

How To Study The Bible

Lesson 1 - Interpretation

Class Aims:

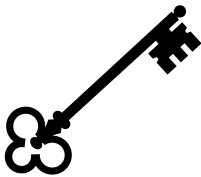
- To become familiar with the terms exegesis and hermeneutics.
- To become familiar with asking contextual questions.

Do Now:

What do you think are the most common reasons why people don't read the Bible?

- _____
- _____

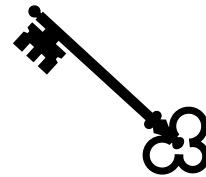
Make these two words your best friends this course! They'll be faithful companions on your journey to understanding the Bible because with them, you'll unlock treasures.



Exegesis

To carefully study the Bible to determine its intended meaning to the original audience.

To find out what it meant



Hermeneutics

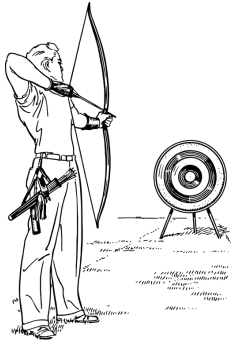
The art and science of interpreting the Bible and taking the intended message for the original audience and translating it to today's audience.

To find out what it means

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

2 Timothy 3:16

The Goal of Interpretation:

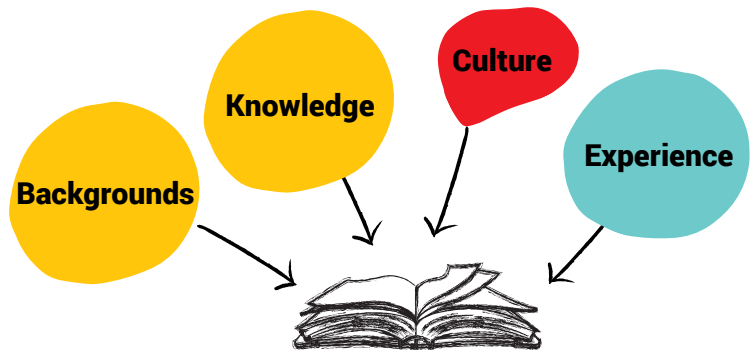


To understand the basic
or plain meaning of the text.

*"What exactly is it
saying and what does
that mean?"*

Why Interpretation is needed:

*Everyone is
an interpreter!*



Because of our backgrounds, knowledge, experiences, it is easy for our interpretations to become skewed from what God originally intended.

Exercise 1: In the story of the prodigal son, what contributed to the son's condition?

The Parable of the Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-16

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

God gave his word through history. Because God chose to speak to us in this way every book of the Bible has historical particularity. This means that every document is conditioned by the language, time, and culture in which it was originally written, as well as the oral history it had before it was written down. There's a distance from the original hearers and us today.



Remember: The Bible was written for us, not to us!

Genre's matter. One of the most important aspects of the Bible is the variety of ways in which God chose to speak to us: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, laws, poetry, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons and apocalypses. To interpret the Bible correctly we must be able to not only understand the exegetical aspects of the content but also the genres in which the different books were written.



Exegesis:

Thinking Contextually:

Exercise 2: Imagine a friend tells you that they're going on a 2 week vacation to another country. What are some questions you'd probably ask your friend?

Exercise 3: Imagine you're at work and you receive this email from a co-worker:

Hey! I'm so terribly sorry. The train in front of mine derailed and its causing massive delays. I'm probably going to be 30 minutes late to our board meeting. Can you head into the conference room 15 minutes before the meeting begins and make sure the presentation is loaded on the big screen, the notes for the meeting are printed and placed on each desk and begin the meeting by going over our performance this last quarter?

Exercise 4: What do you think the underlined word means?

No one seemed to be bothered by it and everyone's already forgotten that it happened. I wish you'd stop making a kerfuffle about it.

Exercise 5: You're getting ready to go away with some friends. Read the following:

Jane: Hey! The AirBnB we're staying in two weeks at has two entrances; a front door and a back door. The code for the front door is: 1763. The code for the back is: 9852

You: Awesome! Sounds good, looking forward to the trip!

2 weeks later

Jane: Anna is heading to the airbnb now and she'll be parking in the back. Can you send her the code for the door?

Which code should you send Anna? _____

Learning to ask Contextual Questions:

<p>What is the Historical Context? Think: Background</p>	<p>The historical context will differ from book to book, and has to do with several matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> The time and culture of the author and audience.<input type="checkbox"/> The geographical, topographical, and political factors that are relevant to the author's setting<input type="checkbox"/> The historical occasion of the book, letter, psalm, prophetic oracle, or other genre	<p>Remember: Exercise 2</p>
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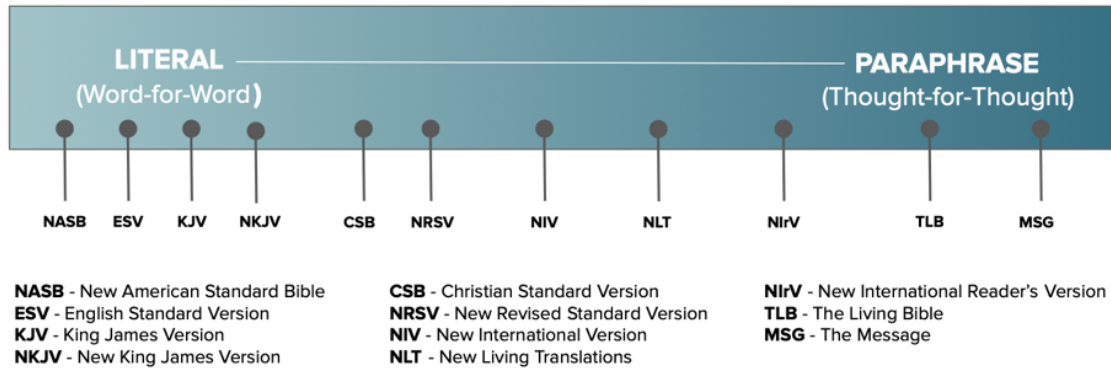
<p>What is the Literary Context of the Passage?</p> <p>Think: What's being said?</p>	<p>Literary context means</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> First that words only have meaning in sentences, and <input type="checkbox"/> Second that biblical sentences for the most part have full and clear meaning only in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences. <p>The most important contextual question you will ever ask (and it must be asked over and over of every sentence and every paragraph) is: <u>What's the point?</u></p> <p>We must try to trace the author's train of thought. What is the author saying, and why does he say it right here? Having made that point, what is he saying next, and why? This question will vary from genre to genre, but it is always the crucial question.</p> <p>Remember: The goal of exegesis is to find out what the original author intended.</p>	<p>Remember: Exercise 3</p>
<p>What are the Meanings of the Words?</p>	<p>The meaning of words, both verbal and grammatical. The difficulty has to do with the transferring of words and ideas from one language to another.</p> <p>To understand what various theories, underlie our modern translations, you will need to become acquainted with the following technical terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Original language: the language that one is translating from; in our case, Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. <input type="checkbox"/> Receptor language: the language that one is translating into; in our case, English. <input type="checkbox"/> Historical distance: has to do with the differences that exist between the original language and the receptor language, both in matters of words, grammar, and idioms as well as in matters of culture and history. 	<p>Remember: Exercise 4</p>
<p>Are there other Passages in the Bible that Help me to Understand the Passage I am Studying?</p>	<p>Scripture interpreting scripture has been a guiding principle of Bible interpretations for centuries. The idea is that the meaning of an unclear passage can be made clear by another passage where the meaning is more straightforward.</p>	<p>Remember exercise 5:</p>

Where can I find the answers to these questions:

A solid translation of the Bible into your native language is the most important resource you can own.

Every Bible is the result of a translation process involving translation and interpretation. The word choices and phrasing of your Bible translation will affect your understanding of the text.

Types of Bibles and Their Translations:



Below are some suggested resources that can be useful in your studies.

What is the Historical Context?	Bible Atlas, History Books, Study Bibles, Bible Dictionaries, some good commentaries.
What is the Literary Context?	Reading the surrounding chapter(s) and the entire book. Outlines from Study Bibles can also help.
What do the Words Mean?	A contemporary version of the Bible in modern English, Bible Dictionaries, and learning the original languages.
What other Passages Might Help?	Topical resources like the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge and Nave's Topical Reference

Hermeneutics:

Two Basic rules for applying the text to our lives.

RULE #1

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

Therefore, exegesis must always come first. This rule establishes some absolute parameters with regard to meaning.

This rule, of course, does not always help one find out what a given passage means, but it does help to set limits as to what it cannot mean.

RULE #2

Whenever we share comparable particulars (i.e., similar "specific life situations) with the original audience, God's word to us is the same as his word to them.

It is this rule that causes most of the theological texts and the community directed ethical imperatives in the Epistles to give modern-day Christians a sense of immediacy with the first century.

Example:

It is still true that "all have sinned" (Rom 3:23)

And that "by grace we have been saved, through faith" (Eph 2:8).

"And clothing ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col 3:12) is still God's word to those who are believers.

How To Study The Bible

Lesson 2 - Epistles (Exegesis)

Class Aim:

- How to exegete an epistle.

Do Now:

When you write a letter, what sort of things do you tend to include?

A new word for your word bank:

Epistle

The Nature of the Epistles:

The Epistles are all of the New Testament except the Four Gospels, Acts, and Revelation. All of the Epistles are referred to as occasional documents, arising out of and intended for a specific occasion. They are also all from the first century. Almost all of the New Testaments letters were occasioned from the reader's side. Usually the occasion was some kind of behavior that needed correcting, or a doctrinal error that needed setting right, or a misunderstanding that needed further light.

Much of the problems in interpreting the Epistles exist in the fact that they are occasional. We have the answers, but we do not always know what the questions or problems are. It is similar to listening to one end of a telephone conversation. The occasional nature of the Epistles also means that they are not first of all theological treatise. There is theology implied but it is task theology.

General Epistle Form:

One of the interesting things about the epistles is that they are similar to letters today. Just like we start our letters with a greeting and end with a farewell, they did too. Let's look at the general form of epistles and then we will look at some examples from scripture.

1. Name of the writer
2. Name of the recipient (the intended audience)
3. Greeting – their way of saying hello
4. Prayer, wish or thanksgiving – a prayer for their blessing or a thanksgiving to God
5. Body of the epistle – this is the message of the epistle
6. Final greeting and farewell

Let's Try It Out: Turn to 1 Peter and fill out the following:

Book	1 Peter
Writer	
Recipient	
Greeting	
Prayer/Wish/Thanksgiving	
Body	vv 1:6 - 5:11
Final Greeting/Farewell	

Exegesis:

The Historical Context: (Background)

1. The first thing to do in reading the Epistles is to try and form an informed reconstruction of the situation the author is speaking to. To do this you can consult a bible dictionary or the introduction of a commentary.
2. The second step, especially for study purposes is to read the letter in one sitting. This will help you grasp the big picture of the letter, examining every word will come later. Some things to jot down as you read might be:
 - What do you notice about the recipients themselves? e.g., whether Jews or Greek, wealthy or slave, problems, attitudes, etc.
 - The author's attitude/tone
 - Any specific things mentioned as to the specific occasion of the letter
 - The letter's natural, logical divisions. (Look for logical connectors: because, therefore, if, and etc.)

The Literary Context: (What's being said)

Here you want to begin to trace the argument as an answer to the occasion that required the letter. Define what the point of the letter is.

- In a compact way state the content of each paragraph.
- In another sentence or two try to explain why the author says what they say when they say it. How does this content contribute to the argument?

A good check to make sure that you have performed good exegesis is

- To make sure that the exegesis is self-contained; that is, you do not have to go outside the text to understand the point. It is good to get additional information to help set the historical context but make sure that the conclusions you arrive at do not step out side the meaning of the letter.
- Make sure that there is nothing in the text that does not fit into the argument.

*Some people think the entire Bible is like the Book of Proverbs: a bunch of random verses without any logical order. That isn't the case. Proverbs is the only book like that and even Proverbs has some rhyme and reason to it.

- When you are finished doing exegesis, there is clarity of the occasion that required the letter.

There will be times when it will be impossible to understand exactly the situation that the letter was written for, but in these cases the point of the letter can still be retrieved. Focus on what the letter means and you will have a good understanding of what the point is. Consulting a good commentary after you have done this work can be beneficial on checking your observations as well as providing insight into areas that you might have missed.

The main goal is to make sense of everything in the passage!

What words can you make out of these letters? I T E E S L P

Now try and make one word using all the letters: I T E E S L P

You might be able to make a word with a few of the letters (i.e. slip, sit, or tie), but your answer is not completely correct unless you use all of the letters provided. In the same way, a strong interpretation of Scripture will not discard portions of a text that are confusing, but will bring them together in a consistent and coherent manner.

Let's Try It Out!

Turn to 2 John

<p>What do you notice about the audience? (Who the letter is written to?)</p>	
<p>What is the author's attitude/tone?</p>	

<p>What do you notice about why the letter is being written?</p>	
<p>What are the logical divisions in the body of the letter?</p>	
<p>Study each paragraph or logical section and jot down a brief summary of what each one is trying to say.</p>	
<p>Map out how each part of the book fits into a flow of ideas. Always look for logical connectors between logical divisions.</p>	

How To Study The Bible

Lesson 3 - Epistles (Hermeneutics)

Class Aim:

- How to take the intended message of an epistle and apply it today.

Do Now:

Turn to Titus 2: 7-8 & Titus 3:13. Do both of these texts apply to you? If so, how & why?

A Brief Review:

Epistle

Hermeneutics:

Remember the Two Basic Rules:

RULE #1

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Therefore, exegesis must always come first. This rule establishes some absolute parameters with regard to meaning.

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RULE #2

Whenever we share comparable particulars (i.e., similar "specific life situations) with the original audience, God's word to us is the same as his word to them.

It is this rule that causes most of the theological texts and the community directed ethical imperatives in the Epistles to give modern-day Christians a sense of immediacy with the first century.

The Problem of Extending Passages beyond their Original Intention:

When there are comparable situations and comparable particulars, God's Word to us must be limited to its original intent.

One reason there are so many different interpretations of Scripture is that some passages are extended beyond their original meaning by using them outside of their context. How do we know when an interpretation has gone too far?

Colossians 3:15 is a good example of this abuse.

When read alone (outside of its context), some might say that this verse states that God will give us peace about a difficult situation when we make the right decision. Without debating whether God's peace is an indication of His will, determine whether it is appropriate to use Colossians 3:15 to prove this point. Why or why not?

By reading this passage in context, we can see that it is speaking about church unity and the importance of having peace in the church body. To use it as a proof text for praying until you have a special peace from God about a decision is to extend it beyond its original intention.

When we run into a passage that addresses an issue that wouldn't happen today or probably wouldn't happen today keep in mind these two things:

First, you must do exegesis paying close attention to hear what God's Word was to the original audience. Find that a clear principle has been articulated, which will usually transcend the historical particularity to which it was being applied.

Second, the "principle" does not now become timeless, to be applied at random or whim to any and every situation. It should truly only be applied to genuinely comparable situations.

Afterwards, use the following steps:

- Understand all the specifics about the 1st Century issue.
- Understand the underlying principle.
- Use your understanding of the specifics and the underlying principle to apply the principle to a comparable situation today.

Let's Practice: Applying a Text with a First-Century Issue that Would Not Occur Today

Turn to Philemon 1:8-20

In this passage, Paul is writing to Philemon, a brother-in-Christ, who owned a slave named Onesimus that escaped and ran away to Rome. While in Rome, he happened to meet Paul, who was imprisoned in Rome. Onesimus heard the gospel and was saved. Paul then encouraged Onesimus to return to Philemon and bring this letter along with him.

<p>What are some of the specifics we need to understand about this situation?</p>	<p>Slavery in Roman time was usually much different than the type of slavery we are familiar with. Slaves of that time period were often in that position because of their debt, not because they were taken against their own will. Slaves were generally not considered to be lesser people, although they often made up a separate social class. Many slaves were educated and served as teachers, doctors, etc.</p> <p>By running away from Philemon, Onesimus wasn't escaping from an oppressive situation; he was running away from his responsibility. Onesimus had not been wronged; Philemon was the one who was wronged.</p>
<p>What are some of the underlying principles in this passage?</p>	<p>Getting saved doesn't relieve you of your responsibilities or the consequences that may have incurred as a result of sin.</p> <p>We shouldn't force people into being charitable. True charity should come from the heart and be a willing gesture.</p> <p>God's providence is so great that He turn an evil situation into something good (v. 15)</p> <p>Being brothers and sisters in Christ is a relationship that takes precedence over any other relationship we might have between each other. Even though we might be a mother, father, son, daughter, worker, or boss in the flesh, if we are also fellow Christians, we should make sure that all we do is in love. We still have to fulfill those other relationships, but with a new attitude.</p>

<p>What would be some comparable situations today that you can apply the principles of this passage?</p>	
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Make a special note of items where the New Testament is uniform and consistent and where it reflects differences:

<p>Take a look at these verses to see where the New Testament reflects differences in regards to money.</p>		
<p>Luke 12:33</p>	<p>Luke 18:22</p>	<p>1 Timothy 6:17-19</p>
<p>How do these passages differ?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>		
<p>The reason for the differences:</p>		
<p>Luke 12:33 – These disciples were being prepared for missionary work in the first century.</p>	<p>Luke 18:22 – Jesus was showing this young man where his heart was at</p>	<p>1 Timothy 6:17-19 – This is an absolute command for us under normal circumstances.</p>

When it comes to when something is a cultural practice or a universal principle:

Consider how many acceptable cultural options were available at the time the text was written:		
If there was only one option and the Bible stuck with it, the option may be just cultural.	Example: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16	Wearing head coverings was the only cultural option for moral women. To be found without a head covering was to be considered immoral.
If there were several options available and the Bible picked one specifically, it is more likely to be a universal principle.	Example: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10	While homosexuality was likely affirmed by some and discouraged by others, it was declared to be a sin by God
If the Bible resisted the existing cultural options and created a new way of doing things it is likely a universal principle.	Example: Galatians 3:28	The spiritual equality of all people was NOT taught in these cultures. By teaching this principle, the Bible was establishing a universal rule to be observed at all times.

Some Additional Important Items:

Remember that the Epistles are occasional in nature. They are focused on delivering theology through practical situations and sometimes do not speak directly to the questions that we have today. Remember that our immediate aim is for greater precision and consistency; our greater aim is calling us all to greater obedience to what we do hear and understand.

When it comes to matters of indifference:

Here are a series of guidelines that might help in identifying matters of indifference.

1. What the Epistles specifically indicates as matters of indifference may be things such as:

Food, drink, observance of specific days, etc.

2. The matters are not inherently moral, but are cultural-even if its stems from religious culture.

Matters that tend to differ from culture to culture, therefore, even among genuine believers may usually be considered matters of indifference.

Something very important to remember when dealing with matters of indifference is that a person that does not feel bound by something should not flaunt his or her freedom, just as a person who feels convicted should not condemn someone else.

How To Study The Bible

Lessons 4 & 5 - Narratives

Class Aim:

- To become familiar with the basic structure of a biblical narrative.
- How to exegete an biblical narrative.
- How to take the message of biblical narratives and apply them today.

Do Now:

Think about a story you really enjoy. Write down a couple of things that come to mind about that story:

A new word for your word bank:

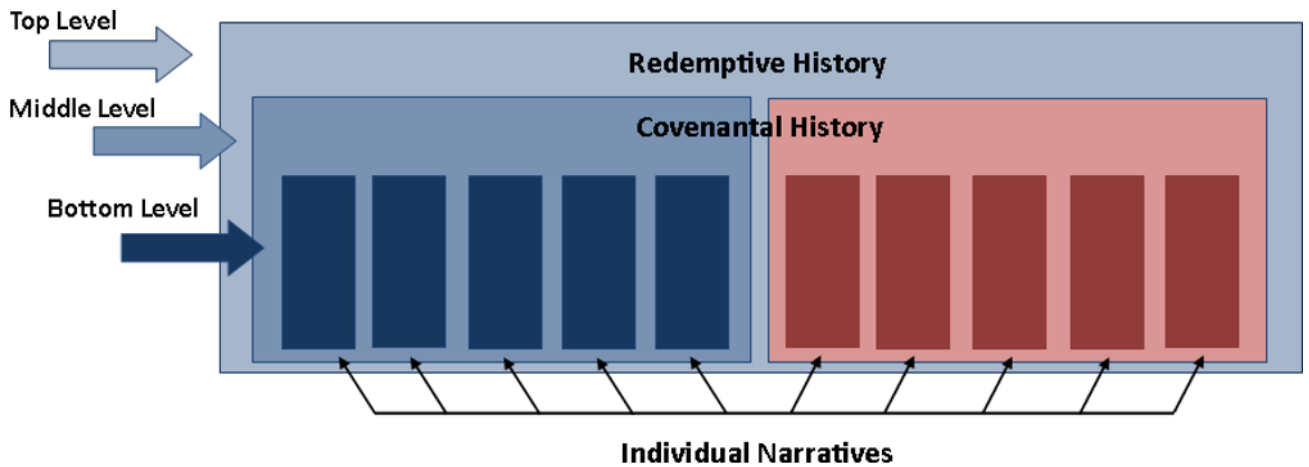
Biblical Narrative:

The Nature of Narratives:

Over 40 percent of the Old Testament is narratives and since the Old Testament constitutes three-quarters of the bible it is no surprise that the single most common type of literature in the entire bible is narrative.

Narratives are basically stories. Stories that we refer to as God's story—a story that is ultimately true, crucially important, and often complex. Their purpose is to show God at work in his creation and among his people. The narratives glorify him, and give us a picture of his providence and protection. They also provide illustrations of many other lessons important to our lives.

Three Levels of Narratives:



Top	Middle	Bottom
<p>The whole universal plan of God worked out through his creation. Key aspects to this level are the initial creation itself; the fall of humanity; the power and ubiquity of sin; the need for redemption; and Christ's incarnation and sacrifice. The top level is often referred to as the "story of redemption" or the "redemptive history."</p>	<p>The middle level centers on Israel: the call of Abraham; the establishment of an Abrahamic lineage through the patriarchs; the enslaving of Israel in Egypt; God's deliverance from bondage and the conquest of the promised land of Canaan; Israel's frequent sins and increasing disloyalty; God's patient protection and pleading with them; the ultimate destruction of northern Israel and then of Judah; and the restoration of the holy people after the Exile.</p>	<p>Here are found all the hundreds of individual narratives that make up the other two levels. Every individual Old Testament narrative is at least part of the greater narrative of Israel's history in the world, which in turn is part of the ultimate narrative of God's creation and his redemption of it. This ultimate narrative goes beyond the Old Testament and into the New.</p>

You will not fully do justice to any individual narrative without recognizing its part within the other two. However there is nothing wrong with studying an individual narrative all by itself.

But for the fullest sense you must finally see that individual narrative within its larger contexts.

Structure of Narratives

Each narrative typically contains characters, a plot, and plot resolution. Among the characters, there is usually a protagonist (the main character), the antagonist (the person bringing the conflict

or tension), and the agonists (other characters involved in the story). Identify the protagonist, antagonist, and agonists in the following scenarios:

<p style="text-align: center;">Top</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Redemptive)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Middle</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Old Covenant)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Bottom</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(David & Goliath)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Protagonist – God</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Antagonist – Satan, Sin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Agonists – The saved, the lost, angels, demons.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Protagonist – God, Abraham, Moses, Israel</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Antagonist – Satan, Sin, Opposing tribes and nations.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Agonists – Many nations and individuals read about during the events that take place.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Protagonist - David</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Antagonist – Goliath</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Agonists – Saul, Israel's army, Philistine army</p>

The primary purpose of a narrative is to record what happened. There may be secondary uses of the text, but we should not be so quick to jump to them that we fail to grasp the primary point.

The Narrator

The Narrator is usually unseen in the text; you may or may not know who it is. That is part of the point though. They are presenting God's perspective on the text, not necessarily their own. They don't tell you everything they know or everything you would like to know, only what you need to know so that you can be drawn in and see the point yourself.

Let's try this out by looking at Jotham. Turn to 2 Kings 15: 32–38.

What are the important things for us to learn about Jotham's reign?

Do we learn anything about the narrator in this passage? (Yes/No)

The Scene(s)

Most of the time, Hebrew narratives go from scene to scene, rather than following a specific character. Together, each scene makes up a single narrative.

The Characters

Although narratives may be organized around scenes, the characters are central to the point. We are not often given information about how they look (unless it is important for us to know), but rather about their occupation, character, and family lineage (usually what tribe they are from). We often get to know our characters by how they compare or contrast to other characters and by what they say or do.

Dialogue (Conversations)

It is important to pay attention to the dialogue between characters because the message of the narrative is often contained in their speech. There are a few patterns throughout biblical narratives that can especially help us grasp the point:

- Pay attention to the first point of dialogue in a story
- Look for contrasting dialogue to see a point made
- Watch for repetition or summaries

Plot

The plot of the story is usually revealed when conflict arises. Some plots are relatively short and simple (like Ehud the Judge of Israel in Judges 3:15-30) while others can have more complexity and span multiple chapters and entire books (like the book of Ruth or Esther). For the most part, Hebrew narratives move along quickly. When they slow down, it is usually because they are trying to draw your attention to something.

Structural Forms

Hebrew narratives can also contain unique structural forms, similar to poetry, intended to help the audience understand and remember the main points. A lot of this probably has to do with the fact that the original audience of the narratives were hearers and not readers. The structural patterns are adapted to engage a listener to the text. The key structures seem to largely revolve around repetition and include:

- Repeating key words.
- Resuming the narrative after a detour by repeating a previously mentioned point.
- The use of stereotypical patterns (like the continual ups and downs of the Book of Judges)
- Chiasm, a form of parallelism in which a narrative (be it very short or long) begins and ends in the same way.
- Foreshadowing, where something previously mentioned is brought up again later in more depth.

The Hero of Every Story

In EVERY biblical narrative, God is the ultimate hero. While He may intervene personally (as at Mount Sinai) or through another character (like David), He wants the reader to know that He is the One

resolving conflict and bringing good from evil. We need to make sure we really see this point in every narrative or we have missed the point.

Example: Joseph in Genesis 50:20

What Narratives Are and Are Not:



<p>They are first and foremost stories about what God did to and through people. The Bible is composed of divine narratives, God is the hero of the story.</p>	<p>The individual characters may be momentary heroes but they're not the main point of the narrative, they're meant to move the redemptive plot line along.</p>
<p>There are parts of Old Testament narratives that may be difficult to understand or have secondary meanings and implications.</p>	<p>Old Testament narratives are not allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings. Narratives do not answer all our questions about a given issue. They are limited in their focus, and give us only one part of the overall picture of what God is doing in history.</p>
<p>They show us God's nature and revelation in special ways that other parts of the Bible cannot. Narratives often show, not tell.</p>	<p>They do not always teach directly.</p>
<p>Each individual narrative plays a crucial role and when that role is properly understood, we can understand how it fits and what we are to learn from it.</p>	<p>Each individual narrative or episode within a narrative does not necessarily have a moral all its own. Narratives cannot be interpreted atomistically, as if every statement, every event, every description could, independently of the others, have a special message for the reader.</p>

10 Principles for Interpreting Narratives:

1. An Old Testament narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine.
2. An Old Testament narrative usually illustrates a doctrine or doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere.
3. Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. Therefore, not every narrative has an individual identifiable moral of the story.
4. What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. In fact it is usually the opposite.
5. Most of the characters in the Old Testament are far from perfect and their actions are too.
6. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We should be able to judge this from what God has taught us elsewhere categorically in the Scriptures.
7. All narratives are incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given. What appears is what inspired the author to think important to let us know.
8. Narratives are not written to answer all of our theological questions. They have particular, specific issues in which they deal with, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere and in other ways.

9. Narratives may teach explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something without actually saying it).

10. In the final analysis, God is always the hero of all biblical narratives, and all narratives ultimately find their full purpose and meaning in Jesus.

Some Final Cautions:

Why is it that people often find things in narratives that isn't really there? First, it is because they are desperate for information that will help them, that will be of personal value that will apply to their own situation. Second, they are impatient; they want their answers now, from this book, from this chapter. Third, they wrongly expect that everything in the Bible directly is instruction for their own individual lives. Here is a list of eight of the most common errors people make when interpreting the bible. These all apply to narratives but are not limited to them.

1. Allegorizing. Trying to think of meanings beyond the clear intended message.

2. Decontextualizing. Ignoring the full historical and literary contexts, and often the individual narrative, people concentrate on small units only and thus miss interpretational clues.

3. Selectivity. Involves picking and choosing specific words and phrases to concentrate on, ignoring the others, and ignoring the overall sweep of the passage being studied.

4. False Combination. This approach combines elements from here and there in a passage and makes a point out of their combination, even though the elements themselves are not directly connected in the passage itself.

5. Redefinition. When the plain meaning leaves people cold, they often redefine it to mean something else.

6. Extracanonical authority. Using external keys to Scripture that claim to unlock the mysteries of truths not otherwise known from Scripture itself.

7. Moralizing. This assumes that a moral can be drawn from every passage. The fallacy of this approach is that it ignores the fact that the narratives were written to show the progress of God's history of redemption, not to illustrate principles.

8. Personalizing. This assumes that every passage applies to you specifically in a way that it may not to others. Do not forget that all parts of the bible are for everyone and ultimately for the Glory of God in displaying Him as the Hero.

No Bible narrative was written specifically about you. You can never assume that God expects you to do exactly the same thing that the Bible characters did, or to have the same things happen to you that happened to them. Narratives are precious to us because they so vividly demonstrate God's involvement in the world and illustrate his principles and calling. But remember they do not systematically include personal ethics.

**Take a moment to try and recognize these mistakes. Below are some examples of common errors.
Try to match the error with its description above.**

Type of Mistake	Description
	"In Genesis 14:13-16 we learn from Abraham that sometimes you need to take the law into your own hands and bring justice to those who mess with your family."
	"Adam and Eve were not necessarily real people, but are intended to represent humans evolving to a point where they became conscious of good and evil and God became involved in history."
	"We learn from Gideon that sometimes it is OK to test God by putting out a fleece."
	"Because Judges 1:8 says that the Israelites captured the City of Jerusalem, the narrative of 2 Samuel 5:6-7 describing David's capture of the Jerusalem must mean that they lost the city at some point and recaptured it."
	"The men of Bible times were much more effeminate because they wore robes instead of pants."
	"I read that Abraham's servant prayed that God would give him a sign of which woman He chose as a wife for Isaac by having her draw water for his camels (Genesis 24). Therefore I am going to pray that the Lord show me who I should marry by having them perform some task that I think of."
	"2 Chronicles 7:14-15 tells us that if God's people humble themselves and pray and seek His face that He will forgive their sin and heal their land. If Christians do this, God will heal America."
	"1 Samuel 28:8-14 teaches us that mediums can communicate with the dead and allow us to speak with those who have already died."

Just because a narrative's teaching is not clearly stated, it doesn't mean that it is a secret. Make sure you pay close attention to what a narrative tells you (not what it doesn't) and prayerfully discern the implied message.

How To Study The Bible

Lessons 6 & 7 - Acts

Class Aim:

- To become familiar the things that should be primary concerns when it comes to the book of Acts.

Acts: An Overview

The exegesis of Acts includes historical questions like, what happened? But also the theological ones such as, why did Luke select and shape the text in this way? When reading Acts you must think paragraphs, like in the Epistles, but also move beyond that to think whole narratives and sections of the book.

You will notice as you read Acts that at every key juncture, in every key person, the Holy Spirit plays the absolutely leading role.

The following observations should help in understanding what Luke was and wasn't concerned with accomplishing with this Scripture.

1. The key to understanding Acts is Luke's interest in movement, orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, of the Gospel from its Jerusalem-based, Judaism-oriented beginnings to its becoming a worldwide, Gentile-predominant phenomenon. Any statement of purpose that does not include the Gentile mission and the Holy Spirit's role in that mission will surely have missed the point of this book.
2. The following are things that Luke does not tell us or is not concerned with. First, he has no interest in the biographies of the apostles. Second, he has little or no interest in church organization or polity. Third, there is no word about geographical expansion except one in the one direct line from Jerusalem to Rome.
3. Luke's interest does not seem to be with standardizing things, bringing everything into uniformity. The diversity that this creates probably means that no specific example is being set forth as the model Christian experience or church life.
4. However, it is thought that Acts intention is to serve as a model. But the model is not so much in the specifics as in the overall picture.

Author & Date

Acts was likely written in the late 50's or early 60's by Luke, the physician who often traveled with the Apostle Paul. Paul was probably still alive when

this book was written and had not yet written many of his epistles or been imprisoned a second time.

Purpose

To decipher this purpose, we should start with the text and develop a tentative framework from the content of the book that reflects any clear statements of intent. Luke begins Acts by referencing his prior writing (the Gospel of Luke) and the ascension of Jesus. This was the conclusion to his gospel, but the introduction to Acts.

Let's consider an example: Read Acts 1:1-11 and look for indication of the purpose of this narrative work.

Jesus told the disciples that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit very soon and thereafter they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth.

It is readily agreed that Acts traces the church from its beginnings in Jerusalem through its spread into Judea, Samaria, and into the rest of the world. The entire book of Acts covers a period of around 30 years. It records the realization of Jesus' prophecy and sets the stage for its continued realization in our day. Yet it is important to recognize that Acts does not broadly cover the history of the early church.

Acts: 1-12	Acts 13-28
Acts starts with a focus on the Church at Jerusalem and the ministry of the Apostle Peter, the early leader among the Apostles and Elders.	The book then transitions to the ministry of the Apostle Paul and his various missionary journeys that allowed the gospel to eventually make its way to Rome, the capital of the civilized world. There are no doubt thousands of conversions that are not mentioned, and many local congregations established during the first 30 years of church history that are not recorded for us.

The authors of How to Read the Bible for All its Worth suggest that there is a repeated theme throughout Acts that divides the book into six sections. Each of these sections is distinguished by presenting various challenges the early church (or the later churches) faced followed by a time of unhindered (or less hindered) spiritual prosperity. Note the six key passages that conclude these sections below. Identify the conflicts and events preceding each passage and the key characters that were the focus of Luke's writing.

Scripture	Key Moment/Event	Characters
<p>Acts 6:7 – And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.</p>	<p>Ascension of Christ; replacing Judas; Pentecost; lame man healed; Peter and John arrested and forbidden to preach Jesus; prayer for boldness; Ananias and Sapphira lied to the church; Apostles arrested, jailed, freed, tried, and flogged; dispute between the Hellenistic Jews and native Hebrews; ordaining of “the seven”.</p>	<p>Holy Spirit; Peter, John and Apostles; Ananias & Sapphira; Deacons</p>
<p>Acts 9:31 – “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”</p>	<p>Stephen’s defense and martyrdom; Saul’s persecution and the scatter of the Jerusalem church through Judea and Samaria; the evangelization of Samaria by Philip; the salvation of the Ethiopian Eunuch; Saul’s conversion on the Road to Damascus and baptism.</p>	<p>Holy Spirit; Stephen; Philip; Saul</p>
<p>Acts 12:24 – “But the word of God grew and multiplied.”</p>	<p>Peter’s miracles in Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa; The Lord tells Peter to eat unclean animals; Peter preaches to the Gentile Cornelius and he and his household are saved and given the gift of the Holy Spirit; the apostles and brethren recognize the evangelism of the Gentiles; Evangelism of the Gentiles begins around Antioch; Barnabas departs to find Saul; Herod kills James and arrests Peter, but he is freed by an angel; the Lord enacted vengeance on Herod.</p>	<p>Holy Spirit; Peter; Cornelius; Barnabas; Herod</p>
<p>Acts 16:4-5 – “And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith and increased in number daily.”</p>	<p>Saul and Barnabas ordained by the church at Antioch and sent on their first missionary journey; a portion of Asia Minor is evangelized, Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch; a dissension arises over whether circumcision is required for salvation; Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem and the Apostles and Elders resolve the conflict; Paul and Barnabas part ways; Paul chooses Silas and begins to visit the churches from his first journey.</p>	<p>Holy Spirit; Saul/Paul; Barnabas; Peter; James (the elder); Silas</p>
<p>Acts 19:20 – “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”</p>	<p>Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (with Silas); the introduction of the gospel into Europe (Greece); Paul and Silas arrested in Philippi and miraculously released; civil unrest breaks out in Thessalonica over the preaching of the gospel; Paul preaches at Mars Hill in Athens; Paul settled in Corinth for a year and a half, preaching the gospel; Paul returns to Antioch and then departs on his third missionary journey; Apollos is found</p>	<p>Holy Spirit; Paul; Silas; Timothy; Priscilla & Aquila; Apollos</p>

	and instructed by Priscilla and Aquila; the Lord magnified the ministry of Paul by various miracles.	
Acts 28:30-31 – “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”	Paul determined to go to Jerusalem despite several warnings to the contrary; civil unrest in Ephesus over the gospel; Paul preaches in Troas and raises a boy back to life who fell from a window during his message; Paul addresses the Ephesian elders one last time; Paul returns to Jerusalem and is counseled to purify himself and pay for the vows of four other men; Paul is recognized and a mob forms, he is arrested by Lysias and addresses the mob; Paul appears before the Sanhedrin and is then transferred to Caesarea to appear before Felix because of a local conspiracy to kill Paul; Paul is held by Felix and has the opportunity to witness to him; Festus takes over for Felix and Paul appeals to Caesar; Festus allows Paul a hearing in front of King Agrippa; Paul witnesses to Agrippa and is transported to Rome; he is shipwrecked along the way and then taken into house arrest in Rome; he preaches to the Roman Jews and declares that he will continue preaching to the Gentiles	Holy Spirit; Paul; Lysias; Felix; Festus; Agrippa; Julius

This is not the only way to organize Acts. One could organize the book by thematic events (Pentecost, Peter & Cornelius, Paul’s 1st, 2nd, 3rd missionary journeys. This method of organization is helpful to see obstacles overcome by the early Church through God’s Spirit.

Main Character

At first glance, it appears that the main characters change throughout Acts. We begin with a general focus on the apostles that narrows to Peter, then to Stephen and Philip, and eventually to Saul/Paul. However, one character remains central throughout the entire text. Identify this character and discuss their role in Acts.

It is the Holy Spirit. He was promised at the Ascension and the apostles were to wait for Him because He would empower them to take the gospel to the world. The Book of Acts recounts this progression from Jerusalem to Rome. Not only does the gospel touch the Gentile world, it gains a significant foothold.

Purpose:

You will notice that we did not definitively determine the purpose of Acts in the last section. We will refrain from dogmatism in this section as well, but we do want to narrow down the possibilities and suggest a purpose that may

help you to make more sense of this important book. Let's proceed by asking some questions about Luke's (or the Holy Spirit's) intent.

Was it biographical?

Although we do learn about key events in the lives of some figures, it is not entirely biographical of any character. Many of the apostles are not even mentioned by name and those that are active in large portions of the text are not covered in complete detail. For example, we do not know how the ministry of Peter or Paul ends.

Was it historical?

Luke does recount Christian history for us, but it is not a complete history by any stretch of the imagination. It tends to cover a beeline of the gospel movement toward Rome from Jerusalem. No doubt the gospel went in many other directions during the same time period but we are not told about it.

Was it intended to standardize church practice?

This is a tricky question. There were several unique things that occurred in Acts. Some examples include casting lots to determine a matter of church business, the miraculous giving/receipt of the Holy Spirit, the practice of all members selling their goods and property and sharing with one another, the ordination of seven men (never called deacons) who serve the Church in Jerusalem but some of which later go to do the work of evangelists and perform miracles, the formation of an authoritative apostolic church council that produces dictates to be read to all churches, Paul's model of first preaching the gospel to the Jews in a community before evangelizing Gentiles, ordaining elders shortly after they are saved, etc... It is difficult to take all aspects Acts and make it a standard for church practice in all times and places. That isn't to say that some things from Acts don't provide a standard of sorts. In the next section, we will talk about some precautions we should take before declaring a precedent to be a standard.

Was it intended to be a model for the church?

In Acts, we see the Holy Spirit moving the gospel forward to fulfill the Great Commission through the agency of the church. We encounter various apostles, missionaries, and churches, but the grand scheme is the furtherance of the gospel through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We do see several themes that serve as a model for the church today. Examples include evangelism, ordination, resolving church issues prayerfully and expeditiously, maintaining doctrinal purity, etc....

Based on this study, Acts serves as a model for the continuous movement of the gospel forward to fulfill the Great Commission given by Christ. Through the main character, the Holy Spirit, we sense a pull of spiritual gravity towards the spread of the gospel that is not withstood by forces internal or external to the church. This book serves as an example and source of encouragement to churches throughout Christian history, regardless of their

cultural circumstances. The Lord has established His church, given her a Commission, and the gates of hell will not prevail against her.

Principles for Interpreting and Applying Acts

The question we must answer when approaching Acts is whether what happened reflects what should happen in the future, meaning that it represents a norm or standard for churches of all ages. Biblical history in general records many events that describe what happened but do not intend to suggest that we follow suit.

For example, Abraham lied twice about his relationship to Sarah (Genesis 13 and 20). This is what Abraham did, but it is not intended for us to imitate.

Let's consider an example: Read Acts 2:37-47.

Does this passage teach us to sell our possessions when we become Christians, or does it teach us something else?

(See also 1 Timothy 6:17-19.)

The early church sold their possessions and shared with others because there was great need in the congregation among displaced Jews that stayed in Jerusalem after their conversion rather than returning home. Additionally, it was something they did voluntarily (Acts 5:4) at the compulsion of the Holy Spirit. We see that in other situations, early Christians were generous but not required to sell all their possessions to put into a centralized, socialized pot of money for redistribution. Acts 2:37-47 is an example of Christian love, not a standard to be enforced among Christians.

1. The word of God in Acts that may be regarded as a command for Christians is related primarily to what any given narrative intended to teach.

2. Details that are incidental to the primary purpose of a text must not become primary as we seek to apply the narrative today.

Let's consider an example: Acts 5:1-11

What is a primary purpose of the account of Ananias and Saphira lying to the Church at Jerusalem? What are we being taught?

The purpose is to show us that an action we take against the body is an action against God (His Spirit in this case). We must respect the church and cannot assume that our sins against this body will be ignored by God.

We see how God judged Ananias and Saphira immediately by striking them dead. Is this the primary teaching purpose of the passage (i.e., God will immediately kill anyone who lies to the church) or an incidental detail?

God judged Ananias and Saphira to set a precedent for church members (and others) to respect the Lord's church. The fact that He judged them is a primary purpose; how He judged them is an incidental detail. It was not intended to imply that all who dishonor the church will be immediately judged in like fashion. However, God will judge sin and one who dishonors the church should not assume that because they were not immediately struck down that God will not enact chastisement or punishment upon them. We will be required to answer for all our deeds in the flesh (Matt. 16:27).

3. It is probably never valid to use a single, stand-alone Biblical precedent as giving Biblical authority for present-day actions.

Let's consider an example: Acts 13:6-11

Does Paul's rebuke and curse upon Barjesus the sorcerer teach us that we should do the same when we encounter a scorner who interferes with our evangelism?

No, Paul was under the control of the Holy Spirit when this occurred and did not do this of his own accord. Later in Acts, Paul is interrupted by Festus while witnessing to Agrippa (Acts 26:24-25) but did not respond in like manner. He remained respectful to Festus despite his scorn.

4. Biblical precedent must be interpreted by clear New Testament teaching, rather than the other way around.

Let's consider an example: Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13

The selection and ordination of the seven Greek Christians in the Church at Jerusalem is often considered to be the ordination of the first deacons. Should the standard used by the Apostles for selection of the seven take priority over Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 3:8-13?

The standard Paul provides us in 1 Timothy is clear and intended to be explicit instruction from God. It could be seen as a clarifying evolution of the standard used by the apostles in Acts 6. Use of the broad principle in Acts 6 in lieu of Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy would be improper. 1 Timothy helps us to better understand and apply the underlying principle in Acts 6.

5. For Biblical precedent to be a standard for today:

1. It must be related to the clear intent of the passage.
2. Occurrences of similar events must be represented consistently throughout Acts or if they are represented differently, there must be clear explanation as to WHY they are different.
3. Other Scriptures should either support or not contradict the practice or doctrine you are recognizing as a standard.

Let's consider an example: Acts 6:6 and 13:3.

In both ceremonies, the apostles or elders prayed and laid hands upon the candidates. Should this be considered a standard practice for all ordination services today?

(See also 1 Timothy 4:14 and 5:22.)

I believe it should be considered a standard because the patterns are related to the clear intent (a need was presented to a church, and it ordained men in response) and is consistently repeated throughout Scripture. This standard is also implied in Paul's first letter to Timothy.

6. Although application of a Biblical precedent may not have been the author's primary intent (and therefore it would not qualify as a standard), these narratives do have value as illustrations of Biblical truths and as a pattern that could be followed today. Biblical patterns are especially useful if the principle behind the pattern is clearly taught somewhere in Scripture.

Let's consider an example: In the account of the ordination of the seven Greek Christians in Acts 6:1-7, we find that there was a need that presented itself to the congregation which resulted in their ordination. Should a need in the congregation be the reason for the ordination of deacons today or should we ordain deacons as a matter of habit or duty?

Beliefs on this vary, however it is the personal conviction of the author that ordination should be the result of a need in a church, not a matter of habit or duty. This is the patterns with every ordination we witness in Scripture. However, I don't believe that an ordination conducted out of habit or duty is invalid as it is the prerogative of the church that calls for the ordination and legitimizes the ceremony.

7. In matters of Christian practice, a Biblical precedent may provide a useful pattern, but still not be recognized as a mandatory standard of Scripture.

Let's consider an example: As we see Paul go on repeated missionary journeys, he always appeared to have at least one other missionary laboring with him (e.g., Acts 13:2, 15:40, 20:4-5). Is this a useful pattern that should be repeated whenever possible or is it a biblical standard that requires that two or more missionaries labor together for mission work to be scripturally valid?

There is strong biblical precedent for missionaries going out two-by-two both in the gospels and in Acts. It is a good pattern that we would do well to heed. At the same time, I don't believe that a missionary work conducted by a single missionary is invalidated by Scripture and necessarily bound for failure because a standard has been violated. A parallel argument could be made about churches with only one pastor when the Scriptural model is for a plurality of elders. Having only one elder does not invalidate a church, yet a church is better served by a plurality of godly leaders.

How To Study The Bible

Lessons 8 - The Gospels

Class Aim:

- To become familiar with exegetical and hermeneutical principles concerning the Gospels.

The Nature of the Gospels:

The gospels may be divided roughly into sayings and narratives, that is, teachings of Jesus and stories about Jesus. Theoretically you should be able to use the principles of studying the Epistles for the one and the principles for historical narratives for the others. Having said this we need to look at the other dimensions of the Gospels that require additional strategy to study and understand. Almost all of the trouble in interpreting the Gospels stems from the fact that:

- 1. Jesus himself did not write a gospel; they come from others, not from him. Because of this reason to perform exegesis we need to think in terms of the historical setting of Jesus and the historical setting of the authors. You will also want to think about the historical context for each Jesus and the authors. Ask yourself why a certain gospel was written and when. One of the questions you will want to ask, even if it cannot be answered for certain, is whether Jesus' audience for a given teaching was his close disciples, the larger crowds, or his opponents
- 2. There are four gospels. For a variety of reasons the gospels written for one community or group of believers did not necessarily meet all of the needs in another community. So one was written first, Mark, and then rewritten twice, Matthew and Luke. Finally a fourth, John was written. All of these books exist with the same importance and authority because in each case the interest in Jesus is at two levels. First, the purely historical concern that this is who Jesus was and this is what he said and did; it is this Jesus, who was crucified and raised from the dead; whom we now worship as the risen Lord. Second, there was the existential concern of retelling the story for the need of later communities that did not speak Aramaic or Greek, and lived in areas like Rome, Ephesus, or Antioch, where the Gospel was encountering an urban pagan environment. These books which tell us virtually all we know about Jesus are not biographies they are "the memoirs of the apostles." Four biographies could not stand side by side with equal value; these books stand side by side because they record the facts about Jesus, recall the teaching of Jesus, and bear witness to Jesus.

There are four gospels, each with its own unique literary style and purpose, and there are sometimes challenges in harmonizing their accounts. The challenges

can be overcome through careful study and often enrich our understanding of the life of Jesus.

Jesus' primary language was Aramaic (Matthew 27:46) while His teachings are recorded in Greek. They were then translated into our modern English translations. Given this fact and the different purposes each writer was guided to accomplish, it is appropriate, acceptable, and expected that two accounts of the same incident may ascribe slightly different words to Christ. When we view the sayings together, we don't find contradiction, but rather different emphasis or a fuller recollection by one author than another.

Keep in mind that two of the gospel writers had to receive knowledge of Jesus' sayings from others because they were probably not present during His ministry.

The first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) are called, "synoptic gospels"

Synoptic – constituting a general view of the whole subject.

The first three gospels are called synoptic because they include:

- many of the same stories,
- are often in the same sequence.
- and sometimes the exact same wording.

The Historical Context:

Finding the historical context of Jesus can be a difficult task at best. This is because the way in which Jesus' teaching was handed down. The content of the Gospels was passed on in individual stories and sayings (pericopes), not as whole Gospels. Some of these sayings were transmitted along with their original contexts. These are often referred to as pronouncement stories. Other stories and sayings did not include any historical context. This left the evangelist under their own guidance and that of the Holy Spirit to give the sayings present contexts. This is one of the reasons that that we often find the same saying or teaching in different contexts in the Gospels. This is also why sayings with similar themes, or the same subject matter, are often grouped in the Gospels in a topical way.

Sometimes sayings were passed down orally, perhaps without their context, that were not included in the gospels but are presented elsewhere (see Acts 20:35). We will sometimes find the same sayings in different gospels, presented in different contexts. There are two reasonable explanations for this.

- 1) Jesus said the thing more than once (as most preachers/teachers do);
and
- 2) The inspired purposes of the writer (how they arranged the sayings of Jesus).

For example, Matthew tends to combine teachings on the same subject matter into one dialogue, while Luke sometimes puts them into a different (perhaps chronological) order.

Matthew	Luke
<p data-bbox="168 180 458 212">Chapter 10 (Apostles sent)</p> <p data-bbox="94 237 529 968">5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; 6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. 9 "Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, 10 or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. 11 "And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city. 12 "As you enter the house, give it your greeting. 13 "If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace.</p> <p data-bbox="94 999 529 1234">14 "Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. 15 "Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.</p> <p data-bbox="94 1266 529 1682">16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 "But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18 and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19 "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say, for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.</p> <p data-bbox="94 1713 529 1808">20 "For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."</p>	<p data-bbox="651 180 929 212">Chapter 9 (Apostles sent)</p> <p data-bbox="572 237 1008 300">2 And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.</p> <p data-bbox="572 331 1008 468">3 And He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece.</p> <p data-bbox="572 499 1008 562">4 "Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city.</p> <p data-bbox="572 804 1008 951">5 "And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."</p> <p data-bbox="651 1024 922 1056">Chapter 10 (the 70 sent)</p> <p data-bbox="572 1087 1008 1150">3 "Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.</p> <p data-bbox="572 1234 993 1266">Chapter 21 (Instructions to Disciples)</p> <p data-bbox="572 1297 1008 1707">12 "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. 13 "It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. 14 "So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; 15 for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute.</p>

What we take away from this is that it is useful to compare accounts from different gospels to broaden our perspective on the context of a particular saying. The latter part of the passage from Matthew refers to what the apostles would

experience in the future after the ascension of Christ, not during their initial ministry. Did Jesus give this to them all at once or did Matthew just group all of these teachings to ministers of the kingdom together? It may not be possible to know for sure, but neither answer makes these words any less inspired.

The Literary Context:

The literary context has to do with the place of a given pericope in the context of any one of the Gospels. The concern for doing this is twofold: (1) to help you exegete or read with understanding a given saying or narrative in its present context in the Gospels, and (2) to help you understand the nature of the composition of the Gospels as wholes, and thus to interpret any one of the Gospels itself, not just isolated facts about the life of Jesus.

- **Think Horizontally:** This means that when studying a pericope in any one gospel, one should be aware of the parallels in the other. There are two basic reasons for thinking horizontally. First, the parallels will often give us an appreciation for the distinctiveness of any one of the Gospels. Second, the parallels will help us to be aware of the different kinds of contexts in which the same or similar materials lived in the ongoing church. This is important in seeing how the same material was used in new contexts in the ongoing church.
- **Think Vertically:** To think vertically means that when reading or studying a narrative or teaching in the Gospels, one should try to be aware of both historical contexts, that of Jesus and that of the evangelists. This is to help bring awareness that many of the gospel materials owe their present context to the evangelists, and that good interpretation may require appreciating a given saying first in its original historical context as a proper prelude to understanding that same word in its present canonical context.

Thinking Across the Gospels

As you identify the distinct blocks of material in the gospels (good study bibles often help you do this), you can compare them with retelling of the same event in other gospels. Always keep in mind as you read one gospel that there are three others and there is a good chance the same thing is addressed elsewhere. There are two good reasons to do this:

1) The parallel passage may help us appreciate what is unique about each Gospel account (remember that each gospel is a stand-alone book);
and

2) The parallel passage will help us gain insight into the fuller context of what Jesus is trying to say to us within the gospel we are studying.

Here is an example from the sermon Jesus preached on the Mount of Olives:

Matthew 24:15-16	Mark 13:14	Luke 21:20-21
<p>Therefore, when you see</p> <p>the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION</p> <p>which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place</p> <p>(let the reader understand),</p> <p>then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.</p>	<p>But when you see</p> <p>the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION</p> <p>standing where it should not be</p> <p>(let the reader understand),</p> <p>then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.</p>	<p>But when you see</p> <p>Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.</p> <p>Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city;</p>

A helpful resource to use in bringing together such a study is a synopsis, also known as a parallel gospel. It places passages from the gospels that address the same events side-by-side.

Interpreting the Gospels as Wholes

The Apostle John had a very specific burden that prompted him to write His gospel. By the direction of the Holy Spirit, He chose specific sayings and events to record and left others out.

Read John 20:30-31 and 21:25. What was His purpose in writing?

Jesus wanted people to believe that Jesus is both the Messiah AND the Son of God, and that these truths would lead them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

How does this purpose affect what John includes in his gospel? Consider John 1:1-18 in comparison with the beginning of the other gospels.

John was intent upon helping people to understand that Jesus is God in the flesh. The beginning of John's gospel was focused on this very purpose. Rather than starting with a genealogy or diving into a narrative, He showed how Christ is the eternal God; His life didn't begin in the womb.

How To Study The Bible

Lessons 9 - Parables

Class Aim:

- To become familiar with the nature of Parables and how to properly exegete and apply their teachings.

Do Now:

What makes a joke funny?

Parable:

To throw along side.

Jesus threw parables alongside His teachings to drive home a point.

The Purpose of Parables

A parable is a saying that is sometimes meant to illustrate an elaborate process and sometimes meant to teach a specific point, but always meant to provoke a response. We cannot study parables without considering what Jesus had to say about the reason behind His use of parables.

The Parables in History:

Parables have suffered misinterpretation second only to Revelation. One of the keys to understanding them, however, lies in discovering who the original audience to whom they were spoke; although many times they did come down to the evangelist without a context. It's not that Jesus was trying to be obtuse; he fully intended to be understood. It is our task to try and hear what Jesus' audience heard.

A Great Example of What NOT to Do!

Interpretation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan by Augustine

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; Adam himself is meant; Jerusalem is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell; Jericho means the moon, and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes, and dies.

Thieves are the devil and his angels. Who stripped him, namely; of his immortality; and beat him, by persuading him to sin; and left him half-dead, because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead; he is therefore called half-dead.

The priest and the Levite who saw him and passed by, signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament which could profit nothing for salvation.

Samaritan means Guardian, and therefore the Lord Himself is signified by this name. The binding of the wounds is the restraint of sin.

Oil is the comfort of good hope; wine the exhortation to work with fervent spirit.

The beast is the flesh in which He deigned to come to us. The being set upon the beast is belief in the incarnation of Christ.

The inn is the Church, where travelers returning to their heavenly country are refreshed after pilgrimage. The morrow is after the resurrection of the Lord.

The two pence are either the two precepts of love, or the promise of this life and of that which is to come.

The innkeeper is the Apostle (Paul). The supererogatory payment is either his counsel of celibacy, or the fact that he worked with his own hands lest he should be a burden to any of the weaker brethren when the Gospel was new, though it was lawful for him "to live by the gospel.

While his interpretation is interesting, it is clearly far-fetched and completely misses the whole point of the parable and the context of its use. We can learn a valuable lesson here.

DON'T TRY TO MAKE A PARABLE DO MORE THAN JESUS INTENDED FOR IT TO DO!

The Nature of the Parables

The Variety of Kinds

Not all parables are created equally, meaning they can take on different literary forms and can be told for different purposes. Parables cannot be lumped together as we define them because such a treatment will result in misinterpretation. As the authors of our source book said, "Because the parables are not all of one kind, one cannot necessarily lay down rules that will cover them all."

Some parables are even used in more than one way. Let's start by identifying some of the basic types of parables.

Parable	Definition	Examples
A True Parable	a story with a distinct beginning and ending.	the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep (both instances), the Prodigal Son, the Great Supper, the Laborers in the Vineyard, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Ten Virgins
A Similitude	illustrations taken from everyday life	the leaven, the sower, and the mustard seed.
Metaphors and Similes	a comparison of two things	Examples of metaphors include: You are the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13) Examples of similes include: Every teacher of the law is like the owner of a house (Matt 13:52)
An Epigram	a concise, clever, or paradoxical statement	Examples include: Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? (Matt. 7:16)

How the Parables Function

In a strange way parables are like jokes, if you understand the points of reference you will laugh (if it is a good joke). If you don't, it will leave you hanging. In the same way, understanding the points of reference in a parable will provoke a response from you and that is precisely what Jesus meant to do. He wanted His audience to respond. Perhaps it was a response of self-examination, humility, repentance, joy, or decision.

Consider the following parable.

Luke 9:62 – But Jesus said to him “no one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God”.

What is the main idea the parable is communicating?

What kind of response should the parable invoke?

Now consider this equivalent parable.

“No one who drives while staring in the rearview mirror is fit for the kingdom of God.”

How the response changes:

Usually, you will see the point of danger. Not only are you distracted and uncommitted, but you are a danger to the work. One who plows looking back doesn't plow straight lines. You have to be forward focused on the goal. But if you don't live in that culture, you lose sight of this part of the parable that is also meant to be understood.

Our goal in studying the parables is to catch the full force of the parable so that truth can be translated into our lives.

The Exegesis of Parables (What did they mean back then?)

Finding the Points of Reference

One of the first things we must do with a parable is to put it into its context (if possible). Some parables are given without a specific context, however many are fitted to an occasion.

Let's read Luke 7:41-42 without reading the context. What does this parable appear to address?

It appears to address our ability to love God based upon the amount of sin forgiven.

Now let's read this parable in its full context. Read Luke 7:36-50.

There are three important points of reference in the parable: the moneylender and the two debtors. Identify each of them.

The moneylender – God/Jesus

The debtor who owed 500 denarii – The woman

The debtor who owed 50 denarii – Simon the Pharisee

Understand that Simon's treatment of Jesus was insulting in Eastern culture. Failing to wash His feet is similar to not offering to take a guest's coat. Jesus was not a welcome guest in Simon's home, but perhaps more of a spectacle or subject of interest.

Consider the audience. This parable was told to involve Simon in recognizing his own sin. Jesus engaged Simon in a showing, not just a telling sort of way. Simon would be humbled before Jesus and his other guests for his lack of sincere hospitality. Likewise, the parable would comfort the woman who humbled herself before Christ, Simon, and the other guests.

One final word, while this parable has symbolism, it isn't an allegory. In an allegory, every part of the parable would have a symbolic meaning (50 denarii and 500 denarii). That doesn't fit with the context of the parable and jumping off in that direction can lead to unfounded misinterpretations.

Identifying the Audience

Remember, when we do exegesis we are trying to understand what the passage meant to its original audience. This is a necessary first step in translating the message to us today. If you noticed in the last example, knowing the audience gave the parable clarity. There are three steps to follow when you know the context in which a parable was given.

1. Read the parable repeatedly, making yourself very familiar with it;
2. Identify the points of reference that would be recognized by the original audience (this usually requires cultural/historical study); and
3. Try to determine how the original hearers would identify with this story and therefore what they would have heard.

Let's look at an example. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one that must be understood in the context of the audience to appreciate its meaning. Read Luke 10:25-37 and consider the following cultural/historical points.

1. The Pharisees were generally at odds with the priests and Levites, who often were Sadducees. They could be likened to Republicans and Democrats, battling for

control of the Jewish court of law (Sanhedrin).

2. The Pharisees (or other Jews for that matter) did not regard the Samaritans with favor. In fact, they had nothing to do with them (John 4:9).

3. Pharisees took pride in giving to the poor (Matthew 6:2).

Put yourself in the position of the Pharisee. How would you have felt as you heard this parable unfold?

When the parable started, it would have sounded pretty good. He wouldn't have expected the priestly types to have given anyway. He was probably happy to hear them put down. He may have expected a Pharisee to be the hero of the day. To hear it was a Samaritan would have been not only unexpected but offensive.

What did Jesus do to the Pharisee's question?

This man wanted to limit definition of neighbor. Jesus revealed his bigotry. Jesus rephrased the question as, "which one proved to be a neighbor"? There are no limits to draw based on gender, religious affiliation, race, etc.... Your neighbor is whoever is near you.

What was the point of this parable?

Like Jesus' interaction with the Rich Young Ruler, this parable was designed to show the Pharisee that he had not kept the law. He did not love his neighbor as God intended. He fell short of the biblical standard and needed mercy himself.

Multi-Use Parables

As we read from gospel to gospel, we will sometimes find the same parable used in different ways. Consider the parable of the Lost Sheep found in Luke 15:3-7 and Matthew 18:12-14.

What is the point of the parable in Luke 15:3-7?

Jesus is justifying His outreach to those in society that were considered to be sinners. Any soul that turned from sin to salvation was a cause for rejoicing.

What is the point of the parable in Matthew 18:12-14?

Jesus is reminding the disciples of how precious every saint is, even the "little ones" that may yet be weak in their faith. Jesus wants us to go after everyone and not let them slip away.

How can we reconcile both uses of the same parable?

This is where we really begin to understand parables. They are potent teaching illustrations used to make specific points. They aren't meant to be a source of doctrine, but vehicles for spiritual impact. Jesus appropriately used the parable in both circumstances. Each time, He made His point to the given audience. We need to value the salvation of every sinner and the sanctification of every saint.

Sometimes you will encounter parables that don't have a clear context. Remember the purpose of parables is to reach out and vividly touch the audience. Keep reading through the parable until you understand the points of reference and who would be touched by the parable. Then you will start to discern a likely audience and its proper usage.

Remember; the purpose of a parable is for us to get the point.

How To Study The Bible

Lesson 10 - The Law & Prophets

Class Aim:

- To become familiar with the nature of the Law and the Prophets.

Covenant:

A binding contract between two parties..

both of whom have obligations specified in the covenant

What the Law is:

The Old Testament contains over six hundred commandments, all of which are contained within four books: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. While Genesis does not contain any of these commandments it is also considered to be part of the law. The largest problem for most Christians in reading and studying this portion of the bible is the hermeneutical question.

The following guidelines should help in the understanding of the Old Testament Laws and covenant.

1. The Old Testament Law is a covenant. A covenant is a binding contract between two parties, both of whom have obligations specified in the covenant. The covenant format of the Old Testament Laws had six parts to it (see next page).

2. The Old Testament is not our testament (at least not apart from the New Covenant). The Old Testament represents an old covenant, which is no longer binding to us. We have to assume that none of its stipulations are binding unless otherwise noted in the New Testament or New Covenant. God expects something different from us than he did those in the Old Covenant or Old Testament.

3. Some stipulations of the Old Testament have clearly not been renewed in the New Covenant. You can make two groups within the Pentateuchal laws that no longer apply to Christians of today.

- a. The Israelite civil laws and
- b. The Israelite ritual laws.

The civil laws specify what penalties existed for various crimes. The ritual laws dealt with the specifics about worshipping God and the atonement of sin. Both of these groups of Laws only applied to the people of ancient Israel.

4. Part of the Old Covenant is renewed in the New Covenant. Some aspects of the old ethical laws are actually restated in the New Testament as applicable to Christians. Such laws derive their continued applicability from the fact that they serve to support the two chief laws of the New Covenant; love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your soul, and your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.

5. All of the Old Testament law is still the Word of God for us even though it is not still the command of God to us. God wants us to know about all commands even if they are not directed at us personally. Care needs to be taken though that we understand that the Law can be used in both a good way and a negative way in the life of the Christian and this is often determined by how the Law is mediated (through Christ or through Moses).

6. Only that which is explicitly renewed from the Old Testament law can be considered part of the New Testament "law of Christ." The Ten Commandments as well as the two laws mentioned earlier; loving your God with heart, soul, and mind; and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Part	Definition	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Preamble	Identifies the parties of the agreement.	Deuteronomy 1:1-5	Joshua 24:2-13	Exodus 20:1
Prologue	Gives a brief history of how the parties became connected to one another.	Deuteronomy 1:6-4:43	Joshua 24:14-15	Exodus 20:2
Stipulations	The individual laws themselves.	Deuteronomy 4:44-26:19	Joshua 24:16-25	Exodus 20:3-17
Witnesses	Those who will enforce the covenant.	Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68	Joshua 24:26-27	
Sanctions	The blessings and curses that function as incentives for keeping the covenant.	Deuteronomy 29:1-34:12	Joshua 24:27 (implied)	
Document Clause	The provisional for regular review of the covenant so that it will not be forgotten.		Joshua 24:26a	Exodus 25:16; 34:1

The Old Testament Laws:

The following definitions of the categories of Laws will help in defining what God was trying to instruct, therefore, allowing better understanding of how this portion of Scripture can apply to your lives.

Category	Description	Example
Apodictic Law	Usually begins with do or do not. They are commands, telling the Israelites what they need to do to fulfill their part of the covenant with God. Throughout the study of these Laws one can begin to see how impossible it is to please God on our own. This also helps to show us that when reading the Old Testament, we ought to be humble and appreciate how unworthy we are to belong to God.	"Thou shall not murder"
Casuistic Law	These laws are case-by-case. These sorts of laws constitute a large portion of the more than six hundred commandments found in the Old Testament Pentateuchal law. None of these laws appear in the New Covenant. What we can gain from studying this kind of law is the demonstration of God's fairness and redemption that he granted. In these laws we often get a glimpse of the character of God.	18 When individuals quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or fist so that the injured party, though not dead, is confined to bed, 19 but recovers and walks around outside with the help of a staff, then the assailant shall be free of liability, except to pay for the loss. - Ex: 21:18-19
The Food Laws	The majority of these laws have to do with God's protection of the Israelites. Most of the foods prohibited were more likely to carry disease or were uneconomical to raise. Laws about the shedding of blood: Sin always deserves punishment. God revealed to his people that one who sins against him does not deserve to live. But he provided a procedure by which a sinner could make atonement for his or her sins; a substitute of blood could be shed for redemption.	Leviticus 11
Unusual Prohibitions:	Inspiration of these laws came from a desire of God to set his people apart from the Canaanites. The Canaanites believed in what is called "sympathetic magic," the idea that symbolic actions can influence the gods of nature. God could not bless his people if they practiced this kind of nonsense. These laws helped lead the Israelites away from a religion with no salvation, ultimately demonstrating Gods love and plan for us.	"You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material. Leviticus 19:19

Some Do's and Don'ts



<p>Do see the Old Testament law as God's fully inspired word for you, but don't always see it as God's direct command to you. Ultimately see God's law as a guardian that leads you to Jesus (see Galatians 3.19-24).</p>	<p>Don't see the Old Testament law as complete. It is not technically comprehensive. Do see the Old Testament law as a paradigm—providing examples for the full range of expected behavior.</p>
<p>Do see the Old Testament law as the basis for the Old Covenant, and therefore Israel's history. However, don't see the law as binding on Christians in the New Covenant except where specifically renewed and mediated through Jesus.</p>	<p>Don't expect the Old Testament law to be cited frequently by the prophets or the New Testament. Remember that the essence of the law (Ten Commandments, and the two chief laws) is repeated in the prophets and the New Testament.</p>
<p>Do See God's justice, love, and high standards revealed in the Old Testament law, but don't forget to see that God's mercy is made equal to the severity of the standards.</p>	
<p>Do see the Old Testament laws as a generous gift from God to the Israelites, and don't see them as an annoying group of arbitrary regulations limiting people's freedom.</p>	

THE PROPHETS: ENFORCING COVENANT IN ISRAEL.

The Nature of the Prophecy:

More individual books of the Bible come under the heading of prophecy than any other heading. Four major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) and twelve minor prophets (the final twelve books of the Old Testament), written between about 760 and 460 BC.

The first mistake that most of us make when studying prophecy is our understanding of what the word means. Most Christians think that the prophets only spoke to the coming of Christ as well as hinting to the New Covenant.

In fact, less than 2 percent of Old Testament prophecy is directly Messianic (this does not mean that all prophecy is not ultimately fulfilled in Christ). Less than 5 percent specifically describes the New Covenant age. Less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come.

The prophets did announce the future, but it was usually the immediate future of Israel, Judah, and other nations that surrounded them, rather than our own future. The purpose of the prophets was to speak to their own contemporaries, not just us.

In the prophetic books we hear from God via the prophets and very little about the prophets themselves. This is the aspect of the prophetic books that causes the most trouble in interpreting. Other areas of trouble are how the oracles were written. In the

longer books or the major prophetic books there seems to be multiple oracles. They are not always presented in their original order and often given without hints to historical setting or where an oracle begins and the other ends. Also, most oracles were spoken in poetry.

Another matter that complicates our understanding of the Prophets is the problem of historical distance. As people move farther and farther away from the religious, historical, and cultural life of ancient Israel, we have a hard time putting the words spoken by the Prophets in their proper context. It is hard for us to see what they are referring to and why.

The Function of Prophecy:

The following guidelines should help in the process of studying the prophetic books of the Bible.

The Prophets were covenant enforcement mediators. God does not merely give his law, but enforces it. God announced the enforcement of his laws through the prophets, so that the event of his blessing or of his curse would be fully understood by his people. They functioned as God's mediators, or spokespersons, for the covenant.

The blessings for covenant faithfulness fall into one of the following six categories: life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect and safety.

The curses can mostly fit into one of ten categories starting with "d": death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution, and disgrace.

As you read the Prophets, look for this simple pattern: (1) an identification of Israel's sin or of God's love for her; (2) a prediction of curse or blessing depending on the circumstance.

The prophet's message was not their own, but God's. The prophets responded to a divine call.

What we read in the prophetic books then, is not merely God's Word as the prophet saw it, but God's word as God wished the prophet to present it. The prophet does not act or speak independently.

The prophet's message is unoriginal. The message that the prophets delivered was more or less the same as the one that Moses gave. God raised up the prophets to gain the attention of the people to whom they were sent. The prophets are not inspired to make any points or announce any doctrines that are not already contained in the Pentateuchal covenant.

The Exegetical Task:

When studying the prophetic books three tools can be very useful to aid in exegesis.

1. The first, a Bible dictionary, this will help to give a good introduction to the historical setting as well as other background information. You should make it a practice to always read a dictionary article on the prophetic book before you start to study.
2. The second is to use a commentary. This will give more in depth analysis of background information but will also provide explanations of the meaning of the individual verses.
3. The third would be to use a Bible handbook. This is a combination of both. This is a great resource when reading through multiple chapters and you only need a general amount of extra information and analysis.

It is also important to think oracles; you want to be able to separate the individual area of the prophecy. This will help to understand the audience better. If you know where the oracles begin and stop then you will know the sections where you need to find the specific context relevant to that oracle.

Specific Contexts:

Each prophetic oracle was delivered in a specific historical setting. A knowledge of the date, audience, and situation, therefore, when they are known, contributes substantially to a reader’s ability to comprehend an oracle.

The Forms of Prophetic Utterance:

It is important to realize that oracles can take on different forms. Bible commentaries are wonderful resources to identify and explain the different forms. Below are the three most common forms you will find in prophetic writing.

Forms	Description	Example
The Lawsuit	The full lawsuit form contains a summons, a charge, evidence, and a verdict, though these elements may sometimes be implied rather than explicit. The figurative style of this prophetic utterance is an effective way of communicating.	The Lord has taken his place to contend; he stands to judge peoples. - Isaiah 3:13
The Woe	“Woe” was the word ancient Israelites cried out when facing disaster or death, or when they mourned at a funeral. Woe oracles contain, either explicitly or implicitly, three elements that characterize this form: an announcement of distress, the reason for distress, and a prediction of doom.	Therefore, thus says the Lord: behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks, and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster. – Micah 2:3
The Promise	Another term for this kind of oracle is the salvation oracle. It can be identified by the following three elements: reference to the future, mention of radical change, and mention of the blessing.	I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. – Amos 9:14

The Prophets as Poets:

Many of the things during ancient times that were important enough to remember were considered appropriate for composition in poetry. This was in part due to the ease of remembering the words or lyrics of the poem because most individuals could not read or owned any books. All of the prophetic books contain a large amount of poetry, and some are entirely comprised of poetry. The following features demonstrate three repetitive styles of Old Testament poetry.

Repetitive Style	Description	Example
Synonymous Parallelism	The second or subsequent line repeats or reinforces the sense of the first line.	Isaiah 44.22 "I have swept your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist."
Antithetical parallelism	The second or subsequent line contrasts the thought of the first.	Hosea 7.14 "They do not cry out to me from their hearts, but wail upon their beds."
Synthetic parallelism	The second or subsequent line adds to the first line in any manner, which provides further information.	Obadiah 1:21 "Deliverers will go up from Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the Lord's."

Some Hermeneutical Suggestions

Beyond sharing most of the same principles with the Epistles, we offer three further matters that should help in applying the information located in the prophetic books to your lives.

1. A Caution: The Prophet as Foreteller of the Future.

a. Yes, the prophets predicted events for the future but as discussed most of their predictions had to do with ancient Israel and Judah. They spoke of coming judgment or salvation in the relatively immediate future of ancient Israel. Be careful to not assume that all of the prophecies were focused on the New Testament. When reading the Prophets take note of the context, intent, style and wording.

2. A Concern: Prophecy and Second Meanings.

a. At a number of places in the New Testament, reference is made to Old Testament passages that do not appear to refer to what the New Testament says they do. These passages seem to have a clear meaning in their original Old Testament setting and yet are used in connection with a different meaning by a New Testament writer. This second meaning is commonly called 'sensus plenior' or fuller meaning. This is apparent when we see New Testament writers expand on references made in the Old Testament that do not, within scripture, allow for this further meaning. The problem for us with this second meaning is that we can not and should not make these connections. Only the authors of the New Testament are authorized to proclaim their writings as inspired by the Holy Spirit. The difficult thing about these sorts of writings is that it takes no concern with the context, intent, style or wording of an Old Testament passage. They draw allegorical connections because the Holy Spirit inspired them to do so not because they were concerned with what the original Old Testament scripture intended. For us this second meaning when discovered through close examination of Scripture can provide further insight into the meanings of a particular passage of Old and New Testament writings.

3. A Final Benefit: The Dual Emphasis on Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy.

a. Orthodoxy is correct belief. Orthopraxy is correct action. Through the prophets God calls the ancient Israelite's and Judah to a balance of right belief and right action. This is the same thing the New Testament calls us to. Because God basically wants the same thing from us as he did of Israel and Judah we can use the Prophets as a constant reminder of God's determination to enforce his covenant.