader to seek good outside help when reading the prophets.
- The reader of the prophets must learn to “think oracles” just as the Epistles demand for us to “think paragraphs.”

Presentations

In [Presentation 31](#) Dr. Watson begins a discussion about the prophet and prophetic literature. The discussion continues in [Presentation 32](#).

Key Terms

Minor Prophets	Book of the Twelve	722 BC	587/586 BC
Lawsuit	woe	promise	enactment prophecy
messenger speech	orthodoxy	orthopraxy	<i>sensus plenior</i>

Chapter Ten Outline

I. The Prophets

- A. More individual books of the Bible come under the heading of “prophecy” than any other.
- B. Major prophets—Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah
- C. Minor prophets—Hosea, Amos, Jonah, etc.
 1. Major and minor do not refer to importance.

2. Minor prophets were grouped in the Hebrew Bible into one book, the Book of the Twelve.

II. The Nature of Prophecy

- A. Most misunderstanding and difficulty in interpreting the prophets is a result of misunderstanding the function and form of prophecy.
- B. The Meaning of Prophecy
 1. Less than 2% of OT prophecy is messianic; less than 5% specifically describes the new covenant age; less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come in our time.
 2. Prophets did announce the future, but typically the immediate future.
- C. The Prophets as Spokespersons
 1. Their main function was to speak for God to their contemporaries.
 2. We have a great deal of narrative description of what the prophets did in OT narratives.
 3. The OT prophetic books themselves provide us very little information about the prophets themselves.
- D. The Problem of History
 1. Historical distance makes it much harder to understand the prophetic word in the modern time than it was to Israel.
 2. Well-known geography, events, and figures to ancient Israel are no longer well-known to us.
- E. The Function of Prophecy in Israel
 1. The prophets were covenant enforcement mediators.
 2. The prophets' message was not their own, but God's.
 3. The prophets were God's direct representatives.
 4. The prophets' message is not original.
 5. Very little, if anything, is truly new in the way of commands.

III. The Exegetical Task

- A. The Need for Outside Help
 1. Because of historical distance, it is a clear necessity that we seek secondary help in order to understand the context and what is being said.
 2. Bible dictionaries, handbooks, and commentaries can be very helpful for these purposes.
- B. The Historical Context
 1. When studying the prophetic books, it is necessary to keep in mind the larger context (prophetic era) and the specific context (that of a single oracle).
 2. Both are necessary for the interpretation of the prophetic books.
- C. The Larger Context
 1. All 16 of the prophetic books were from the period of around 760–460 BC—a relatively short period of time in the scope of biblical history.
 2. This period called especially for covenant enforcement mediation.
 3. There is an evident desire of God that his words to Israel in this period would be recorded.
- D. This period was characterized by:
 1. Unprecedented political, military, economic, and social upheaval.
 2. Enormous amount of religious unfaithfulness.
 3. Shifts in populations, national boundaries, and international power.
- E. The Specific Context
 1. The historical setting in which an oracle was delivered.
 2. Requires understanding of date, audience, and situation (when possible).

3. The Isolation of Individual Oracles
4. In the prophets, we “think oracles” rather than paragraphs.
5. Understanding where an oracle begins and ends can make a big difference in how one understands the setting.

IV. The Forms of Prophetic Utterance

- A. The five most common forms are:
 1. The lawsuit (Isa. 3:13–26)
 2. The woe (Hab. 2:6–8)
 3. The promise (Amos 9:11–15)
 4. The enactment prophecy (Isa. 20)
 5. The messenger speech (Mal. 1:2–5)
- B. The Prophets as Poets
 1. The prophets often used a special, formal and poetic style that featured:
 2. Synonymous parallelism
 3. Antithetical parallelism
 4. Synthetic parallelism

V. Some Hermeneutical Suggestions

- A. There are certain aspects of the prophetic message that we can immediately recognize as God’s word to us—the sins of former times tend to be the sins of the modern day as well.
- B. A Caution: The Prophet as Foreteller of the Future
 1. The prophets did indeed predict the future, but that future is mostly our past.
 2. Some prophecies of the prophets’ near future were set against the background of the great eschatological future.
 3. The Bible regularly sees God’s acts in temporal history in light of his overall plan for humanity.
- C. A Concern: Prophecy and Second Meanings
 1. Fairly often the NT uses an OT passage and carries with it a new meaning than it had in the OT.
 2. We are not inspired authors, and so are not authorized to do what the NT authors did.
 3. Sensus plenior is a function of inspiration, not illumination.
 - a. Unless so identified by the NT, we cannot confidently identify sensus plenior from the OT.
- D. A Final Benefit: The Dual Emphasis on Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy
 1. Orthodoxy is correct belief. Orthopraxy is correct living.
 2. The prophetic books serve as constant reminders that we must know God (and his covenant), and live accordingly.

Chapter Summary

More individual books of the Bible come under the heading of prophecy than under any other heading. The writing prophets were active between about 760 and 460 BC, and were by no means the only prophets to have been in Israel. We typically distinguish between major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) and minor prophets (Hosea, Amos, etc.), but these terms only describe the length of the books themselves. They have absolutely nothing to do with their relative worth.

Many of the most difficult aspects of interpreting the prophets are a result of misunderstandings about their function and form. While the prophets often foretold what God would do in the future, the future was their immediate future. The vast majority of OT prophecy was fulfilled in OT times! Furthermore, these prophecies were intended to affect the behavior and covenant faithfulness in the prophets’ present. They were “covenant enforcers.”

In the Bible, we catch glimpses of the prophets in two ways: 1) OT narratives tell us of the acts of very influential prophets, such as Elijah, though not much of what they said; 2) written prophecies tell us a great deal of what the prophets said, but don't often tell us much of what the prophet did. What we find is that prophets were essentially God's direct representatives, speaking God's word—though this word was always rooted in the covenant.

But why is it that the Israelite prophets only wrote between the relatively limited time period of 300 years? These written prophecies came at times characterized by unprecedented upheaval, enormous religious unfaithfulness, and enormous changes to domestic and international political realities for Israel. Understanding the function and meaning of the prophets, then, requires attention to date, audience, and situation when this information is available.

The forms of OT prophecy vary greatly, in each case they attempt to grab the readers'/hearers' attention. Interpretation of the prophets calls for the reader to "think oracles" just as the Epistles demand for us to "think paragraphs." Since it is so often difficult to identify divisions in the prophecies (not the least of which because the prophets often use poetry), it is helpful to understand the basic forms in which Israelite prophecies occur. These include lawsuit, woe, promise, enactment prophecies, and messenger speeches. Understanding the basic nuances of these forms can help us delineate the transitions from one oracle to another.

When interpreting the OT prophets it is quite natural to translate God's word to Israel as also his word to us. We too must be faithful and loyal to God alone, we must care for the needy, and we too fall victim to those who use their ecclesial positions for their own selfish gain. However, we must avoid the pitfall of thinking that all of OT prophecy is speaking of the new covenant. This is to ignore that most of these prophecies were fulfilled in the time of the prophets themselves.

We must carefully read these texts, particularly because fulfillment, which is now (for us) in the past, is also blended into language that describes the eschaton. Furthermore, we need to take great care when we try to replicate the interpretive license that we find in the NT. The writers of the NT were inspired, but we are not. If there is a fuller meaning to be had in the prophets, it is a matter of inspiration, not illumination. Still, the OT prophetic books are of extraordinary value to us. Everywhere, the prophets encourage us to believe correctly (orthodoxy) and live correctly (orthopraxy).

Practice Quiz

True/False

1. The minor prophets are less important prophets.
2. It is difficult to put the words of the prophets in their original historical context because of our distance in spheres of religion, history, and culture.
3. Moses was the mediator of God's law when God first announced it and thus is the paradigm for the prophets.
4. The prophets' messages were their own.
5. The prophets were God's direct representatives.
6. The prophets were inspired to announce doctrines not already contained in the Pentateuch.
7. The messianic prophecies in the prophets arise from the Pentateuch.

Fill in the Blank

8. A great deal of the difficulty with interpreting OT prophecy results from misunderstanding its _____ and _____.
9. The prophets were _____ enforcement mediators.
10. Judah was destroyed by the _____ in 587/586 BC.
11. Israel was destroyed by Assyria in _____ BC.

(quiz continues)

Multiple Choice

12. What is the primary function of the OT prophets?
 - A) To yell at people
 - B) To smash idols
 - C) To speak for God to their contemporaries
 - D) To advise the king
13. Which of the following is true about OT prophecy?
 - A) Less than 2 percent of OT prophecy is Messianic
 - B) Less than 5 percent specifically refers to the new covenant age
 - C) Less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come in our time
 - D) All of the above
14. Which of the following is a category of corporate punishment in the law and prophetic literature:
 - A) Denial
 - B) Deportation
 - C) Dancing
 - D) Draftiness
15. Which of the following is *not* a form of prophecy found in the OT prophetic books?
 - A) Lawsuit
 - B) Woe
 - C) Enactment prophecy
 - D) Divination

Answer Key: 1.F 2.T 3.T 4.F 5.T 6.F 7.T 8. form. function 9. covenant 10. Babylonians 11.722 B.C. 12.C 13.D 14.B 15.D

Notes and Reminders

Third Area of Study: The Psalms: Israel's Prayers and Ours

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 11 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Identify and discuss the six parts of a lament psalm.
2. Discuss how the Psalms are helpful for Christian worship.
3. Describe how the Psalms enable the believer to relate to God more honestly.
4. Discuss how imprecatory psalms affect our application and understanding of Jesus' command to love our enemies.
5. Explain the significance of reading a psalm as a whole.
6. Identify the five books within the book of Psalms, what they generally deal with, and why this five-fold structure is important to understanding the book of Psalms as a whole.
7. Identify and explain the forms of the psalms and the way they may have functioned in Israel.
8. Understand the importance of dating in the book of Psalms.
9. Identify and define synonymous parallelism.
10. Describe the difference it makes that psalms are musical poetry.
11. Describe the benefits of the Psalms to Christians and Christian worship.
12. Understand the importance of proper identification of metaphor within the book of Psalms.

Presentations

In these two presentations Dr. Watson discusses the nature of the Psalms and their proper interpretation.

[Presentation 33](#)

[Presentation 34](#)

Key Points

- The Psalms are musical poems.
- The Psalms are words spoken primarily to and about God.
- The Psalms are of various types, each with its own formal structure and function within the life of Israel.
- Psalms are to be read as *wholes*.
- The Psalms can function for us, as they did for Israel, to guide us in worship, relate honestly to God, and reflect and meditate on that which God has done for us.

Key Terms

synonymous parallelism	acrostic	thanksgiving psalm
hymn of praise	salvation-history psalm	psalm of celebration and affirmation;
wisdom psalm	psalm of trust	imprecatory psalm lament

Chapter Eleven Outline

I. The Psalms

A. The Psalms are poetic hymns, and by their very nature are addressed to God or express truths about God.

1. Poetic features of rhyme and repetition look a little different in Hebrew poetry.

2. They are very beneficial to us, but frequently applied poorly.
- B. Some Preliminary Exegetical Observations
 1. As a distinct genre, we need to understand the nature of the Psalms, the various types, as well as their forms and functions.
 2. The Psalms as Poetry
 - a. Hebrew poetry, by its very nature, was addressed to the mind through the heart.
 - b. The Psalms are musical poems, intended to evoke feelings that straight propositional seldom does.
 - c. While they contain and reflect doctrine, they are not intended as repositories of doctrinal exposition.
 - d. The vocabulary of poetry is purposefully metaphorical.

II. The Psalms as Literature

- A. The Psalms are of several different types.
 1. Each psalm is also characterized by its formal structure.
 2. Each type of psalm was intended to have a given function in the life of Israel.
 3. There are various patterns within the psalms (acrostic, stylistic play on words, etc.)
 4. Each psalm is a literary unit.
 - a. To remove a few verses from a psalm is to decontextualize it, which often leads to the wrong conclusions.

III. The Use of the Psalms in Ancient Israel

- A. The Psalms were functional songs for use in worship by Israel.
 1. They make connections between the worshiper and God.
- B. It is very difficult to date psalms, though this is not really a large exegetical problem since they are so applicable to all times.
 1. The book of Psalms was probably not completed until the post-exilic period.

IV. The Types of Psalms

- A. It is possible to group psalms into seven different categories.
 1. There is some overlap, but the categories can help us learn to use psalms well.
- B. Laments
 1. Largest group of psalms.
 2. There are both corporate and individual laments.
 3. Express distress in a deep and honest way.
 4. Includes six elements: address, complaint, trust, deliverance, assurance, and praise.
- C. Thanksgiving Psalms
 1. Expressed joy to the Lord because something had gone well.
 2. There are communal and individual thanksgiving psalms.
 3. Includes several features: introduction, distress, appeal, deliverance, testimony.
- D. Salvation-History Psalms
 1. Concentrate on the history of God's redemption of his people.
 2. These were used for different purposes (celebration, thanksgiving, warning, etc.).
- E. Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation
 1. Include covenant renewal liturgies, psalms that deal with kingship and the Davidic promise, enthronement psalms, and Songs of Zion.
- F. Wisdom Psalms
 1. Specifically praise the merits of wisdom and the wise life.
- G. Songs of Trust
 1. Center on the fact that God can be trusted, even in times of despair.
- H. A Special Note on the Imprecatory Psalms

1. These psalms serve as a model for us on how to be angry, by expressing our anger directly to and through God rather than seeking to return evil to those who have wronged us.
2. These don't contradict Jesus' command to love our enemies, but properly place anger toward others in God's hands.

V. Some Concluding Hermeneutical Observations

- A. The Psalms function as for us as a word from God in the same way it was for Israel—an opportunity to speak to God with inspired words.
- B. Three Basic Benefits of the Psalms
 1. The Psalms can serve as a guide to worship.
 2. The Psalms demonstrate to us how we can relate honestly to God.
 3. The Psalms demonstrate the importance of reflection and meditation on that which God has done for us.
- C. A Caution
 1. The Psalms do not guarantee a pleasant life. God deserves praise for his greatness and goodness in spite of and in the midst of our misery.

Chapter Summary

The Psalms are a great benefit to the believer who looks for help in expressing joy and sorrow, success and failure, hope and regret, and true worship. The Psalms are musical poems, spoken and sung to and about God. The problem that faces us is how to understand words spoken *to* and *about* God also as words *from* God to us. The best way to do this is to pay close attention to the forms and functions of Psalms in the life of Israel. By doing this, we find that the Psalms can function for us, as they did for Israel, to guide us in worship, relate honestly to God, and reflect and meditate on that which God has done for us.

The most important thing to remember is that psalms are musical poems. By their very nature they are addressed to the mind of the believer *through* the heart. As musical poetry, they are intended to evoke the emotions in a way that straight propositional content cannot. It goes beyond mere understanding and involves the whole person in response to God. Thus, they are not intended as repositories for doctrine, but they do connect who God is and what he has done to the life of the believer in a powerful way. The vocabulary of the Psalms is also purposefully metaphorical, so it is important not to take them as literal descriptions while, at the same time, to recognize what the metaphors are describing.

As a musical poem, a psalm also has distinct features, forms, and functions within the life of God's people. The Psalms have several different types: lament, thanksgiving, praise, salvation-history, celebration/affirmation, wisdom, songs of trust, and imprecatory psalms. Each of these is characterized by a formal structure and a particular function in the life of Israel. Most important for the modern reader is the recognition that each psalm has its own integrity as a literary whole. When we pull out a phrase from a psalm, it must always be set in relation to the whole—otherwise we will often jump to the wrong conclusions.

In ancient Israel the Psalms performed a number of functions. Some are oriented to the individual worshipper, some to the community as a whole, some to the king, some for worship aids for common people, and some to be sung by professional singers. From ancient Israel onwards, the Psalms have always functioned in a central way to Israelite and Christian worship. The forms and functions of the Psalms, therefore, make them applicable to all of life lived before God.

The book of Psalms is broken up into five collections, or books: 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; 107–150. Many Psalms are difficult or impossible to date with any assuredness, but that doesn't really

present an exegetical problem for us. They are remarkably applicable to all times just as great hymns are. Nevertheless, understanding their forms and functions in the life of the people of God in Israel offers us a firm guide to how we can use them today in a way that is in keeping with their original use.

Practice Quiz

True/False

1. The primary difficulty with the Psalms is understanding what they are and consistently applying this knowledge.
2. The Psalms were really only of great benefit to ancient Israel.
3. The description of the people of God as “sheep” was meant to point out how trusting we are.
4. The Psalms are repositories for doctrinal exposition.
5. The Psalms are of several different types.
6. It is unimportant to read a psalm as a whole.
7. The dating of the Psalms is not a significant exegetical problem.

Fill in the Blank

8. The most important item to remember in reading psalms is that they are musical _____.
9. The common way in which Hebrew poetry expresses ideas, where the second line reinforces or reiterates the sense of the first line is called _____.
10. Decontextualizing a psalm by taking one or two lines out of context usually results in the formation of wrong _____.
11. An _____ psalm expresses anger against someone or something directly to or through God.

Multiple Choice

12. The largest group of psalms are characterized by what form?
 - A) Thanksgiving
 - B) Imprecation
 - C) Praise
 - D) Lament
13. Which of the following is not a form found in the book of Psalms?
 - A) Lament
 - B) Salvation-history
 - C) Narrative
 - D) Celebration
14. Which of the following are elements of a psalm of lament?
 - A) Address
 - B) Trust
 - C) Complaint
 - D) All of the above
15. Which of the following is not a feature of a thanksgiving psalm?
 - A) Complaint
 - B) Appeal
 - C) Testimony

D) Introduction

Answer Key: 1.T 2.F 3.T 4.F 5.T 6.F 7.T 8. poems 9. synonymous parallelism 10. conclusions
11. imprecatory 12.D 13.C 14D 15A

Fourth Area of Study: Wisdom: Then and Now

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 12 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Describe the point of the book of Job with reference to the dialogue between Job and his friends and between Job and God.
2. Describe the common misunderstandings of the book of Proverbs and why it matters.
3. Discuss the two general possibilities for understanding the body of the book of Ecclesiastes.
4. Define wisdom with reference to the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.
5. Define and explain the use of the word hebel in the book of Ecclesiastes.
6. Explain the meaning of fear of the Lord.
7. Understand the terms wisdom and folly in the book of Proverbs.
8. Explain the different types of wisdom that occur in the Bible.
9. Identify the common ways Song of Songs has been allegorized in Jewish and Christian interpretation.
10. Identify the rules for understanding the book of Proverbs on page 249.
11. Describe the role of Job's friends in the book of Job.
12. Understand the relationship between wisdom and behavior.

Presentations

In these three presentations Dr. Watson discusses the nature of Biblical wisdom literature and its proper interpretation.

[Presentation 36](#)

[Presentation 37](#)

[Presentation 38](#)

Key Points

- Biblical wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life.
- The wise person is highly practical—interested in being able to make the choices that help produce God's desired results in their life.
- The intention of wisdom literature is not to be wise, but to get wise.
- Proverbial wisdom is characterized by pithy, memorable sayings that are brief, particular expressions of a truth.
- Proverbial wisdom does not guarantee success in life for the believer.
- One must be very careful in the book of Job to listen to the right voice.
- Song of Songs is an expression of God's intention for love and marriage.

Key Terms

wisdom	fool	fear of the Lord	proverbial wisdom
speculative wisdom	lyric wisdom	proverb	synecdoche

Chapter 12 Outline

I. About Wisdom Literature

A. The Nature of Wisdom

1. Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life
 2. This is achieved by applying God's truth to your life, so that your choices will be godly.
- B. Abuse of Wisdom Literature
1. There are three common abuses:
 - a. The tendency to miss the overall message leads to misapplication.
 - b. Misunderstanding the terms and categories of Hebrew wisdom, as well as styles and literary modes, leads to misuse.
 - c. Failure to follow the line of argument so that the meaning is missed.
- C. Who Is Wise?
1. Wisdom exists only when a person thinks and acts according to truth when making the many choices that life demands.
 2. The wise person is highly practical, not merely theoretical.
 3. Able to formulate choices that would help produce God's desired results in life.
 4. Other ancient cultures had similar wisdom literature, but biblical wisdom revolves around making godly choices—the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
 - a. It has nothing to do with IQ, cleverness, skill, or even age.
 - b. Responsible, successful living was the goal.
 - c. People don't seek to learn how to be wise as much as they seek to get wise.

II. Teachers of Wisdom

- A. Wise men and women who instructed others in wisdom arose as early as the beginning of the kings of Israel.
1. Served as a sort of substitute parent to the person seeking wisdom.
- B. Wisdom in the Home
1. Wisdom was taught in the home more than any other setting.
 2. Subordinates all wisdom to God's wisdom.
- C. Wisdom among Colleagues
1. Wisdom is found in proverbial, lyrical, and speculative forms.
 2. Speculative wisdom is highly practical and empirical rather than merely theoretical (Job and Ecclesiastes).
- D. Wisdom Expressed through Poetry
1. Poetry was an especially popular technique to aid the student of wisdom in remembering what they were taught.
- E. The Limits of Wisdom
1. Not all wisdom in the ancient world was godly or orthodox.
 2. Wisdom does not cover all of life, but is intensely practical.

III. Wisdom in Proverbs

- A. Contains proverbial wisdom.
1. Concentrates mostly on practical attitudes and behavior in everyday life.
 2. Presents a distinct contrast between choosing a life of wisdom and a life of folly.
 3. Contains very little specifically religious language.
- B. Uses and Abuses of Proverbs
1. A proverb is a brief expression of a truth.
 2. The briefer a statement is, the less likely it is to be totally precise and universally applicable.
 - a. A brief statement is, however, memorable.
- C. A proverb does not state everything about a truth, but rather points toward it.
1. Proverbs tend to use figurative language and express things suggestively rather than in detail.

2. A successful life is according to God's definition—not ours.

IV. Some Hermeneutical Guidelines

- A. Proverbs Are Not Legal Guarantees from God
 1. They set forth the wise way to live and what is most likely to happen, but nowhere does it teach automatic success for the wise and failure for the fool.
- B. Proverbs Must Be Read as a Collection
 1. Reading as a collection provides balance and aids in understanding. The more one reads a proverb in isolation, the less clear its interpretation will be.
- C. Proverbs Are Worded to Be Memorable, Not to Be Theoretically Accurate
 1. No proverb is a complete statement of truth.
- D. Some Proverbs Need to be “Translated” to Be Appreciated
 1. Since the proverbs often express truth with reference to customs and practices that no longer exist, they require us to recognize the point and translate them to our situations.

V. Wisdom in Job

- A. Job comes to us as a carefully structured dialogue between Job and his desperately wrong, well-meaning friends.
- B. This dialogue seeks to establish convincingly in the mind of the reader that what happens in life does not always happen either because God desires it or because it is fair.
- C. Job prevails in his argument with his friends.
- D. God prevails in reference to Job's question of “why?” Just because suffering exists in our lives does not mean that he doesn't know what he is doing or that his rights should be questioned.
 1. Through Job we learn about God's gracious sovereignty over suffering and the way innocent suffering can glorify God.

VI. Wisdom in Ecclesiastes

- A. Ecclesiastes is difficult particularly because we assume that everything in the Bible was written from God's perspective.
 1. It can be interpreted as cynical wisdom in which the speaker most often represents the point of view to be avoided.
 2. It could also be interpreted as an expression of how one should enjoy life in a world in which we all die.
- B. Wisdom in Ecclesiastes
 1. The term *hebel* (vanity, futility) is the key to understanding the book.
 - a. The Teacher seems to think that one should live life, *hebel* as it is, as a gift from God.
 2. The book does not deal with matters of theology or God's faithfulness. Rather, as speculative wisdom, it is not so much trying to provide answers as to remind the reader of the hard questions.

VII. Wisdom in Song of Songs

- A. This is an example of lyric wisdom.
 1. It deals with the “wise choice” of marital and sexual fidelity.
 2. Monogamous, heterosexual marriage is the proper context for sexual relations.
 - a. As ancient love poetry, its proper context was marriage
 3. The book suggests godly choices in poetry rather than describing them in a mundane way.
 - a. The book is not about how we can satisfy ourselves, but how one can respond faithfully to the attractiveness of another and fulfill their needs.

Chapter Summary

Though biblical wisdom literature is often misapplied and misunderstood, it can be a helpful resource for Christian living. At its root, biblical wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life. It is an intensely practical area of knowledge, interested in being able to make the choices that help produce God's desired results in life. Therefore, *being* wise is not really a state of being, but the accumulated result of *getting* wise. Biblical wisdom falls basically into three categories (proverbial, speculative, and lyric), which are found mostly in the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and the Song of Songs (though the Psalms contain some wisdom literature, as does the NT book of James).

There are several abuses of wisdom literature that are fairly common in Christian interpretation. The fact that people often read these books in bits and pieces results in a failure to see that there is an overall message. This typically results in the tendency to misapply a concept that sounds profound, but goes against the intent of the Bible. People also often misunderstand terms and categories of Hebrew wisdom, as well as its styles and literary modes. The specific terms "wisdom," "fool," or "vanity," are vital to proper interpretation, but can't be understood apart from their use throughout the wisdom books. Furthermore, especially in a book like Job, people fail to understand what the book is all about, which results in confusing the voices of Job's friends for the perspective of God (contrary to what the book is about).

Because wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life, there is a significant personal side to this type of literature. The wise person is the one who thinks and acts according to truth when making real life choices. The "fool" is basically someone who lives life according to selfish, indulgent whims and who acknowledges no higher authority than themselves. As the book of Proverbs says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This does not mean to live a life characterized by fear, but to live full of awe and wonder before God.

Therefore, wisdom has nothing to do with IQ, cleverness, or even age, but rather the orientation to God, out of which comes the ability to please God. The goal of wisdom is responsible, successful living before God. Consequently, biblical wisdom also acknowledges its own limits. Being wise does not mean that one will always use that wisdom well, as in the case of Solomon. The only way that wisdom can achieve its proper ends is when it is subordinated to obedience to God.

The book of Proverbs is characterized by pithy, memorable sayings that are brief, particular expressions of a truth. There is no intention to state everything about a particular truth, but the statement orients the reader to the truth. Proverbs use figurative language and express things *suggestively* rather than in detail. As a result of these characteristics, it is important to remember that their goal is to live according to God's definition of success—not ours.

Proverbs are not legal guarantees from God. They describe what is likely to happen, but not what always happens. They also must be read as a collection in order to hear the depth and breadth of the wisdom taught, and the reader must pay attention to how figurative language is used throughout the collection in order to understand properly. Individual proverbs are written to be memorable, not complete statements of truth. Furthermore, many proverbs need to be translated from the context of the ancient world to our world in order to be properly understood.

The books of Job and Ecclesiastes are characteristic of speculative wisdom—that which is not so much trying to provide answers as it is to remind the reader of hard questions that cannot be answered apart from the redemptive acts of God for us. The point of the book of Job is to establish convincingly that what happens in life does not always happen either because God desires it or because it is fair.

With this in mind, Job's friends contribute the point of view that the book is trying to refute—that everything in life is determined as a direct result of whether one pleases God or not. The righteous are blessed, and those who suffer deserve it. Job himself refutes this attitude throughout the book, and

then is declared right by God in the end. Job is vindicated before his friends, but God is vindicated too—his ways are far above ours, and suffering in our lives does not mean that he doesn't know what he is doing or that his rights should be questioned.

The book of Ecclesiastes can be read in two different ways: Either the bulk of it is an expression of cynical wisdom, an outlook on life that should be avoided, or more positively as an expression of how one should enjoy life under God in a world in which we all die. Either way, the "Teacher" of the book of Ecclesiastes seems to be asserting that, even if the only real certainty about this present life is the certainty of death, one should still live life as a gift from God.

The Song of Songs is an example of lyric wisdom. It is a poem that deals explicitly with the wise choice of marital and sexual fidelity. Though there is a great deal of allegorical interpretation in both Jewish and Christian tradition, the book itself is a celebration of the joys of the gift of marriage and love between a husband and wife. It sets forth a vision of love, fidelity, and excitement within marriage that is quite distinct from the sexual values of modern culture. At its root, it is concerned with how one person can respond faithfully to the attractiveness of another and still fulfill the needs *of the other*.

Practice Quiz

True/False

1. Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life.
2. According to Proverbs, the wise person is highly practical.
3. Wisdom literature was common in most ancient cultures.
4. Wisdom is primarily about intelligence.
5. Responsible, successful living is the goal of wisdom.
6. In the ancient world, wisdom was mostly taught in schools.
7. Wisdom literature does not cover all of life.

Fill in the Blank

8. According to Proverbs, a _____ is the one who lives according to selfish, indulgent whims.
9. The _____ is to understand and approach God full of awe and wonder.
10. Biblical wisdom is not about being wise, but about _____ wise.
11. The Song of Songs is an example of _____ wisdom.
12. Which of the following books is not a good example of wisdom literature?
A) James
B) Proverbs
C) Isaiah
D) Job
13. Which of the following is a common misunderstanding of wisdom literature?
A) Failing to understand what the book is all about
B) Inability to identify whether the book of Ecclesiastes is cynical or positive
C) These books are not the Word of God
D) None of the above
14. A brief, particular expression of a truth is called a:
A) Lizard
B) Proverb
C) Poem
D) Psalm
15. Which of the following is *not* true about proverbs in the Bible?
A) They are not legal guarantees from God

- B) They are not always theoretically accurate
- C) They must be read as a collection
- D) They show us how to make a lot of money

Answer Key: 1.T 2.T 3.T 4.F 5.T 6.F 7.T 8.fool 9. fear of the Lord 10. getting 11. lyric 12.C 13.A 14.B
15. D

Notes and Reminders

Fifth Area of Study: Revelation: Images of Judgment and Hope

Reading Assignment

Please read chapter 13 of your textbook.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this Area of Study, students should be able to:

1. Describe the basic outline of Revelation.
2. Explain the main themes of each section.
3. Explain the genre(s) of Revelation and the difference it makes for interpreting the book.
4. Identify and explain the characteristics of apocalyptic literature.
5. Explain how an “already and not yet” approach affects the interpretation of Revelation.
6. Explain how Revelation differs from other examples of Jewish apocalyptic literature.
7. Discuss the role of “analogy of Scripture” in interpreting Revelation.
8. Identify the major exegetical difficulties for the book of Revelation.
9. Discuss the role of the OT in Revelation.
10. Discuss how Revelation fits into its first-century context.
11. Identify the major approaches to the millennium in Revelation.
12. Identify the major approaches to interpreting Revelation.

Presentations

In these two presentations Dr. Watson discusses the nature of the Book of Revelation and its proper interpretation.

[Lecture 39](#)

[Lecture 40](#)

Key Points

- Much of the difficulty in interpreting Revelation stems from the symbolism as well as the fact that the book deals with future events while firmly set in a first-century context.
- Revelation is a unique combination of apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle.
- An apocalypse is a particular *literary* form that no longer exists in our own day, but was fairly common in the first century.
- Revelation is prophecy, written in the time of the advent of the Spirit of God, and was to be proclaimed openly unlike other apocalyptic texts.
- Revelation is also epistle, written to particular people at a particular time in order to respond to particular situations.
- As with all other genres, God’s word to us in Revelation is to be found first of all in his word to them (in the first century).

Key Terms

apocalypse pseudonymity

Chapter Thirteen Outline

I. Revelation

- A. The problems of the book are intrinsic.
- B. The symbols in addition to the matter of future events complicates interpretation.
- C. The book was written to and for a first-century audience.

- D. John sees everything in light of the OT.
- E. It is important to approach this book with humility!

II. The Nature of Revelation

- A. Revelation is a unique blend of apocalypse, prophecy, and letter.
 - 1. The genre of apocalypse no longer exists in our day.
- B. Revelation as Apocalypse
 - 1. The book is primarily a Jewish apocalypse, born in persecution or great oppression.
 - 2. The taproot is the OT prophetic literature, but was not as concerned with God's activity within history as much as how he would end it.
 - 3. Apocalypses are literary (not oral) works from the beginning.
 - 4. The presentation is in the form of visions, dreams, and cryptic language.
 - 5. The images are often forms of fantasy rather than reality.
 - 6. Apocalypses are formally stylized with a strong tendency to divide time and events into neat packages.
 - 7. Most apocalyptic works were pseudonymous, but Revelation is not.

III. Revelation as Prophecy

- A. John had a deep sense of the already/not yet nature of the end.
 - 1. He knew that the coming of Jesus ushered in the last days.
 - 2. The advent of the Spirit was the principle sign that the end time had begun.
 - 3. The book is meant to instruct the church, not seal it up (as with other apocalypses).

IV. Revelation as Epistle

- A. John wrote to specific churches at a specific time.
 - 1. This is significant because it demonstrates the book to be an occasional document.
- B. The Necessity of Exegesis
 - 1. The first task is to seek out what the author and Spirit intended it to mean for the original readers.
 - 2. Be careful of the overuse of the "analogy of scripture"—one should not have to venture outside of the book often for clues to the meaning.
- C. There are added issues because of the apocalyptic/prophetic nature of the book.
 - 1. One must be sensitive to the rich background of ideas, particularly the OT, but also ancient mythology and other apocalypses.
 - a. The imagery is of several kinds.
- D. There are added issues because of the apocalyptic/prophetic nature of the book.
 - 1. John himself sometimes interprets the vision for us, so he must serve as our starting point.
 - 2. The images should be interpreted as wholes, not in an allegorical way that presses every detail.
 - 3. John expects his readers to hear his echoes of the OT as the continuation and consummation of that story.
 - 4. Apocalypses in general, and Revelation in particular, seldom intend their message as a detailed chronological account of the future.

V. The Historical Context

- A. The place to begin exegesis is with a provisional reconstruction of the situation in which it was written.
 - 1. Read (preferably out loud) the book in one sitting.
 - 2. Make brief notes about the author and his audience as you read.
- B. The main themes of the book are clear:
 - 1. The church and the state are on a collision course.

2. Suffering and death lie ahead.
3. The book is very concerned that the readers do not capitulate under persecution.
- C. The book is meant to encourage the hearer that God is in control.
 1. Because Christ holds the keys to history, the church triumphs even in death.
 2. A time is coming when God will pour out his wrath on all those who oppressed his people.
- D. There is a key difference between tribulation and wrath.
 1. Tribulation refers to what the church was experiencing and would experience more and more.
 2. Wrath refers to God's punishment on the wicked.

VI. The Literary Context

- A. How does a particular vision function in the book as a whole?
 1. Chapters 1–3: set the stage, introduce the characters, show Christ is in control, and give a specific word to the seven churches.
 2. Chapters 4–5: Set the stage in Heaven
 3. Chapters 6–7: Begin the unfolding of the drama.
- B. How does a particular vision function in the book as a whole?
 1. Chapters 8–11: Reveal the content of God's temporal judgment on Rome.
 2. Chapter 12: The theological key to the book.
 3. Chapters 13–14: Satan's vengeance from chapter 12 takes the form of Roman demands for religious allegiance.
 4. Chapters 15–16: The empire and emperors are doomed.
 5. Chapters 17–22: The tale of two cities—the city of earth and the city of God.

VII. The Hermeneutical Questions

- A. What was God's word to them?
 1. Revelation is God's word of comfort and encouragement to Christians who suffer. God is in control. Jesus has overcome the dragon.
 2. Most of our difficulties lie in the fact that the temporal word of God is so often tied to the final eschatological reality.
- B. A few suggestions:
 1. Pictures of the future are pictures, not detailed, chronological accounts.
 2. Some of the pictures are meant to express the certainty of God's judgment, not soon-ness.
 3. The pictures where the temporal is tied to the eschatological should not be viewed as simultaneous occurrence in time and space.
 4. We are given no keys to pin down any second, yet to be fulfilled dimensions to the pictures.
 5. The pictures that were intended to be totally eschatological are still to be taken as such.

Chapter Summary

The interpretive problems with Revelation are basically intrinsic: it is the Word of God for us and yet the book is so full of symbolism that it is difficult to make heads or tails of it. Much of the difficulty in interpreting Revelation stems from the symbolism as well as the fact that the book deals with future events while firmly set in a first-century context. To further complicate matters, John seems to understand the entirety of the vision in direct relation to the OT. He alludes to or echoes the OT over 250 times in the course of the book! With these things in mind, it is necessary from the beginning to approach the book with a degree of humility.

Revelation is a unique combination of apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle. An apocalypse is a

particular type of *literary* form in which a person receives highly symbolic visions through the mediation of an angelic interpreter. These are typically pseudonymous, written in the name of some well-known figure from the past (Elijah, Moses, Enoch, etc.), and the writer was typically told to seal up and keep the vision hidden. Like these other works, Revelation draws heavily from OT prophecies of Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and parts of Isaiah.

Unlike the OT prophets, John's work was written from the beginning and intended to be read (and read aloud). Revelation is also quite similar to other apocalypses in that it is characterized primarily by its symbolic nature, these symbols tend toward the realm of fantasy rather than nature, and the book is highly stylized—time and events are neatly packaged and there is a great fondness for numbers. Revelation differs from other apocalypses in two notable respects: it is not pseudonymous and John is told to declare the visions openly.

Revelation is also a book of prophecy. Like the OT prophets, John was given and delivered his message “in the Spirit” and he was told to declare this message openly to the people of God. The book is not to be sealed for the future, but was intended to act as a comfort and guide to the first century church. However, the book of Revelation is also epistle, written to particular people at a particular time in order to respond to particular situations. This makes it all that much more important that we do the work of understanding the book in its historical context. It is, like other epistles, an *occasional* work. It was written to a church under threat, from within and outside—a church that needed to stand strong in the face of persecution and receive comfort from knowing that God was in control.

It is especially important in the book of Revelation to exegete well. The primary meaning of Revelation is what John intended, which also must have been something his original audience could understand. The keys to interpreting Revelation are often in the book itself—it often interprets its own symbols and visions (and it does so more often than not). Because the book makes such heavy use of the OT, other apocalypses, and even ancient mythology, it is important to recognize these while also paying close attention to the way John uses and reinterprets them.

It is especially evident that John expects his readers to pick up on his OT references and understand his vision as the continuation and consummation of the OT story. While it is difficult to understand some of the symbols, it is also important to note that they are of varying kinds. Some refer to individuals, some to empires, some to the church, and some to the fallen human condition that results in the church's suffering more generally.

John's interpretation of the symbols, where he does so, must serve as the starting point for understanding the rest of the symbols in the vision. It is also important to seek understanding of the visions as wholes rather than allegorically pressing every detail. Furthermore, it is absolutely vital to understand that apocalypses seldom intend to give a detailed *chronological* account of the future.

When we interpret Revelation it is helpful to keep the following hermeneutical suggestions in mind:

- First, we need to recognize that pictures and symbols express reality, but must not themselves be confused with reality. They are all too often too ambiguous to expect a straightforward fulfillment in time and space. There is fulfillment to be sure, but it is not so straightforward.
- Second, the symbols that describe the absolute certainty of God's judgment must not be confused as saying that this judgment is coming soon—at least from our relative place in history. No one knows the hour or day but the Father in Heaven.
- Third, we must be alert to “not yet” aspects of eschatological texts. Even in Revelation, fulfillment does not always necessarily mean consummation.
- Fourth, we must recognize that instances of second, yet to be fulfilled dimensions of symbols (e.g. the anti-Christ) do not come to us with the keys to pin them down in time and space. We must not be dogmatic about historical identifications in these cases.

- Finally, the pictures that were supposed to be taken as totally eschatological (Rev. 11:15–19, 19:1–22:21) are still to be taken as such. God will bring all things to consummation. This remains a significant aspect of the Christian hope.

Practice Quiz

True/False

1. There is one, very obvious way to interpret Revelation.
2. Revelation is not pseudonymous.
3. Revelation, like other apocalypses, was to be sealed up for the future.
4. The primary meaning of Revelation is what John intended it to mean.
5. One must interpret the visions as wholes, not in an allegorical manner.
6. Revelation is meant to be read aloud.
7. Revelation 12–22 offers details of the judgment and triumph generally outlined in 8–11.

Fill in the Blank

8. _____ prophecy is the taproot of Jewish apocalyptic literature.
9. Crucial to John's understanding is the advent of the _____.
10. The fact that Revelation is written in the form of a _____ is significant because it offers us an occasion for the book.
11. Apocalypses seldom give detailed, _____ accounts of the future.

Multiple Choice

12. Which of the following is not a source of interpretive difficulty in Revelation?
A) Symbols
B) The book deals with future events
C) The book is set in a recognizable first-century context
D) None of the above
13. Which of the following are genres found in Revelation?
A) Apocalypse
B) Prophecy
C) Epistle
D) All of the above
14. Which of the following is true about apocalyptic literature?
A) It is formally stylized
B) It is a common genre in twentieth-century literature
C) It only exists in the Bible
D) None of the above
15. Which of the following is a symbol found in Revelation?
A) Donkey
B) Monkey
C) Trees
D) Pizza

Answer Key: 1.F 2.T 3.F 4.T 5.T 6.T 7.T 8. Old Testament 9. Spirit 10. letter 11. chronological 12.D 13.D 14.A 15.C