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CHAPTER ONE
HERMENEUTICS

Introduction

In many places in scripture,the believer is encouraged toto study the written wordas the foundation for a holy, godly and trustful life before God and man .But how are we study this unified ,but daunting compilation of sixty-six books written by over forty authors between nineteen hundred and thrity five hundred years ago in languages and cultures that may be totally foreign to us ? Enter the science of hermeneutics .

To understand hermeneutical principles is to be equipped for intelligent study of the word of God, tending greatly to our approach before God as workmen that do not need to be ashamed.

In as far as the Bible is God's revealed word, there is always a dimension of interpretation that falls under the ministry of the Holy Spirit. While this fact is no excuse for inadequate or sloppy analysis from a human perspective, it requires a certain sensitivity and openness from the very beginning and at all stages of the process of interpretation. Always begin the interpretive task with a prayer for God's leadership in your work: "Lord, help me understand!" And then as you do your work; listen for the text to speak His word, again!

1.1 Definitions of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is a science in that we need to bring specific principles, a specific method to bear.

Hermeneutics provides a strategy that will enable us what an author or speaker intended to communicate. Hermeneutics describes the task of explaining the meaning of the Scriptures. The word hermeneutics derives from the Greek verb *hermeneutic* means to "explain, interpret or to translate," the noun *hermeneutic* "interpretation" or "translation."



1.2 The Meaning of the Message

The first clarification is that the original meaning refers to the author's intended meaning; what the author originally intended. This raises one of the most important questions that hermeneutics, or biblical interpretation, seeks to answer. And that question is where does meaning reside.
In a written text there are really three possibilities for where meaning resides. There was

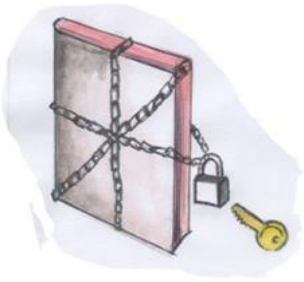
1. **An author,** an original author, of that text, the person that wrote it.
2. **The text itself,** which is the words on the page, the sentences on the page, the paragraphs on the page.
3. There is a **reader** of the text. The one whether ancient or modern who picks up that document and reads the words that the author wrote.

So, in every passage in the Bible, as written text throughout history, there are three possibilities as to where meaning resides; meaning could be a focus on the author who originally wrote it, or is meaning in the text itself, that is in the words on the page, or is meaning in the mind of the reader. There is modern literary theory that is called reader response criticism that puts all of the focus on the reader suggesting that we actually create meaning when we read. Every reader approaches a text differently and so really the focus of, the locus and focus of meaning is in the reader rather than in the author or in the text itself. Now, it is certainly true that meaning is a dynamic interplay between the text, the author, and the reader, but ultimately in this course we are going to focus on the fact that ultimately our goal is to get back to the author‘s intention, what the author intended when they wrote their document, what was going on in their mind, what their goal was.

Now, there are important clarifications with reference to that. The original meaning we are looking for is the author‘s intended meaning, but our approach has to be text-centered.

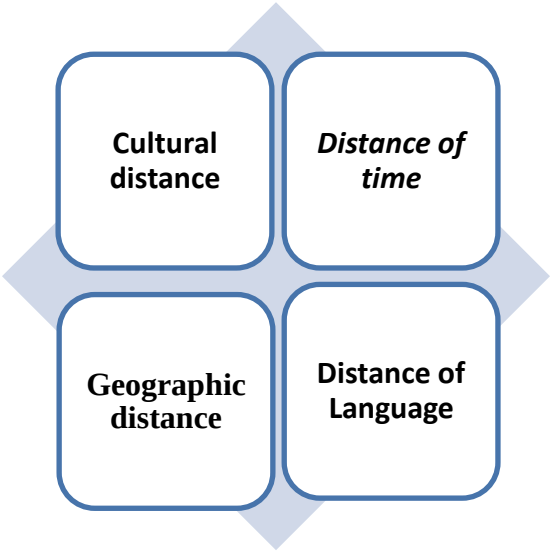
Why is that? It is because the author is dead, the author of every New Testament and Old Testament document is not with us, so if we say, okay, we are looking for Paul‘s meaning, but we cannot ask Paul his meaning is. We have to look to the written text, the text that that author penned and determine the meaning from that text. So the text is important, it is not just the author we are looking at. So our first clarification was that the original meaning refers to the author‘s intended meaning.

1.3 Why Hermeneutics?



1. To discern God’s message for us correctly. To understand what the authors of the Bible want communicate to their first receipts. To draw truth and timeless principles from the Bible.
2. To avoid or dispel misconceptions or erroneous perspectives and conclusions about the Bible.
3. To be able to apply the Bible’s message to our lives.

1.4 Barriers to Hermeneutics



1.4.1 Distance of time

"First of all consider the distance of time that exists between the ancient texts and our modern world. The writings and events recorded in the Bible span many centuries, but about 1900 yrs have passed since its last words were written. Simply put, the world has changed in substantial ways over the course of the Bible's composition and since its completion. Further, most of us lack essential information about the world as it was when the Bible was written. We may be at a loss to understand what a text means because it involves subjects beyond our time span."

1.4.2 Cultural Distance

"Another challenge of distance that must be considered is the cultural distance that separates us from the world of the biblical texts: a world that was basically agrarian, made up of landowners and tenant farmers; machinery that was primitive by our standards; and methods of travel that were slow and wearing. On the pages of the Bible we encounter customs, beliefs, and practices that make little sense to us."

1.4.3 Distance of Language

"The task of Biblical interpretation is further challenged with the distance of a language gap between the biblical world and our own. The writers of the Bible wrote in the language of their day- Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek- languages that are inaccessible to most people today. Even those who speak modern Hebrew or Greek have an incomplete knowledge of the ancient languages. We are also relatively unfamiliar with literary conventions of the ancient authors. We depend upon trained biblical scholars to translate the biblical languages and their literary devices into our native tongues, but their work is necessarily interpretive."

1.4.4 Geographic Distance:

"Another challenge to correct Bible interpretation is geographical distance. Unless we have had the opportunity to visit the places mentioned in the Bible, we lack an element that would aid our understanding of certain events. Of course, even if we could visit all the accessible sites (and many Christian have), few of them retain the look (and none the culture) they had in biblical times."

1.5 Bridge illustration

One side of the bridge is us, the other side of the bridge is them, "us" as in the contemporary reader, "them" as in the author and readers of the original documents. So the goal is to cross the bridge back to the first century context of meaning. We call that exegesis. Exegesis means drawing out the author's intended meaning, then we take that message or meaning and bring it back across the bridge and we call that process contextualization; bringing the sense or meaning or intention of the author into our contemporary context.

The goal of interpretation, the first goal of hermeneutics, or the first goal of interpretation is exegesis, and exegesis is crossing the cultural and linguistic bridge that separates us from them, and so I want to understand what Paul meant when he wrote this letter. Well, how can I understand what he wrote? I have to cross the bridge of time and space. I have to try to enter into the thought world

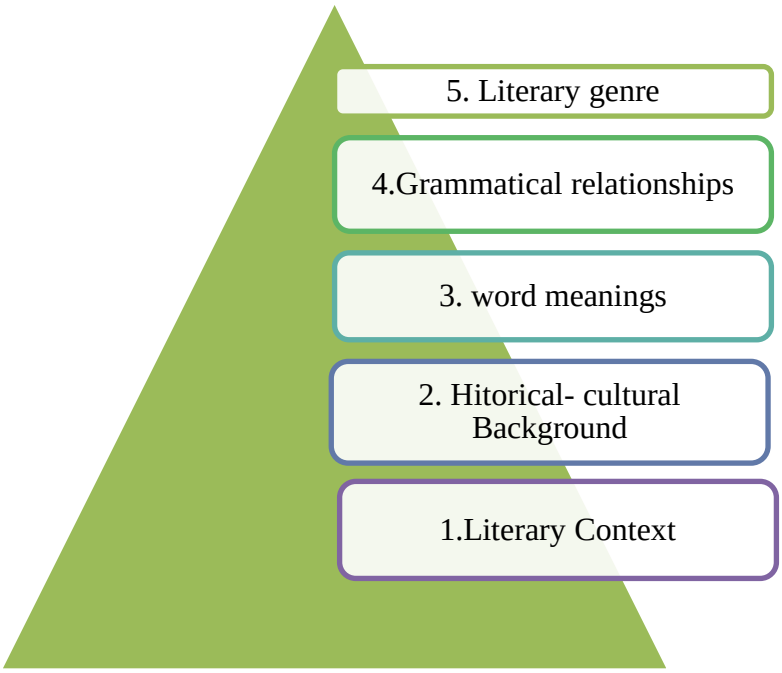
of Paul. I have to learn the language, I have to learn the culture, I have to understand the life situation.

If the first process, crossing the bridge back to the original context is called exegesis we call the process of bringing that message to us today as contextualization. Exegesis is determining the original meaning of the text; we are going to use that term meaning, determining the original meaning. Contextualization is determining the contemporary significance. What that text means to us today is the contemporary significance. How that text applies to our particular life situation, to our culture, to our context. And both steps are crucial. We have to cross the bridge back and understand what Paul meant in his original context, in his original culture, and then we have to find out how that applies to us, what God is saying to us, what truth we can draw from this passage. That is contextualization. Now, why do we need contextualization? Well, the reason we need contextualization or application is because not every command in the Bible was meant for all believers for all time.

CHAPTER TWO

PRINCIPLE OF HERMENEUTICS

The process of arriving at an accurate interpretation of written texts involves an understanding of five essential items:



2.1 Literary Context

A basic principle of biblical hermeneutics is that *the intended meaning of any passage is the meaning that is consistent with the sense of the literary context in which it occurs.*

In literature, the context of any specific passage is the material that comes immediately before and after it. The context of a sentence is its paragraph, the context of a paragraph is the series of paragraphs that precede and follow it, and the context of a chapter is the surrounding chapters. Ultimately, the whole book in which a passage appears is its controlling context.

2.1.1 The Importance of Literary Context

We must interpret every passage consistent with its context for three reasons

First, ***context provides flow of thought.*** A flow-of thought is a series of ideas an author organizes to communicate a specific concept.

Second, ***context provides accurate meanings of words.*** Most words have more than one meaning. The literary context presents the most reliable guide for determining the most likely meaning in that setting. Then interpreter must select the one most likely intended by the writer.

Third, ***context delineates correct relationships among units.*** Most biblical books were written and preserved as complete documents intended to be read as unit. Biblical writers composed or edited individual sentences and paragraphs as part of a larger document.

2.1.2 Principles of Hermeneutics Relating to Context

The first principle is: *Each statement must be understood according to its natural meaning in the literary context in which it occurs.*

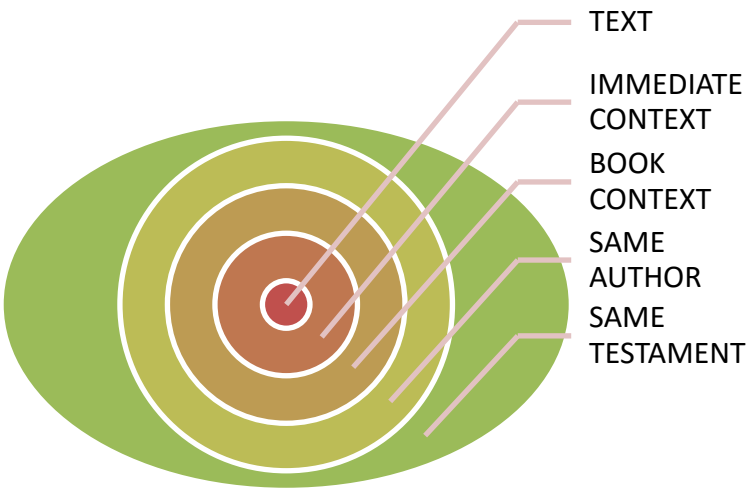
The corollary principle is**:** *A text without a context may be a pretext.* Here we define a 'pretext' as an alleged interpretation that only appears valid; in reality it obscures the real state of affairs. This serves as a warning against the popular tendency to engage in invalid proof-texting: quoting biblical

passage to prove a doctrine or standard for Christian living without regard for the literary context. Example: “Then he (Judas) went away and hanged himself” (Mt. 27: 5); “Jesus told him. Go and do likewise” (Luke 10: 37b); and “What you are about to do, do quickly” (Jn. 13: 27b).

The third principle is: *The smaller the passage being studied, the greater the chance of error*. Short texts usually contain very little information about the general theme of the larger passage. They give us less evidence about their meaning.

2.1.3 Circles of Contextual Study

To interpret a passage in its literary context one must examine different circles of context:



- Text:
- The immediate context: the material presented immediately before and after the passage under study.
- The book context: to understand a passage correctly means to understand it in terms of the whole book in which it occurs.
- The author’s corpus of writings context (where available):
- The Same Testament context:
- The Bible context:

2.2 Historical-cultural background

Beyond reflecting ancient languages, cultures and lifestyles, the biblical writers wrote their messages for people different from us. Every time we study a Scripture text, we must be aware of this cross-cultural and epoch-spanning dimension. The correct interpretation of a biblical passage will be consistent with the historical-cultural background of the passage. Three reasons why this principle is important:

2.2.1 Perspective

We need to comprehend the perspective of the original communicators- initiator and receptor- to understand the correct meaning. Because both the writer and the recipients shared the same cultural

background and information and lived at the same time in history; they never make explicit their perspective.

2.2.2 Mindset

A mindset describes a mental attitude or inclination. For Example, when Jesus called Herod Antipas a fox (Lk. 13: 32), his hearers understood "fox" to represent a certain value. To call someone a fox today would have different meanings or values, depending upon the culture (or subculture) involved.

2.2.3 Contextualization

The first two reasons, perspective and mindset, stress the importance of knowing the historical-cultural background for discovering the meaning intended for the original recipients. But the third reason, contextualization focuses on expressing that message correctly on today's world.

Four parts in studying a book or a letter

- Reading the book
- Studying the historical context
- surveying the "Character" of the book
- Outlining the book or letter

A. Read the book (How do we read)

1. Read one entire book or letter at a time
2. Read the book continuously
3. Read repeatedly
4. Read independently
5. Read the book prayerfully
6. Write all initial thoughts. "First impression matters"

B. Study the Historical Context

Historical context allows us know to understand the historical situation that called forth the writing of the book. To know this we need to answer the following five questions.

1. Who wrote the book or letter?
2. To whom the book was written?
3. When was the book or letter written?
4. From where the book written?
5. Why was the book written? This is very essential.

2.3 Word Meaning

The correct interpretation of Scripture is the meaning required by the normal meaning of the words in the context in which they occur. There are three steps for performing word studies:

a. Select words that require detailed analysis
b. Determine the range of meaning for the word
c. Select the meaning for the word
d.

2.4 Grammatical-structural Relationships

The grammatical and structural relationships of words and word-groups make up the final component of language communication we must assess to understand a writer's meaning.

Steps for discovering structural relationships

Natural division: Example, the dream of Dan. 7: 1-14 is one unit; its interpretation in 7: 15-28 is another.

Flow of thought: Trace the flow of thought in the passage for study. How does the writer's logic develop in the passage?

2.5 Literary Genre

Literary genre is the difference types of literature found in the Bible. Both old and New Testament feature have a number of subgenres, like parables, sermons, etc.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Contextualization means what the text means now for the contemporary reader.

Contextualization or Application focuses the truth of God's Word to specific, life related situations. It helps understand people what to do or to use what they have learned. Meaning refers to the ideas the biblical text originally intended to communicate to its readers; significance refers to the implication of that meaning in different, later situation. From this vantage of point, therefore, the meaning of any given passage of Scripture remains consistent no matter who is reading the text, while its significance may vary reader to reader.

3.1 The Importance of Application

Since not everyone shares the conviction that God intended his people to apply the Bible outside its original setting, we will discuss briefly two factors that support this conviction.

First, the Scriptures themselves repeatedly claim that people glorify God, by obeying- that is by applying- his Word. After Moses reviewed the laws at the end of the wilderness wandering, he concluded by promising the people blessing and prosperity if, and only if, they obeyed the laws (Deut. 30: 11020). The Assyrian and Babylonian captivities thus served as vivid reminders of the serious consequences of failing to live consistently with God's Word. Jesus also gives the necessity not merely to hear his Words but to put them into practice (Mt. 7: 13-27).

Second, the Bible claims that its message is relevant for later generations, not just its original readers. Individual parents are commanded to teach the law to their children on regular basis (Deut. 6: 7-25). The New Testament contains equally striking evidence confirming that God's Word was designed not only for the original readers but also for subsequent generations (Mt. 28: 20).

3.2 A four-step methodology for legitimate application

Legitimate application requires the use of both the general hermeneutical principles (establishing an accurate context, the correct meaning of words, the historical-cultural background, the larger literary contexts, and the like) and also special hermeneutics or genre criticism.

1. Determine the original application (s) intended by the passage.

In this step the interpreter should ask such questions. How did the biblical author of a given passage want his readers to respond? What did the author intend the readers to do? To answer these questions the interpreter asks a series of additional questions. Is there a command to obey, an example to follow or to avoid, a promise to claim, a warning to heed, a teaching to act on or a truth to believe.

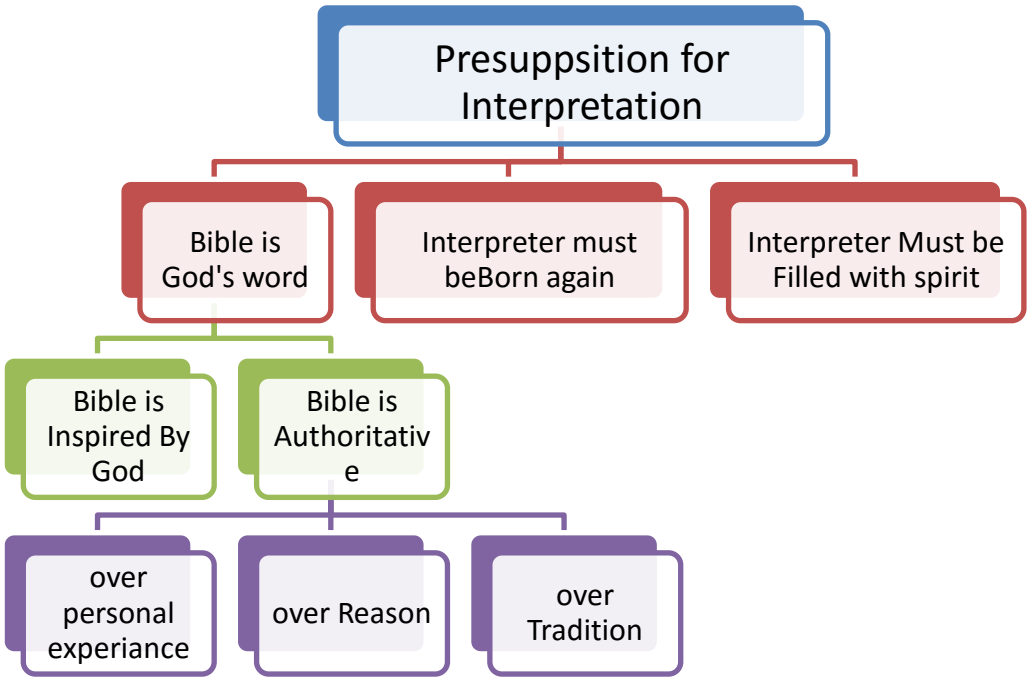
2. Evaluate the level of specificity of those applications to their original historical situations.

If the original specific applications are transferable across time and space to other audiences, apply them in culturally appropriate ways.

3. If the original applications are not transferable, identify one or more broader cross-cultural principles that the specific elements of the text reflect.
4. Identify the Cross-Cultural Principles: Find appropriate applications for today that implement those principles.

3.3 Presuppositions for Interpretation

Before interpreting the bible, one should consider the following presuppositions.



3.3.1 The Bible Is God's Word

The Bible is God's word. This is not something we are seeking to prove, this is something we take as a given as Evangelicals, as those who believe the Bible is God's Word, we take it as a given that

the Bible is God's Word. What does that mean that the Bible is God's Word? I want to look at two aspects of that.

1. **The Bible is Inspired by God.**

The Bible is inspired by God; that is claimed implicitly throughout Scripture, the Old Testament carries a sense, a constant throughout that this is the Lord's word, ―the Lord says,― the prophets frequently say that. The New Testament has the stamp of apostolic authority. Compare these various Old Testament citations in the New.

Acts 2:16 citing Joel 2:28-32 says, ―This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. In the last days," God says, ―I will pour out my Spirit on all people.― So, in Acts 2 Peter cites Joel 2 and he cites it as something spoken by the prophets of the Old Testament as given by the prophet. But then if we look at Hebrews 3:7 citing Psalm 95 the writer of Hebrews says, ―So as the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.― Who spoke in the Old Testament? It was the Holy Spirit speaking.

We get maybe an overall clear view of inspiration in Acts 4:25 citing Psalm 2:1 it says, ―So, the Lord said, by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant our father David.― Who spoke in this case? It was the Lord speaking by means of the Holy Spirit through the mouth or through the spokesperson, that is, David. So, we can see that Scripture is God's Word given by his Holy Spirit spoken by the human author. So, inspiration, the inspiration of God's Word, is claimed implicitly throughout Scripture.

It is also claimed explicitly, one of the key texts for the inspiration of Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:16-17 where it says, ―All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." That word inspired by God is a Greek word the **opneustos** which seems to have been coined by Paul himself, he seems to have made it up by combining two words. It means God exhaled or God breathed out his word.

How did God do that? Scripture does not tell us exactly how God did it, but we do know that this is God's Word by virtue of his divine inspiration. 2 Peter 1:21 gives us a little bit of a hint of how God did it. It says, ―No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but people moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." So God moved individuals to speak the message that he wished to deliver.

Now one clarification is very important here; this does not mean dictation. In other words, for the most part God did not dictate Scripture word by word to these human authors. How do we know that? How do we know that God's Word was not given, for the most part, through dictation? Well, the answer to that question is that the different writers of the Old Testament and the New Testament have different styles, their personalities come out, their style of writing comes out and so we see that there is a human dimension in inspiration.

If all of Scripture was simply dictated by the Holy Spirit to human authors we would expect it to have a uniform style, but since we see the human authors' personalities and the vocabulary they use and the grammar that they use coming through in the Scripture that they write we see that this is not simply dictated. That is the first thing we mean by the Bible is God's Word.

2. **The Authority of Scripture**

The second thing we mean by the Bible is God's Word is not just its inspiration as Scripture but its authority as Scripture. And what do we mean by authority? We mean that Scripture has claim to our life and that we submit ourselves to Scripture's authority.

1. ***Over Personal Experience***

Three aspects of authority – we can see that Scripture is authoritative over personal experience. We don't allow our human experience to determine what we believe or the behaviors we practice, we submit to Scripture's commands, Scripture's authoritative statements.

2. ***Over Reason***

Not just authoritative over our experience, Scripture is also authoritative over reason. What do I mean by that? It does not mean that we leave our brains at the door when we read Scripture. We mean by that, that it's authoritative over rationalism or over naturalism. We assume the supernatural, we assume the existence of God and the fact that God engages in human history and God intervenes in human history. Another thing we mean by the authority of Scripture over reason is that unresolved issues or apparent contradictions that we find in Scripture do not negate Scripture's authority, instead we accept a wait and see attitude if we cannot resolve a particular issue in Scripture. I believe that God is a God of reason and that his Scripture will stand up under historical and scientific scrutiny.

3. Over Tradition

So, authoritative over experience, authoritative over reason, and third, authoritative over tradition or dogma. Church traditions are good. The ancient creeds of the church are good.

They help us to understand who God is and what his word means but ultimately all church tradition must be subordinated to the authority of Scripture. So, Scripture is authoritative over all church tradition or dogma. The rallying cry of the Protestant reformation was Sola Scriptura, that is that ultimately Scripture has the final authority.

Now sometimes we think of certain groups as placing tradition over Scripture. Maybe we think of the Roman Catholic Church, for example, as placing tradition over Scripture, but, in fact, we all have a tendency to do that, because all of us, whether Baptist, whether Methodist, whether Presbyterians, have church traditions that in many ways govern the way we think and the way we believe and so ultimately we are to submit those traditions to the authority of Scripture. So, our first given, our first presupposition for our biblical interpretation is that the Bible is God's Word.

3.3.2 The Interpreter Must Be Born Again

The interpreter must be in a relationship with Jesus Christ in order to comprehend, fully comprehend God's Word.

2 Corinthians 4:4 says*, "The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ who is the image of God."*

1 Corinthians 2:14 says, *"The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."*

So ultimately it is the Spirit who enlightens and illuminates Scripture so that we can understand it.

Now that raises a significant question and that question is can non-Christians understand the Bible? I raise that question because we have got many great Bible scholars who do not have faith in Jesus Christ, who are not believers and yet they know the historical culture, they know the background, they apparently interpret God's Word very well. So, how can I say, then, that the interpreter must be born again? I think the answer to that question is that someone can interpret Scripture but if they do not apply it to their lives they are mishandling God's Word.

Hebrews 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

God's Word is meant not just to be read and understood, it is intended to be applied to our lives. Like a double-edged sword, it is meant to cut us, to challenge us, to change us, to shape us, to guide us, and if God's Word does not guide us, if we do not allow it to guide us then we are mishandling God's Word.

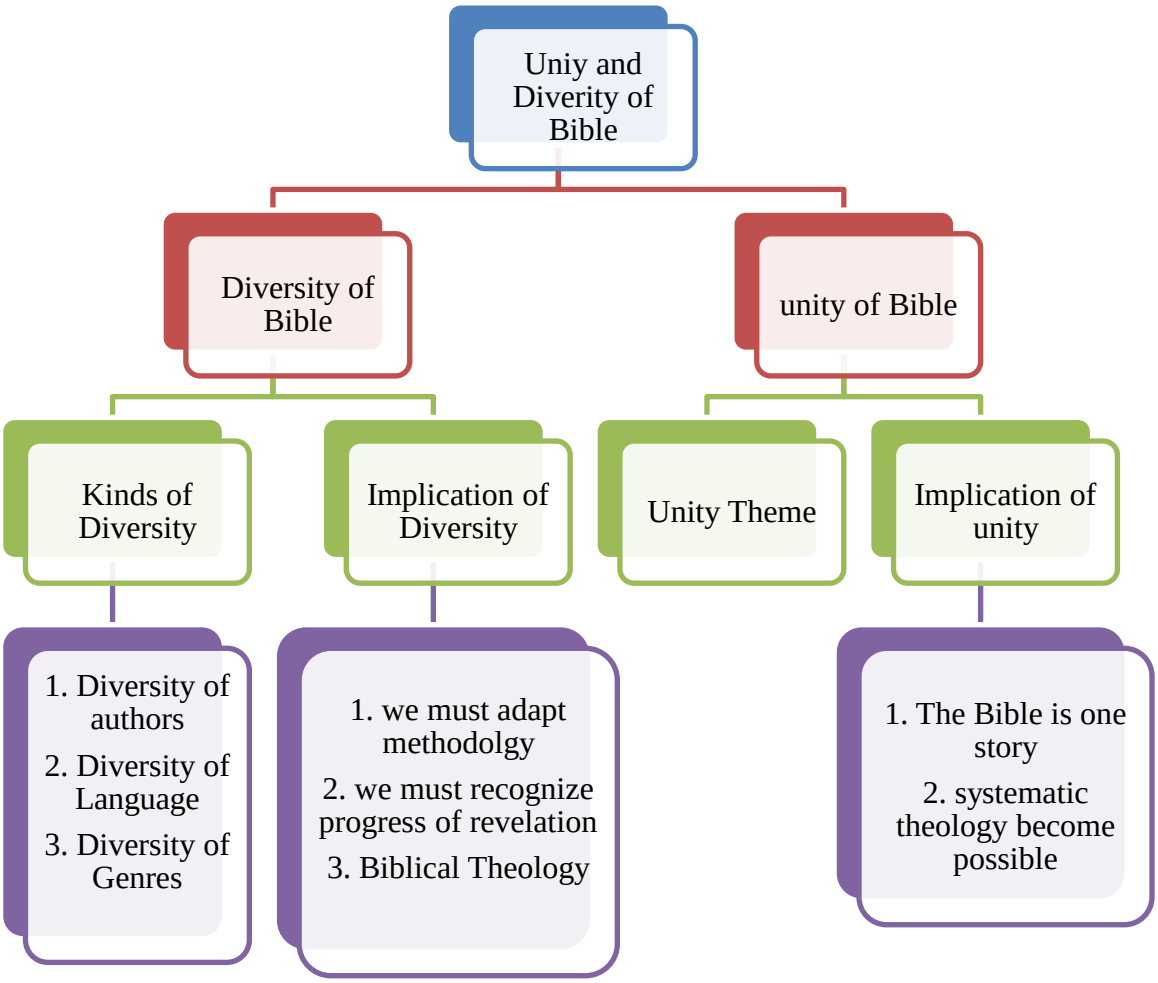
3.3.3 The Interpreter Must Be Filled with the Spirit

The interpreter must be filled with the Spirit. Not only must they be born, again but they must actually be empowered to understand God's Word and be guided in their understanding of God's Word through the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13 says, *"—But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, he will not speak on his own, he will speak only what he hears and he will tell you what is yet to come."* Now that passage was given by Jesus to his twelve disciples in the Upper Room discourse on the last night of his life here on earth before his crucifixion. So it was given specifically to them, it was not given to all believers. But the truth that it teaches certainly applies to all believers because we like the twelve disciples have the Spirit living in us and he is our guide and he is our direction. So in order to properly hear God speak, to properly understand God's Word we have to be filled and empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER FOUR
UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF THE BIBLE

The best way to understand the nature of the Bible is with the terms unity and diversity. Together these two terms really help us to understand what the Bible is and how we ought to approach it. So we will start with the term diversity and speak about various aspects of diversity.



3.4 Diversity of the Bible

The Bible has diversity. It exists as two very different "Testaments" written in three languages, in different cultures, over a vast span of time. The Bible embodies a diverse collection of kinds of literature: legal, historical, poetic, prophetic, gospel, epistolary, and apocalyptic. The various authors write with distinct purposes, to different audiences, on different topics, and with varying emphasis.

4.1.1 Kinds of Diversity

By diversity we mean that the Bible is a diverse collection of literary works. Various kinds of diversity; we have diversity of time for example. By diversity of time we mean that the Bible is written over a long period of time, something like 1,500 years.

***Diversity of authors*;** we have authors from all walks of life in the Bible. As authors of the Bible we have fisherman, we have tent makers, we have prophets, we have priests, we have kings, we have a whole range of different occupations, different backgrounds from different cultures and contexts.

Diversity of languages*;* the Bible is written in two main languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament was written in Greek, there is a smattering of Aramaic, both in the Old Testament and then a few Aramaic words in the New Testament. So we have diversity of authors, diversity of times, diversity of cultures, and diversity of languages.

Diversity of genres; A genre refers to a different literary form. What kinds of genres are in the Bible? The two main genres are prose and poetry, but there are many, many subgenres. There are psalms, there are parables, there are letters, there are historical narratives, there are laws, there are proverbs, and there are prophecies. So we have got this extraordinary diversity of Scripture.

4.1.2 Implications of Diversity

How does that diversity affect the way we read Scripture? Let me just give you three key implications or perhaps I should first ask the question what are the implications associated with this great diversity of Scripture, that it was written by many different authors in many different times and places, representing various theological perspectives, what are some of the implications of that diversity? Well, here are three implications of the diversity of the Bible.

1. We must adapt methodology for various kinds of literature.

The first implication is that we must adapt our methods for various kinds of literature. As we just mentioned one of the aspects of diversity is diversity of genre and different genres require different methods of interpretation, different approaches.

Let me just give you some illustrations of this from the Bible.

Example 1of apocalyptic literature of Daniel 7:6

Daniel 7:6, *"After that I looked and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard, and on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads and it was given authority to rule."*

We cannot possibly understand it unless we identify and recognize that this is what is called *apocalyptic literature*. Apocalyptic literature often uses symbolic, sometimes bazaar imagery in order to communicate spiritual truth or in order to communicate some historical event or some historical person. And so in order to understand this passage we have to first acknowledge and identify what literary form it is.

Here is another passage, Ecclesiastes 1:1-4, *"Meaningless meaning less says the teacher, utterly meaningless; everything is meaningless. What does anyone gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go but the earth remains forever."* If we read that passage and ask is that true, is everything ultimately meaningless? In order to understand this passage in God's Word we have to first identify its literary form. Is this meant to be God's wisdom, is this meant to be absolute truth, that everything is meaningless, or is this truth given from a human perspective apart from God? Identifying the genre of the Book of Ecclesiastes is essential before we can understand it. So we are speaking about the diversity of different genres and depending on the genre we have to adopt an appropriate strategy of interpretation.

Here is another example of that, Psalm 137:9, *"Happy is the one who takes your babies and smashes them against the rocks."* Well, that is not a very pretty picture nor does it sound like the loving God who cares about all people. How do we understand that passage? We have to recognize

its genre, its literary form. It is not just a psalm; it is actually what we call an *imprecatory psalm*. An imprecatory psalm is the psalmist crying out in agony and suffering against his enemies. So, we recognize this is not necessarily something we should be saying about our enemies, this is someone's human emotion expressed towards God. Identifying that literary form or that genre is essential if we are going to understand that passage.

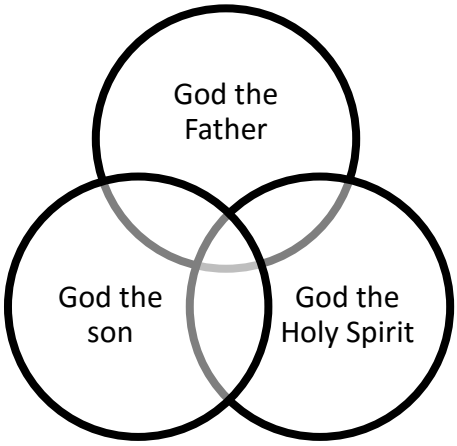
Here is another example, Isaiah 55:12. Isaiah 55:12 says, *"You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands."* We might ask, is that true? Will the mountains one day burst into song? Will the trees of the field clap their hands? In order to understand this passage you have to acknowledge and recognize that the genre is poetry, it is poetic and it is eschatological poetry or focusing on God's end-time salvation and so it is using symbols, it is using metaphors to describe the restoration of creation at the end of time. So, is it to be taken literally? The answer to that question is no, it is not to be taken literally. Why? Because it is *figurative poetry*, it is meant to be taken figuratively.

So identifying that literary form is essential if we are going to understand God's Word. So, that was our first implication of the diversity of Scripture is that we must adapt methodology for various kinds of literature.'

2. We must recognize the progress of revelation.

Here is a second implication of the diversity of the Bible. It reminds us, that diversity, that we must recognize the progress of revelation. There is a development of doctrine in Scripture. Later stages of the Bible do not replace the earlier stages, but they clarify the earlier passages and they develop a gradual developing understanding of the people of God.

Hebrews 1:1 illustrates what we mean by the progress of revelation. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe."* That verse points out that the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, was given at various times and in various places in a somewhat scattered way through the prophets. The New Covenant, the New Testament, is God's final revelation, complete revelation, through his Son. So we see progress from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.



Trinity is Progress Revelation

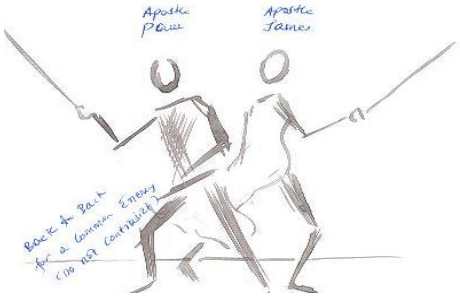
Take the doctrine of the **Trinity**, for example, the truth that God is three persons, one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, perhaps the most foundational truth of Christianity, and the doctrine of the Trinity. But if you read your Old Testament the doctrine of the Trinity is not clearly taught. We get some hints of it, some suggestions of it in the Old Testament when God says, —Let us make man in our own image." The —us" there may perhaps refer to the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, but it is certainly not clear. We see the Spirit of God hovering over the waters at the time of creation, but in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is not clearly identified as a distinct person within the Trinity, the Spirit of God is the vitality of God, the presence of God in

the world, the power and presence of God. So, the Old Testament we do not see the Trinity clearly taught. We get to the New Testament; of course, we see God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We could point to many, many passages in the New Testament that confirm the doctrine of the Trinity. So we see this progressive revelation from the Old Testament to the New. The diversity of Scripture reminds us that we have to read an Old Testament writer within that writer's original context. We must not force New Testament meanings, for example, on the Old Testament; we must allow each writer to speak for themselves. Why did God not reveal himself as Trinity in the Old Covenant or more clearly, maybe we should say, as Trinity in the Old Covenant? Well, one possible answer to that is that the nation of Israel was living in a context of polygamy where there were many, many gods and the nations around had competing gods and perhaps the rallying cry of Judaism, ―Hear, O Israel, the Lord he is one;" one as opposed to the many gods of the nations. So perhaps God revealed himself in the unity alone in the Old Covenant in order to keep Israel from adopting a polytheistic view of God or that there were many gods competing. The demonstration of the one true God was essential for Israel's religion under the Old Covenant. So there is one example of the progress of revelation.

Let me give you another example of the progress of revelation. How about the practice of sacrificing animals? The Old Covenant commanded animal sacrifices to be made and those sacrifices were meant to pay the penalty for sins and we get many Old Testament passages that refer to the sacrifice of an animal paying the penalty for sins. We get to the New Covenant, however, the New Testament, and it becomes clear that Jesus Christ is the only true and ultimate sacrifice and that the sacrifices of the Old Covenant never really did pay for sin. Hebrews 10:4 says, ―For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." That is Hebrews 10:4. Well, the Old Covenant seemed to suggest that the blood of bulls and goats did take away sins; the New Covenant confirms that the blood of bulls and goats, the sacrifices of animals, never did actually take away sins. So how do we bring these two together? Well, the answer is the progress of revelation. God progressively revealed his plan to human beings. Alright, those are two implications of the diversity of the Bible. The first is we must adapt methodology for various kinds of literature or various genres. The second is we must recognize the progress of revelation.

3. We must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves.

Here is our third implication of diversity. The third implication is we must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves. Then we can seek an internal unity behind their diverse expressions of faith. So we must first allow them to speak for themselves, then we must seek an internal unity behind the diverse expressions of faith. Too often we have a tendency to interpret one author exclusively by another author instead of first listening to that particular author. We must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves.



Example 1: Compare two New Testament writers, **James** and **Paul**, on the issue of faith and works. At first reading these two seem to contradict each other.

Paul says a person is justified by faith alone apart from works. A person is justified, or declared righteous by God by faith alone apart from works.

James on the other hand says faith without works is dead. He also says you see a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

These two writers at first seem to be contradicting each other. Well, this point about diversity, we must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves. We must listen to James in the context of James' letter. We must listen to Paul in the context of his life and letters and overall theology. So we must first of all allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves. Once we understand James and once we understand Paul we can be confident that these two will ultimately agree, they will complement each other rather than contradict each other.

Example 2: Compare the writer to the Hebrews on the issue of eternal security with the Apostle Paul on the same issue. Paul, for example, in a great passage in Romans 8 says, ―For those God foreknew he also predestined." It goes on to say, ―Those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified." So Paul makes it clear that those that God foreknew, those he saved he will glorify. That once you are saved you can be certain that you will retain that salvation forever. The writer to the Hebrews, on the other hand, says in Hebrews 10:26-27, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." Now, at first reading it sounds as though the writer to the Hebrews is saying that you can lose the salvation you have gained. So how do you bring Paul and the writer to the Hebrews together on an issue like this, an issue of eternal security, an issue of whether we are once saved and always saved? Well, the diversity of Scripture reminds us that we need to first and foremost listen to each author in their original context. We have to understand what Paul is saying in his context and we have to understand what the writer to the Hebrews is saying in his context. And ultimately we know that these two will be brought together, they will be complementary rather than contradictory. This issue of the diverse theologies of various New Testament writers, the study of each diverse theology is known as biblical theology and I want to introduce that topic right now briefly because it is very important in terms of our interpretation of the Bible.

Let me first of all define for you the word biblical theology. Biblical theology deals with God's progressive revelation through the distinct theological emphases of persons and periods. So, if I am speaking about Paul's theology, that is the distinct theological emphases, a particular person I can talk about John's theology, the Johannine theology, John's theology of the New Testament, or I can talk about Isaiah's theology or I can talk even broadly, maybe about prophetic theology, the theology in general of the Old Testament prophets. Doing theology as we apply God's Word to life is always a three-step process and biblical theology is the center point of those three steps. We will be talking more about this in future lectures. But essentially the first step is what we call exegesis. Exegesis is seeking to determine the author's original meaning in a particular passage. So, that is our first step, to look at a passage and understand what it means. But the second step then is to relate that particular passage to an author's overall perspective. Let me give you an illustration. Suppose we are reading Paul's letter to the Philippians. Well, we try to read that passage, that letter in its original context and we read it trying to discern what Paul intends to say in that passage. But then we take that message and we look at it from the perspective, from the context of Paul's theology as revealed in his other letters. That is biblical theology.

Biblical theology is examining this distinct theological emphasis of a particular person or of a particular period. So every biblical author has a distinct theological perspective, a theological

perspective that is not contradictory of other perspectives, but is complementary of other perspectives. I said doing theology is a three-step process. The first step is exegesis, the second step is biblical theology, and the third step we could call then systematic theology or taking those various distinct theological perspectives; Paul's theology, John's theology, Isaiah's theology, and bringing them together into a system of truth or a systematic theology, statements of absolute or statements of God's truth that we call systematic theology. The whole point of this discussion is that before we can identify systematic truth, or God's truth, we have to first read God's Word in context. Doing biblical theology is just reading Paul's letter within the context of Paul's thought world and John's letter within the context of John's theology. So we have examined three implications of the diversity of Scripture. We must adapt a methodology for various kinds of literature were our first one. Secondly, we must recognize the progress of revelation, that later doctrine does not replace earlier but explains it, develops it, gives us a greater understanding of who God is and what his purpose for the world is. And our third implication is that we must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves and then seek an internal unity behind their diverse expressions of faith. Alright, so that is diversity. We might call the diversity of Scripture the human side of the Bible, because we recognize it was written by human beings in different cultures, in different languages at different times. So that is the human side of Scripture, but there is also a divine side of Scripture related to the inspiration by God. And so diversity was our first point under the nature of the Bible.

4.2 Unity of the Bible

The Bible is united in a single theme, for example, covenant, promise, the mighty acts of God, communion, and the life of God's people, dominion, justice, or righteousness. It is also united in content.

4.2.1 Unity of Theme

We have an ultimate unity in Scripture and it is a unity of theme. That theme could be stated in a variety of ways. Let me give you one statement of theme, in other words, what the whole Bible is about from beginning to end. Here is a statement of theme that would describe the entire biblical revelation and that is:

The actions of God in bringing salvation to humanity through Jesus Christ, it is the story of God's redemption. So, the actions of God in bringing redemption to creation through Jesus Christ, through Jesus the Messiah, this theme can summarize the whole of Scripture, from beginning to end.

The Old Testament looks forward to the coming of Jesus Christ and the salvation he will accomplish. The New Testament looks back at the salvation achieved through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and then it looks forward to the final salvation, which will be accomplished when he comes.

I would like to look at one passage that really summarizes this whole issue of the unity of theme in Scripture. It is in Luke 24. It is the resurrection appearance by Jesus to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. These two disciples are walking along when Jesus joins them. He has just risen from the dead, but they are prevented, God prevents them from being able to recognize him, and as they walk along he asked them, ―What were you discussing together along the way?" And it says they stood still, their faces downcast. One of them said, ―Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not

know the things that have happened there in these days?" Jesus plays along and says, ―What things are you talking about?" And they describe, they say, ―About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. This Jesus was this powerful prophet and we thought that he might be the one to redeem Israel. We thought he might be the Messiah, the Savior of the world, but he has been crucified, he died and so he can't possibly be the one we thought he was."

Jesus responds to them with this, he said to them, ―How foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" Jesus says, ―You've missed it haven't you? You don't understand. Isn't this all along what the prophet said, that the Messiah would have to suffer and die before entering into his glory?" And then verse 27, this is Luke 24:27, ―And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." Beginning with

Moses and all the prophets; Moses refers to the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis through Deuteronomy; the prophets are the books that follow that. Moses and the prophets is a shorthand way of summarizing the whole of the Old Testament. So Luke, the author, tells us beginning with Genesis and moving all the way through the Old Testament revelation he explained to them what was said in all Scriptures concerning himself. What an incredible sermon that must have been as Jesus took those two disciples through essentially the whole revelation of the Old Testament, because all Scripture ultimately points to Jesus Christ. So the unifying theme, once again, of all of Scripture is the actions of God in bringing redemption to creation through Jesus the Messiah. Genesis describes how God created a perfect world. How he placed Adam and Eve within the Garden to tend it, to keep it, but then Adam and Eve rebelled against him and they were judged by God and all of creation entered a fallen state. The whole rest of the revelation of Scripture is God's purpose and plan to redeem that creation. His purpose and plan through the Messiah through Jesus Christ who is the center point of history. So, the unity of

Scripture tells us that we have one central theme and that central theme, according to Luke 24, is Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant looks forward to Jesus Christ; the New Covenant looks back to what he accomplished on the cross. So we have seen the diversity of Scripture written by human authors in diverse situations and contexts. Now we see the unity of Scripture.

4.2.2 Implications of unity

1. The bible is one story.

Now here are two key implications of unity. The first implication of the unity of Scripture is that the Bible is one story from beginning to end, though made up of diverse literature, though made up of many, many short stories, in one sense every book of the Bible relates to God's ultimate redemption.

Let me just give you an example of what we mean by the Bible as one story. Take the Old Testament story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis. It is a great narrative, a great story in its own right. The story of Joseph who is favored by his father Jacob over his brothers, his brothers hate him and so at one point they seize him and sell him as a slave into Egypt, a story of sibling rivalry, but also a story of Joseph's faithfulness as he perseveres and remains faithful to God. And God takes him and blesses him in Egypt, he becomes second in command only second to /Pharaoh in all of Egypt. Eventually his brothers, because of a famine in the land of Israel, come to him, they are

reunited with Joseph. Just a wonderful story; we can understand that on the level of story, we can talk about moral lessons and so forth that are taught by that story, but ultimately that story fits into the larger picture of God's overall story, the grand narrative, what we might call the metanarrative of Scripture that begins in Genesis and comes to conclusion in revelation.

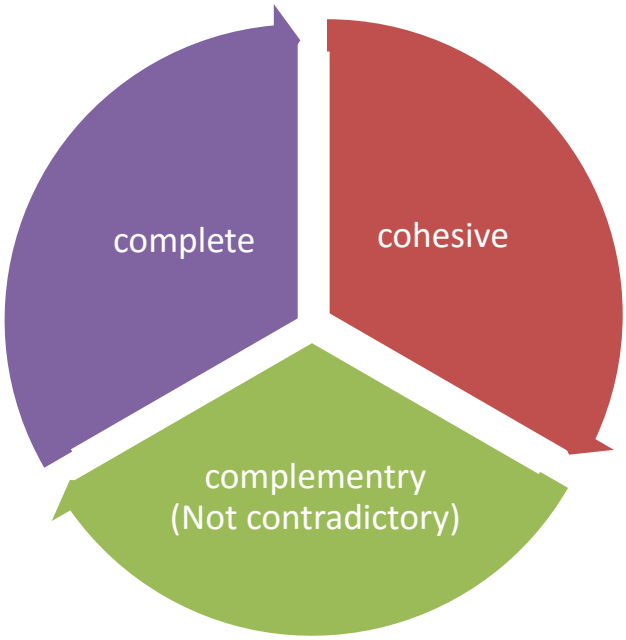
The Joseph story is part of a larger story; that larger story is the story of Israel. Because the Joseph story shows us how God preserved his people, the nation Israel, during a great time of famine by sending Joseph ahead of his family into Egypt he prepared the way for them and so the children of Israel were saved, were delivered from that famine. So it is part of Israel's story, the story of their redemption. But Israel's story is part of God's grand narrative, God's story of redemption that begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. The story of God's plan to save and redeem his people, because through the nation Israel the Messiah would come, Jesus Christ, who would suffer and die for the sins of the world, who would reverse the results of Adam and Eve's sins. So the Joseph story fits into the larger perspective of Scripture confirming the Bible is one story.

Let me just give you one more example of that, another Old Testament book, the Book of Esther. The Book of Esther is unique in many ways and one way it is unique is the fact that the name God never appears in Esther, not once is God mentioned in Esther. Some have wondered why this book is even part of the Bible, if God is not even mentioned. But the story of Esther is part of a greater story, just like the Joseph story, it is part of two greater stories actually, it is part of the story of Israel, because Esther is once again a story of how God's people are rescued, are delivered. When someone attempts to destroy them, Esther becomes queen and through that story she accomplishes Israel's deliverance.

The story of Israel's deliverance is once again part of the larger story of God's redemptive plan for all of humanity. So, every small narrative in the Old Testament fits into the larger narrative of Israel, and every larger narrative of Israel fits into the grand or metanarrative of all of Scripture beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation. So we can place each story into its context of God's ultimate purpose and plan for all humanity. So there is our first implication of unity is that the Bible is one story.

2. A systematic theology becomes a possibility.

Here is a second implication of unity and that is that a systematic theology becomes a possibility. What do I mean by that? I mean we can ask the question what is truth and by examining Scripture we can come up with answers, with propositions, with statements that are complete, that are cohesive, and that are complementary, not contradictory. Let me go through those three C's for you. We can come up with statements that are complete. We recognize that we have the whole story. Genesis through Revelation forms a complete narrative of God's purpose and plan covering all topics that we need for faith and practice. So the unity of the Bible reminds us that God's story is **complete**. Secondly, it is **cohesive**. It is a story that makes sense that begins at one point, which ends at another, that describes God's actions in human history. Not only is it complete and cohesive ultimately it is **complementary**, not contradictory. We can read one author and understand them within their context and then read another and understand them within their context and those two authors will be complementary, they will not contradict one another, because of the unity of God's Word. Alright, so what have we seen? We have seen two aspects of the nature of the Bible. We have seen the diversity of Scripture written by many authors at many times at many places.



We have seen the unity of Scripture. Ultimately it is one story, it is God's Word. One analogy we can draw here, the Bible is God's Word, it is the written word. Jesus is identified in John 1:1 as the Living Word, *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."* Jesus as the Word means that Jesus is God's self-revelation. When we talk about Jesus' nature, we talk about him being fully human and yet fully divine. By being fully human he could pay the penalty for our sins. By being fully divine he could die for all the sins of the world. So Jesus as the Living Word of God, God's living revelation is fully human and fully divine. But the written Word, the Bible, is also fully human and fully divine and these two aspects of the nature of the Bible, diversity and unity, point to the humanity of the Bible written in real-life situations by real authors in real time in real place. That is the human side. But it is not only fully human it is also fully divine; it is God's Word and that gives the Bible this unity from beginning to end. We can ask the question what is truth and we can recognize that the Bible's answer will be trustworthy and will be true.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXEGESIS

Exegesis: To determine the meaning of a passage in its original context.



Exegesis is from a Greek word meaning to draw out the meaning of the text. Our first goal in interpreting Scripture is to draw out the author's original meaning. We contrast exegesis with what we call eisegesis. Eisegesis is another Greek word that means to read into an outside meaning. In other words our goal is to hear scripture speak to us not to bring our ideas and confirm our own presuppositions and ideas in scripture.

Let me just illustrate this for you.

Exodus 29:38 says, ―This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day, two lambs a year old." Exodus 29:38 commands us to offer on the altar regularly each day two lambs a year old. So do we follow that Old Testament command? Well, you are probably aware most of us do not follow that Old Testament command, because that command was not given to us; it was given to the nation Israel under the Old Covenant.

The following verses are not applicable to us because of contextualization, Deuteronomy 21:18, Leviticus 19:19, Take even one of the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath command, Exodus 35:2. *There are many, many, many Old Testament commands that we do not obey.*

Let me just give you a few New Testament commands that many Christians said they do not obey. Greet one another with a kiss of love Peter says in 1 Peter 5:14. Many Christians today do not greet with a kiss, they might great with a hand shake. Many cultures do greet with a kiss, but certainly not all Christians believe that this command is meant for today. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul says, ―For every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head.‖ Paul says that a woman must not pray or prophesy in church with her head uncovered; she has to veil or cover her head. Now, in many churches around the world today women worship, they pray or they prophesy with their head uncovered. Are those women disobeying God? Are they disobeying the truth by praying with their head uncovered? Well, many Christians believe, at least, that this command is not meant for Christians for all time. The process of contextualization is looking at a passage of Scripture and trying to determine whether it applies today and in what way it applies today.

One more example, 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul says, ―No longer drink water exclusively but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.‖ In this passage Paul apparently commands to drink wine, but of course we recognize that Paul is writing to Timothy in a very specific situation and that command is meant for Timothy. So the question of contextualization is asking the question how this command applies to today.

5.1 Avoid Shortcutting the Hermeneutical Process

1. Application without Exegesis

There are mistakes that are sometimes made and we want to avoid those mistakes as we read and study God‘s word. Let me just give you two mistakes, possible mistakes, that we want to avoid. The first mistake is application without exegesis; in other words, applying God‘s word without fully understanding God‘s word, application without exegesis. One form of this is called subjectivity, assuming that whatever I first understand the text to mean is what it means to me; applying the passage directly to my life without understanding its original meaning or context. So this is application without exegesis, applying it without determining its original meaning. You may have been in a Bible study, perhaps, where a passage was read and then everyone went around and described what they thought it meant, or how it applied to them.

2 Exegesis without contextualization

The opposite is also true, however. Some people do exegesis without contextualization, or they might understand what the text meant, but then they misapply it to their life today in some way.

Let me give you a couple examples of that. A liberal error related to exegesis without contextualization is not allowing the Bible to transform your life. Reading it, understanding it in its original context, but not allowing it to change us. I have read many commentaries that are very well written, that quite fully understand then original context and culture and background and language, but then the author is not a true believer, the author does not allow that message to change his or her life.

Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* God‘s word is meant to be read and understood and ultimately applied, it is meant to transform our lives. So, we cannot fully interpret God‘s word until we allow it to change us. That might be a liberal error associated with exegesis without contextualization, but there are also conservative errors that misapply God‘s word. And one example is confusing eternal principles with cultural applications. Sometimes in Scripture what we have are specific cultural applications of eternal principles, but God never intended those things necessarily to apply for all time.

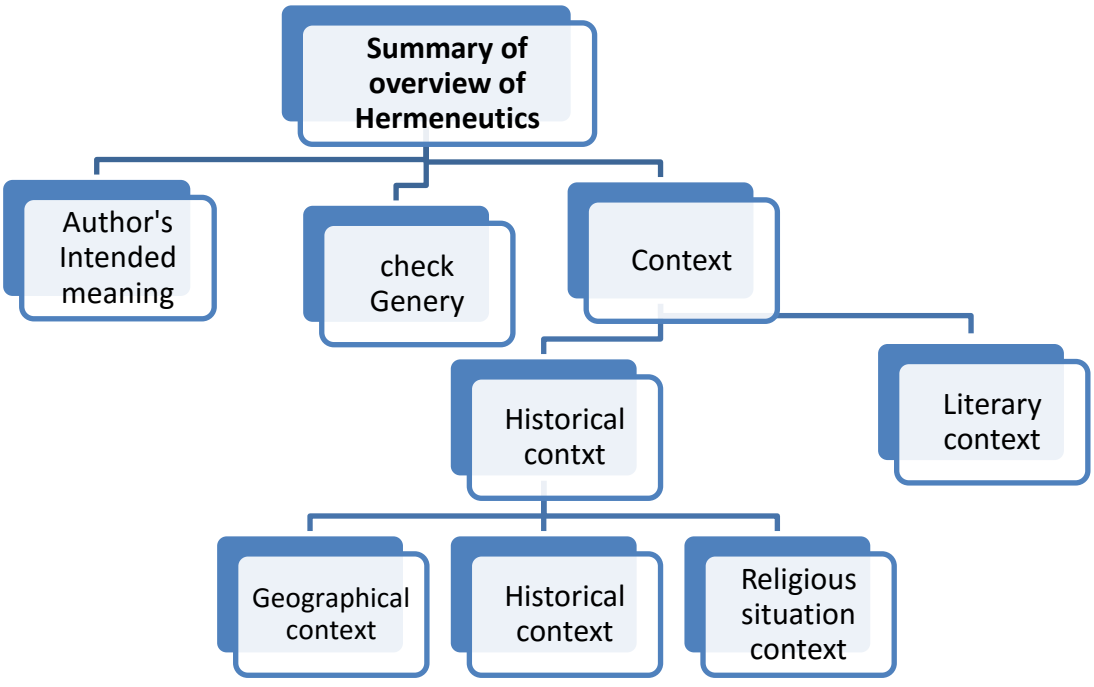
For example, 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul says a woman should remain silent in church. Now, we have to first of all exegete that and understand what it means in its original context, because it is obvious that Paul does not mean that command to apply to all women in all churches for all time. We know that because even earlier in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul assumes that women are prophesying and praying in church. So, exegesis without contextualization would say, ―Paul said it this way, therefore this is the way we should apply it," without fully understanding why Paul said it and then determining what its appropriate application is for today.

A second conservative error with reference to exegesis without contextualization we might call the magic answer book or the verse for the day syndrome. And that is searching Scripture for the answer to a specific problem and so taking a passage out of context.

It is like the young soldier who was in training camp, he was in boot camp, and he was really suffering under the rigors of military life and he desperately wanted to go home. So he began

searching his Bible for an answer to help him, something to encourage him and he came to Genesis 31:13 where it says "arise, get out of this place," and he took that as a message from the Lord, so he deserted his army post and he went home. Well, his interpretation was fine, his exegesis was fine. He understood what that meant, that meant arise, get out of the place, but he applied it inappropriately to himself. That passage was never meant to be for him, it was meant for an entire different life situation. In many Christian books I read stories of people who understand and discern God's will in this way. I remember reading the story of a woman whose husband was considering taking a new job, but she just was not sure that it was the right job to take, because it would require them to leave their home and move to another town and she was reading her Bible and she came to Luke 4:43 where Jesus says, —I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.‖ She read that verse and took that as a message from God that they were to move from this town to the Well, the problem with that is that passage was never meant to tell us that we should move from one town to another. That passage was Jesus telling his disciples that his mission was to proclaim the good news to all the towns of Israel. In fact, that woman could have read another verse; she could have read Isaiah 33:20 that says, —Look upon Zion, a tent that will not moved. She could have taken that as a passage telling her she should stay put. The verse goes on, —Its steak will never be pulled up nor any of its ropes broken.‖ So she could take that verse to mean that she should stay in her town and they should not move. You see, the problem is that is not what the verse ever meant. As Fee and Stewart said, —A text cannot mean today what it never meant in its original context." Appropriate contextualization, appropriate application has to come from appropriate exegesis, determining what the author meant in their original context.

5.6 Summary of overview of Hermeneutics



1. Determine the Author's Intended Meaning

Here are four principles of exegesis. If we keep these four principles in mind then we are likely to accurately determine the author's intended meaning and that in fact is our first principle. Our first principle of exegesis is that, in general, a biblical text has one meaning and that meaning is the

author‘s intended meaning. We are looking to determine what the author intended. Our goal is not to bring our meaning and impose it upon the text, our goal is to hear the original author in the original author‘s original context and determine the meaning of the text from there.

Double Meaning?

In some text there is an intentional double meaning introduced.

For Example in the book Revelation phrase, the revelation of Jesus Christ, could mean the revelation from Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ is revealing the message of this book. But it also could mean the revelation about Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ himself is revealed in the book and in fact both are true. It is Jesus Christ who gives the revelation to John. He is the one who presents it, gives the message to the seven churches and then the rest of the revelation, but the book is also very much a revelation of who Jesus Christ is and we get the picture of the glorified Son of Man, we get Christ returning in glory at the end of the book and so both meanings are possible. Could the author have intended both, in fact, is there a double meaning to that phrase? Many scholars think that that is likely.

In that case it was the author‘s intent to present a double meaning not just a single. So still we are talking about the author‘s one intent and that intent just entails a double meaning.

Let me give you another example of a possible double meaning or word play. It is in Mark‘s Gospel chapter 2 in the context of what we call the Sabbath controversies. Jesus and his disciples are walking through a grain field on the Sabbath. His disciples begin to pick heads of grain and eat them and Pharisees who are present say, ―Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?‖ The disciples are taking grain and eating it, or breaking off the heads and eating it, and the Pharisees view that as work and work is forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus responds by pointing to an example from David‘s life. He says, ―Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need, how he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread which is lawful only for priests to eat.‖ So Jesus points to an example where David the anointed king actually did something that was, at least on the surface, contrary to the command of God. Then Jesus concludes with this statement, ―The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.‖ The Sabbath was made to be a blessing for people, people were not created by God in order to keep the Sabbath is what Jesus‘ first response is and his second response then is, ―So, the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath. Now, in context that word Son of Man could mean two different things. Son of Man is a Hebrew way of referring to a human being. Ben'adam in Hebrew means a human being, a person. So, if you read it in that sense it would say the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath, so people have lordship over the Sabbath. In other words they are more important; therefore, they have dominion over the Sabbath. If there is a physical need that needs to be met, it should be met. That is one way to read it. But, of course, it must mean something else. It must mean, for Mark‘s reader, that Jesus who is the ultimate Son of Man, who is the Messiah and Son of Man is a messianic title taken from Daniel 7, the Son of Man Jesus is Lord even of the Sabbath. Now the first statement, the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath, would suggest that Son of Man means people, so people are lord of the Sabbath, but the context of Mark‘s Gospel where Jesus is the Son of Man makes it clear that the other meaning is there as well and maybe even is the dominant meaning. So here we have got one author who is making a play on words and means more than one thing. But here we are still dealing with an

author‘s intention, an author intentionally introduces a pun or introduces a play on words and so there are not two different meanings, there is the author‘s one meaning which happens to be twofold.

2. The Meaning of a Text is Genre Dependent

Here is out second principle of exegesis and that is that the meaning of a text is genre dependent.

There are many different literary forms, different genres in the Bible. We have psalms, we have proverbs, we have parables, we have letters, we have legal material or laws, we have prophecy, we have history or historical narrative. Each of these literary forms has certain rules, certain principles of interpretation and in order to comprehend God‘s message to us through that particular literary form we have to understand how that form works.

For example, Luke 10 Jesus says, ―A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away leaving him half dead.‖ Now, what is Jesus describing here? Well, this is a parable. And so if we recognize it as a parable we are going to be looking for certain things. We do not have to ask what was this man‘s name. We don‘t have to ask what was his family background, because in this context what is important is that the parable Jesus is teaching a spiritual truth. So what is important, as we would see in this parable if we were studying it, is that this man is Jewish and the man that is going to come along and help him is a Samaritan. Jesus is driving home a point through the use of a parable.

Here is another literary genre, ―And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea and I saw a beast coming out of the sea, he had ten horns and seven heads with ten crowns on his horns and on his head and on each head a blasphemous name.‖ This is from Revelation 13. Well, what is being described? If we identify this as history or historical narrative we would be very confused. We have to recognize that this is an apocalyptic narrative. This is a picture, an image, a story using symbols that represent different things. Understanding the way apocalyptic literature works will enable us to understand more clearly what the message of Revelation is. Ecclesiastes 1:1, we mentioned this verse before, ―Meaningless, meaningless says the preacher, utterly meaningless, everything is meaningless.‖ Determining the literary form of Ecclesiastes is essential if we are going to understand whether this book represents in fact God‘s ultimately wisdom or whether, in fact, human wisdom apart from God‘s, separate from God.

Philippians 1:1, ―Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi together with the overseers and deacons.‖ Identifying Philippians as a letter is critically important for understanding its message. We have to recognize that this letter is written to a church in the first century, that it is written to address their issues and concerns. We have to recognize that this letter is written by the Apostle Paul, the first century Christian missionary and church planter. If we recognize the genre as letters then we are going to be looking for certain clues as to its meaning. So identifying the genre is critically important in terms of interpreting the text. So our first principle, in general, a text has only one meaning and that meaning is the author‘s intended meaning. A second fundamental principle is that a text‘s meaning is dependent on its literary form, on its particular genre.

3. Context is the Key to Interpretation

Here is a third fundamental principle of exegesis and it is one that we have mentioned in passing many times and that is that context is the key to interpretation. The context of a passage determines its meaning. And here we have to distinguish between two different kinds of context. What we call historical context, the first part, and what we call literary context. Literary context is sometimes referred to as co-text. So we would have historical context sometimes called simply context and literary context sometimes called **co-text**. That is the text around and beside the text. So our point is context is the key to interpretation.

1. Historical Context

a. General Historical Context

i. Geographical Context

First of all historical context – historical context refers to the total life situation in which the book arose. Aspects of that, the general historical context would include the geographical context. John 4:3-4 says, ―He left Judea and went back once more to Galilee, now he had to go through Samaria.‖ Now understanding that Judea was in the south of Israel and was populated mostly by Jews, Galilee was in the north also populated by Jews, between the two was Samaria populated by Samaritans who were enemies of the Jews. And so understanding that geographical context is critical to recognizing what Jesus is doing and the significance of his encounter with the woman at the well, a Samaritan woman in that particular context and understanding who the Samaritans were. Geographical context – beginning of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, it says,―Paul to the church of God in Corinth.‖ Understanding where Corinth is in southern Greece or Achaia. Understanding who these people were and the context of Paul's missionary journey is critically important for understanding this letter.

ii. Historical and Political Context

Not only the geographical context, but historical context includes the historical and political context. Luke 3:1-2 Luke says, ―In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar — when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, … during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the desert. Now here is a verse that establishes the broad historical and political context of John the

Baptist's ministry and of Jesus' ministry. The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – Tiberius was the emperor of the whole Roman Empire. When Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea – Pilate was the Roman prefect or governor over Judea. Herod tetrarch of Galilee – this is Herod Antipas the son of Herod the Great who was ruling in the north over Galilee as a essentially a vassal king for the Romans. So we get the establishment of the broad historical context of the gospel. Then we get a broad overview of the religious context – during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. Now that is an interesting statement, because Luke seems to get it wrong. Judaism had only one high priest and we know historically Caiaphas was the high priest, but Luke, in fact, gets it right because he recognizes that Anna's who was the father in-law of Caiaphas was really the power behind the high priesthood and so he, even though he might seem to get it wrong, strictly speaking, from a strict historical perspective, he gets

it right in terms of the true historical situation. We get independent attestation of that in John's Gospel where at Jesus' trial he is first taken before Annas, tried before Annas before being taken before Caiaphas and the whole Sanhedrin, because it was with Annas' approval only that Jesus would be convicted and then executed by the Romans. So Luke gets it right when he introduces this religious background.

The next phrase says the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. That phrase ―word of God‖ reminds us of the call of the prophets in the Old Testament and of course John is the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets. So we have set the stage historically and politically for the ministry of Jesus and the proclamation of the Gospel.

The last sentence in verse 15 says, ―The people were waiting expectantly and were wondering in their hearts if John might be the Christ.‖ Once again, part of the historical situation, the expectations of the coming of the Messiah, could John be this Messiah. So Luke who has such a strong sense of the historical background and context of the Gospel sets the stage for us in terms of our reading of the Gospel. Historical and political context –critical for understanding Jesus' life and ministry.

iii. Religious Situation/ Context

That is the geographical context, the historical and political context; another part of this broad historical context is the religious situation. Matthew 23:5-7, ―The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat,‖ says Jesus. ―Everything they do is done for people to see, they make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.‖ Jesus accuses the Scribes and the Pharisees of hypocrisy here, but everything he says has a religious context.

What does it mean that the Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat? Well, that is a way of referring to them as interpreters of the law. Moses, of course, wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. He recorded the law. We refer to the old covenant as the Mosaic Law. Well, the Scribes and the Pharisees are the guardians of that. They make their phylacteries wide – we mentioned in our last session what a phylactery was, a prayer box with a verse inside and literal fulfillment of Old Testament commands to keep God's word always in front of our eyes, always in front of us. Their tassels on their garments long – once again Leviticus tells Jewish males to have tassels or fringes on their garments. So understanding this religious background is essential to understanding Jesus'statement about the hypocrisy that the religious leaders are demonstrating.

Another example of the importance of understanding the religious background, from the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 9:13 says, ―The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.‖ Chapter 10:3-4 says, ―But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.‖ In many modern contexts, in many modern cultures, this idea of blood of goats and bulls being sprinkled, sanctifying, making clean, it is completely foreign, it is completely alien. We do not think of blood as making anything clean, we would think of it as certainly staining.

Well, this passage, of course, comes from the sacrificial system of the Old Testament where an animal would be sacrificed as a payment for sins. The author of Hebrews draws on that imagery to identify Jesus as the great final sacrifice for our sins. Understanding the religious context of

Judaism is essential to understanding this passage and understanding that Jesus Christ is the great and final sacrifice for sins.

Let me give you one example, a kind of broad example that hits various points of religious, social, cultural and historical context just to illustrate what we are talking about the need to understand the historical context. This is the parable of the tenant farmers in Mark 12.

Jesus has just entered Jerusalem. He has entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey in literal fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. He then enters the temple and clears the temple courts and a series of controversies with the religious leaders begin.

In the midst of those controversies Jesus tells a parable, we call it the Parable of the Tenants or the Parable of the Tenant Farmers. Mark 12:1, ―He then began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey.‖

Now, as Jesus often does he begins to tell a parable from everyday life and there were vineyards all over Galilee so anyone listening to this message would understand this. A vineyard would have a wall around it for protection, would have a watchtower where a night watchman could keep guard to keep robbers and bandits away. Also, it was very common to have a wealthy land owner who would rent such vineyards out to tenant farmers who would plant the vineyard, would keep the crops, and then would give a share of those crops to the owner of the vineyard. So understanding the region of Galilee and this kind of tenant farmer situation where there was often abuse where an owner would be viewed as taking advantage of the poor tenant farmers and there would be animosity and anger between the two. This whole scene would have been understandable within the context of the first-century Galilee, the region in which Jesus is telling this parable. But there is even more going on than that general historical context, because any Jew of Jesus' day would immediately recognize in this parable an echo of an earlier passage. Isaiah 5, what is called the Song of the Vineyard, and let me just read for you a portion of

Isaiah 5:1-2. Isaiah says, ―I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. So as soon as Jesus began to tell this parable his Jewish hearers would immediately recognize this Song of the Vineyard, this description as soon as he began to speak of a wall around the vineyard, a pit for the winepress, the planting of vines. And they would also recognize what happens in this Song of the Vineyard in the Old Testament context. This vineyard produces only bad fruit.

Then suddenly this Song of the Vineyard, this beautiful love song, turns into a judgment oracle in Isaiah 5:3, ―Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it. When I look for good grapes why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard, I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed. I will break down its wall and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it. So he pronounces a judgment against this vineyard, because it does not produce fruit and then we see the interpretation of Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard. ―The

vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in and he looked for

justice but saw bloodshed, for righteousness but heard cries of distress.‖ So Isaiah interprets this Song of the Vineyard as a judgment against Israel, how God is going to take down Israel‘s protection and allow the Assyrian empire to come in and judge Israel for their sins and that is exactly what we see in history. As Jesus begins to tell this parable any Jewish person in the first century would immediately recognize that behind this parable is this judgment oracle against Israel for her sin. But then Jesus‘ parable is different than Isaiah‘s Song of the Vineyard. It is the same story, but with a twist. Instead of referring to the vineyard in judging the vineyard, Jesus refers to the tenant farmers who are overseeing the vineyard and they, it quickly becomes clear, represent the Jewish religious leaders. Let me pick up the story of the parable there, ―At harvest time he,‖ that is the owner of the vineyard, ―sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard but they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them, they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another and that one they killed. He sent many others, some of them they beat, others they killed. He had one left to send, a son whom he loved.―He sent him last of all saying, they will respect my son,‘ but the tenants said to one another, _this is at the heir, come let‘s kill him and the inheritance will be ours.‘ So they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and given the vineyard to others. Haven‘t you heard this passage of scripture, The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes.‘ So Jesus takes this Song of the Vineyard from Isaiah and gives a reinterpretation to it, where now it is not just about Israel as the vineyard, it is about Israel‘s leaders, the religious leaders, who are overseeing the vineyard and God the owner of the vineyard sends his servants who represent the prophets again and again, but Israel rejects them and the religious leaders reject them.

Finally, he sends his dear son, a reference to Jesus, of course, and they kill the son. And so Jesus tells this parable and alludes back to Isaiah‘s Song of the Vineyard and relates it to his soon death. Verse 12 then says, ―Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders look for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them, but they were afraid of the crowd so they left him and went away.‖ This parable is going to be one of the things that provokes Jesus‘ death. So understanding the cultural context, the historical background, understanding Isaiah‘s Song of the Vineyard is essential for understanding the nature of this parable.

b. Specific Historical Context

We have been discussing historical context and what we have been looking at are aspects of the general historical context of the biblical material: the history, the politics, the religion, the culture, but there is also something we could call specific historical context and that relates to the circumstances from which each of these books arose. Issues like the authorship, issues like the date, the provenance, which means where the document was written from, the recipients, to whom the document is written, and the purpose and occasion for which it is written.

Let me illustrate this from an American example. If I said, ―Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.‖ Most Americans would recognize that, they would

recognize the author of that; the author of that piece is Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States.

They would also recognize the date or the approximate date, that this was an address given at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863 after one of the bloodiest battles of the American Civil War. The recipients are the American public devastated by that war. The life situation or occasion is of course this bloody battle that turned the tide of the Civil War. The purpose of this particular document was to unify and inspire the nation in the context of this war.

Now that is the specific historical context to that Gettysburg Address. Now you can see in that case how important understanding those issues of authorship, of recipients, of purpose, and occasion are for understanding that particular document.

It is the same with New Testament documents. Take an example like Paul‘s letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians. The author is Paul the apostle. The date is about A.D. 55, written from Ephesus on Paul‘s third missionary journey. The recipients are this immature, struggling church at Corinth. The occasion – Paul has just received a delegation from Corinth with questions from the church and reports of problems in the church.

Paul‘s purpose, then, is to call the church to unity, to call the church to maturity, and once again to submit to his authority. Understanding those specific questions of historical context, the why the book was written, the when the book was written, the purpose for which the book was written; these are critical questions for understanding the letter of 1Corinthians. So we have general historical context. What was the world in which these documents arose, these documents were written. And specific, what is the specific life situation in which they arose. So our first kind of context – historical context.

2. Literary Context

Our second kind of context is literary context. Literary context refers to the progress of thought in the book or the progress of the argument. The key question to ask with reference to literary context is what is the point. What is the point the author is making? When we say, as we often do, that was taken out of context, that verse is taken out of context, we are generally referring to literary context, the flow of thought, the progress of the argument.

Now how do we determine literary context? Well, we must think of concentric circles moving outward. The smallest basic unit of meaning is the word, followed by the sentence, followed by the paragraph, followed by the larger section, followed by the book or letter, the document itself. So we have to ask the question where does meaning reside?

Words

Does meaning reside in words? Well, yes, but certainly not completely. Think of a word; let‘s take an example like the word fresh. What does the word fresh mean? Well, we could speak about fresh air, we could speak about fresh fruit, we could speak about fresh bread and fresh water. Fresh air means brisk air or air that is not stale, stuffy. Fresh fruit might mean fresh fruit as opposed to canned fruit.

Fresh bread would mean just baked bread. Fresh water would mean water that is not salty; we have saltwater lakes and freshwater lakes. You could speak of a fresh slant on a story and that would be a

creative or new way to tell a story. You can speak of fresh linen and by fresh linen we do not mean new linen we mean clean linen, something clean placed in a room. We can speak of fresh troops and fresh troops would be rested troops.

So, you can see the word fresh as we have said with reference to Bible translation, all words have a range of possible meanings, not generally one single meaning. So meaning does not reside in words, meanings resides in words in context. The meaning of words is determined by their context. Let me just give you an example of this. Suppose I say where I am reading a headline of the newspaper and the headline of the newspaper says, ―The President Prepares To Do Battle in the House over the Welfare Bill.‖ What do each of those words mean? Well, I can identify the meaning of those words

– the President in this context is almost certainly the President of the United States. Prepares to do battle – What kind of battle is this? Well, this is a legislative battle, a battle between political parties perhaps. This battle it says is in the House. What kind of a house is that? Well, that house is a word referring to the House of Representatives, a body of legislators or politicians who decide on legislative bills. Over the welfare bill – The President prepares to do battle in the house over the welfare bill. Well, what kind of a bill is that? I get an electric bill where I pay my electric bill and I pay my water bill, is that the kind of bill? No, this is a piece of legislation, a piece of law that is going to be voted on. So each of those words – president, battle, house and bill – have a variety of possible meanings, but when I place them in that context, the broader context, both the historical context and the literary context that is the surrounding words, tells me what that means. Suppose I said another sentence, ―Meeting in the White House, the President instructed

Eisenhower that victory in this battle was crucial for the welfare of the nation.‖ What I have done I have just created a sentence with many of the same words. ―Meeting in the White House‖ – that is a different house, that is the house where the President lives not the legislative branch, the House of Representatives. The President in this case is the same office, but it is a different President, a President during World War II. We know that because of the reference to Eisenhower who was the general during World War II.

―Victory in this battle – this is no longer a legislative battle, this is a military battle on a battlefield somewhere. ―Was crucial for the welfare of the nation‖ – this is no longer a welfare bill, a bill related to helping the poor, this is the general welfare, sustainability, viability of the nation itself. So what have we done? We have created another sentence with many of the same words, but those words have different meanings. So meaning does not reside in words alone, it resides in words in context.

Sentence

Alright, moving outward in our concentric circle, if the word is the smallest basic unit of meaning, the next unit of meaning is the sentence. What if I made this statement, this sentence, ―The last eight years have been a disaster.‖? Does that sentence have meaning?

Well, yes, it has meaning but not entirely. What last eight years am I referring to? What is the disaster? Some people after a two-term president might use that sentence to describe the political situation – ―The last eight years of this presidency have been a disaster.‖

Someone else in a business, maybe their partner has just run away with all of the money from a business they have been building together for eight years and you might say the last eight years, meaning this business, have been a financial disaster. Perhaps a very difficult marriage, someone might say in anger the last eight years have been a disaster. You see the point is the sentence does not have meaning apart from it being an utterance, for one thing, within an historical context and part of a larger paragraph.

Paragraphs

Moving outward in our concentric circles we have words, we have sentences, we have paragraphs. Paragraphs get their meaning from larger contexts, so ultimately literary context moving outward from words to sentences to paragraphs to sections and then to the larger entire document or book. Words only have meaning within these larger contexts and moving outward in the context is essential to comprehending the meaning of the text. That is what we mean by literary context.

Book

Now we could actually move outward even further from the book, because the book itself has a larger context. For example, take Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul's letter to the Philippians is part of a larger body of literature or what we could call a larger corpus, that body of literature are the Prison Epistles. Philippians was probably written from Rome, at the same time Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. So that larger corpus, it is a part of that literary context.

Broader Context

We could then even go further out and say all of Paul's letters are part of that larger corpus or context of that letter to the Philippians. Of course, then, we could move even further than that and say all of the New Testament epistles then are the next concentric circle beyond the Pauline letters because they are related in some sense that these are letters from Christians to churches or Christians to individuals. And then of course we can move outward from the New Testament epistles to all the New Testament documents, because they are related to each other as being part of the canon of scripture, as being part of the early Christian writings. And then from the New Testament documents we can go even further out in our concentric circle to the larger world of the Bible, all the books of the Bible form part of this broader literary context. And then of course we could go even further to the world of ancient literature because the Bible itself was written within the context of ancient literature, in general. So, by literary context what do we mean? We mean moving outward from the smallest unit of meaning and recognizing that we can really truly only understand God's word when we read it within its broader context. Alright we have zeroed in a great deal on our third point, so let's review our three points. Our first point, our first principle of exegesis is that, in general, a text has one meaning, the author's intended meaning. Our second principle of exegesis is that the meaning of a text is genre dependent; the meaning of a text depends on its literary form. Our third key principle of interpretation is that context is the key to meaning and that context can be divided into two major kinds of context, historical context and literary context. Historical context refers to the whole life situation in which the letter or book arose. The literary context refers to the words and sentences and paragraphs and larger sections within which that text is found. Those two contexts give us the key to meaning.

4. The Text Itself Must Be Given Priority

Here is a fourth key principle of exegesis, a fourth and final principle of exegesis that I would like to give you and that is that the text itself must be given priority. It sets the agenda.

What do I mean by this? Well, one of the criticisms of biblical interpretation in recent years is the claim that exegesis is a circular process. The interpreter comes to the text with certain concerns and simply reads those texts within those concerns and so it is circular, it is not going anywhere, it is coming right back. The interpreter is simply speaking to himself or speaking to herself.

A better model introduced than a circle, however, and this model has been introduced by many practitioners, Grant Osborne has a book called The Hermeneutical Spiral. The better model is not a circle, but a spiral, because whereas a circle comes back on itself a spiral moves circularly but it moves in a particular direction.

Now what do I mean by all of this? I mean there is a circular process to interpretation. We as an interpreter approach the text from our own world, from our own perspective, from our worldview with our own biases, from our cultural context. And we cannot help but in one sense contribute to that spiral reading because we are actively and personally and subjectively engaging with the text. But we are not simply reading our own ideas in the text, we are listening to the text, we are learning from the text, we are growing from the text. So, this circular motion is actually moving in a particular direction and like a spring, it is not simply a ring, a spring is circular, moving in a particular direction, heading from point A to point B and point B in the first case would be the meaning of the text. The interpreter comes to the text, certainly brings perspective, certainly brings biases, but then listens to the text and is transformed gradually from reading the text and bringing it back.

1. A spiral from inductive to deductive reasoning

There are two kinds of spirals I will just mention in this process of interpretation. The first we could describe as a spiral from inductive to deductive reason. Let me define a few terms. Inductive reasoning is reasoning from facts to propositions. Certain facts are in evidence and from those facts I draw certain conclusions. Deductive reasoning is sort of the reverse or inverse of that. It is starting with a proposition or a hypothesis and then proving or demonstrating that hypothesis. So what are we doing when we are reading scripture? Are we doing inductive reasoning, that is, are we drawing out facts and coming to conclusions or are we doing deductive reasoning? Are we making hypotheses or propositions and then seeking to prove or demonstrate them? Well, the answer, of course, is that we are doing both. We are moving from inductive to deductive reasoning and back to inductive reasoning. Let me explain how this works and what I am referring to with reference to the biblical text. We read God‘s word, we read it and we read the words and we seek to interpret the words and understand and comprehend those words, but then we take our understanding of those words and we form certain hypotheses or conclusions and then we test those conclusions against the larger world in which the Bible arose. We propose hypotheses and then we confirm those hypotheses. We read certain words in sentences and then we confirm the meaning of those words by examining ancient literature and understanding the meaning. We draw certain conclusions based on peoples and groups in the Bible and then grow to understand better those peoples and groups by reading ancient literature, understanding who the Pharisees were and who the Sadducees were. So

our study of Scripture is a constant process moving from facts to propositions and then making proposals and confirming them. So it is a spiral from inductive to deductive reasoning.

2. A spiral from text to context

But exegesis is also a second kind of a spiral, a spiral from text to context, from the text of the Bible to our context. We come to the text with our concerns, with our issues, but then we allow the text to shape and mold us into the people of God. Ultimately then it is the text that sets the agenda. It is given the priority. We do not force our concerns, force our conclusions on the text, we instead draw from the text where we ought to go. We allow it to set our agenda. Here is our point. The biblical text sets the agenda, the meaning of the text controls our contextualization, our application, rather than our context determining the meaning of the text. The meaning of the text controls our contextualization, our application, rather than our context determining the meaning of the text.

Let me give you a couple of examples of imposing a human agenda over the fundamental concerns of the text. Take for example the fundamental question of what is sin. What is sin? Well, if we read the Bible and let the Bible set the agenda we realize that the biblical definition of sin is rebellion against God. All sin is ultimately rejecting God‘s purpose and plan and rebelling against him. Some theological perspectives, however, identify something else as sin, for example liberation theology. There is many positives about liberation theology, I do not want to paint this in all negative terms, but fundamentally for liberation theology sin is economic or social oppression; economic, political, military, or social oppression. So salvation is overthrowing that oppression or defeating that oppression. Well, we have to certainly acknowledge that economic and social oppression, political oppression, religious oppression, all of these are sin, but ultimately they are a result or a consequence of sin rather than the core essence of sin. Sin is rebellion against God. Rebellion against God produces oppression. So if liberation theology, if sin is oppression, then salvation comes from freedom from that oppression. On the other hand, if rebellion against God is the ultimate of sin then freedom comes through reconciliation with God and once we reconcile with God then we will be defeating economic, social, political oppression. So allowing a human agenda to define sin as opposed to allowing the Bible itself to define sin produces a misunderstanding of what sin is and, therefore, a misapplication of God‘s word. Here is another example of imposing a human agenda over the fundamental concerns of the text and that is end times speculation. In America, in particular, there tends to be an obsession with the events leading up to the end times, related to the rapture of the church, or the tribulation, or the millennium, endless debate over pre- mid- or post-tribulational raptures and obsession over the signs of the time and current events and how they relate to end times, often dividing fellowship over issues that are extremely peripheral to the central concerns of Scripture. But we have to ask the question is Scripture more concerned with issues like the unity of the church, evangelistic outreach, or the minute details of the end times and the obvious conclusion is that it is the former that the overwhelming concern of Scripture is loving God and loving one another and making God known, proclaiming the gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth. Too often we let our agenda control the meaning of the text and that becomes our central point. Here is our point, the key point is that it is the biblical text itself that must control both our interpretation and our application. Alright, four key principles of exegesis. In general a biblical text has one meaning is our first principle. Our second principle is that the meaning of a text is dependent on its genre.



Our third principle is that context is the key to interpretation and our fourth principle is that the text is given priority. It sets the theological agenda. Clarification: What about interpreting the Bible literally?

Now you might note that there is one principle that some would suggest is core that I have left out and that principle is that we interpret the Bible literally. As Evangelicals we interpret the Bible literally. I have intentionally left that out, because I do not really believe that principle is valid in the way it is generally spoken about. When I was in seminary as I was being trained that was one of our fundamental principles of hermeneutics. One of the fundamentals principles of interpretation is that we take the Bible literally. The problem with that term is that we do not use the word literal in common everyday speech the way my hermeneutics professors, my biblical interpretation professors were using it. By literal they meant the natural or normal meaning of the text, but that is not the way most people understand literal. If I say in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah says that one day the trees of the field will clap their hands. You might ask do I mean that literally? Well I do not mean that literally because that is figurative language, that is poetic language; I mean it poetically or symbolically or figuratively. So that is the way most people understand ―literal‖ whereas the definition used with reference to hermeneutics is the natural or normal meaning of the text. So I do not use the term literal, because that term with reference to this topic, because that term is open to misunderstanding. Instead when we speak about the authors intended meaning we are assuming what was traditionally referred to as a literal interpretation. If I am looking for Paul's intended meaning, then if Paul is speaking figuratively, I am looking for figurative meaning. If Paul is speaking literally, I am looking for literal meaning. If Paul or Jesus were telling a parable; I am looking for a parable, I am looking for the significance of a parable. If Jesus is speaking in proverbs, I am understanding it as a proverb. If Jesus speaks allegorically, I understand it allegorically. So I am looking for what Jesus intended, what Paul intended, what the original author or speaker intended. So our first principle of exegesis that a text has one meaning, the author's intended meaning, subsumes under it all that was once described as a so-called literal meaning of interpretation. So that is just a clarification, I want to explain why I am not using that term literal, why I do not think it is very helpful for us, because as we might say it dies the death of a thousand clarifications. It is not a helpful principle of exegesis because it causes more confusion than clarity.

Ten Steps for Exegesis

This is the practical side of the exegetical process. I have ten steps for English exegesis, for English Bible interpretation. Determining the meaning of the text in its original context is the goal of exegesis. We will try to keep reviewing the ten steps so you can keep them in order. So these are ten steps for interpretation, ten steps for exegesis, ten steps for determining the author's original meaning.

1. Identify the Genre (the Literary Form)

Alright, here is our first step. The first step coincides with one of our principles and that is the first step of any interpretation is to identify the genre, to identify the literary form. You simple will misread a text if you do not correctly identify its form.

If I receive a letter from someone, I immediately have to identify that as a letter in order to understand what kind of an act of communication it is. Suppose I pick up a children's book and the first line of the children's book says ―Once upon a time there were three bears.‖ Well the first

thing I need to do is I need to identify that literary genre. That literally genre is a fairytale. If I identify it wrongly, if I identify it as, say, history or historical narrative, then I am going to be looking for the wrong things. I might wonder where these bears live; I might wonder whether they are brown bears or grizzly bears. But those are not questions I need to be concerned with. If I identify this as a fairytale I realize that it is not a true story, that it is meant to teach some moral lesson or to entertain. Identifying the genre, the literary form, is critical, is important with any work of literature, because the genre determines the rules by which we understand the text. So, for this step the question you ask is what are the rules for understanding this literary form? Epistles, or letters, are interpreted differently than narrative literature. Poetry and proverbial literature have their own rules of interpretation. Now, we will take some time to discuss the rules of select literary genres, literary forms in a later session, but here were will simply say the first step to all interpretation is to identify the literary genre, so you know the way truth is communicated. Truth is communicated differently in different literary forms. For example, historical narrative; historical narrative – truth is communicated factually through the language of the narrative. We are looking for historical facts. We are also looking for features of narrative like plot and characters and so forth, but with historical narrative we are looking for facts. With a parable what are we looking for? If Jesus told a parable, we are not looking for historical facts, we are not looking for the question of whether the good Samaritan was an actual character or actual person in history. We are looking for the moral lesson that Jesus wants us to understand or the truth that he wants us to understand from that story. If Jesus tells a proverb we are not necessarily looking for an absolute truth. We are looking for a general truth that teaches us how to live life in light of God‘s truth, God‘s wisdom. So, different literary forms are interpreted differently. That is our step one, identify the literary form.

2. Get the Big Picture: Establish the Historical and Literary Context

Our second step of interpretation is to get the big picture and by that we mean to establish the historical and literary context of the document that is under study.

a. Historical Context

The historical context, as we have talked about, means the life setting of the letter or the book. Now we have talked about two ways of reading; we read inductively and we read 42 deductively and as we determine the broad historical context of the book to get the big picture we need to do it both inductively and deductively. The best way to get the big picture is to read the entire letter or the entire book all the way through looking for its overall themes. So the point here is that before I can read and study a passage in say Philippians, Paul‘s letter to the Philippians, I have to understand what the whole letter is all about. Before I can truly understand a single passage in the Gospel of Mark I have to understand the overall message of Mark, how the book progresses from beginning to end. So that is what I mean by getting the big picture; it is establishing overall the big picture of the document so that then I can accurately interpret each passage within its context. Alright, so determining the historical context is done both inductively and deductively. Inductively, we would read through the entire document seeking to establish the broader life setting of the book. Let me give you some examples of how we would do that with different literary forms or genre.

Epistle

Take an epistle. What are we looking for as we read through an epistle? Well, we would be looking for things like the author. Who is the author of this letter? It makes a big difference as to who wrote it concerning who wrote is as to what the meaning will be. We will want to know the recipients; to whom is the letter written? So, at the beginning of most of Paul's letters he will say, "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ;" well there is the author. Then he will identify the recipients, "to the church of God at Corinth," for example. Understanding who the author is, understanding who the recipients are is essential for getting the big picture. You would look for in a letter the occasion and purpose. What prompted the author to write this letter and what was the reason that he is writing? Going back to our example of Corinthians; we know by reading through the entire letter what Paul's purpose in writing this letter was and what the occasion was. The occasion was that Paul is in Ephesus on his third missionary journey and he gets a visit from some of the members of the church, a three-man delegation, some members of the family, the household of a woman named Chloe. He probably received some other reports as well. He receives reports of some problems in the church at Corinth. So his purpose in writing, then,we talk about the occasion of the letters, the life situation that prompted its writing, the purpose in writing was to answer questions from the church and correct problems from the church. The main themes, then, are a whole host of issues related to church problems, problems of disunity, problems of sexual immorality. In this letter of 1 Corinthians we have problems of lawsuits, concerns about the way the spiritual gifts are being used, concerns about the way the Lord's Supper is being practiced, and as we go through the letter getting the big picture we look for these particular theological themes. We look for the author's theological perspective. What theological themes resurface again and again in this letter? So, that is what we mean by determining the historical context of an epistle. Let me give you another example just to illustrate this. Let us talk about Paul's letter to the Galatians. We talk about the author; the author is the Apostle Paul. We would see that, again, from the first word of the book; Paul identifies himself as Paul. The recipients are the churches, not the singular church, but the plural churches in Galatia. Now there is a debate as to which churches in Galatia, whether these are churches in southern Galatia or churches in northern Galatia, that could be resolved by examining commentaries, we will talk about that in just a moment, but you would identify the recipients as the members of the church in Galatia. The occasion, what is the occasion that prompted the letter to the Galatians? As you read through the text you will see that the Galatians are apparently deserting the faith, are turning to a different gospel, because of some false teachers that have come into their midst. That is the occasion, v that is the life setting that prompted Paul to write. The purpose then is to correct this church, to call them back to the authentic faith, to the authentic gospel of justification by faith alone. The main themes would be justification by faith alone. It would be the danger of legalism; that is of trying to be saved by your own works. A theme you will see of living in the Spirit and the power of the Spirit, rather than the power of the flesh. So by reading through the entire letter we are looking for main themes, we are looking for the author, we are looking for the recipients, we are getting the big picture. It is essential before we can understand and read a specific passage in an epistle to understand the big picture. That is an epistle.

Gospel

Let me just give you a few other examples. A gospel. You are reading the Gospel of Luke let's say or the Gospel of Mark. What are you looking for? Well, again, it is important to read through the entire Gospel, in one sitting, if possible, in order to get the big picture. And how do we determine the big picture, the historical and literary context? What are we looking for? We are looking for

things like the historical and the political setting; we need to know something about first-century Palestine. Israel at the time ruled by the Roman Empire; understanding the history and background of how Israel got to where it was during Jesus' life is important for understanding the Gospels. So when we see that Jesus is brought before the Roman, Pontius Pilate, during his trial, understanding the relationship of Pilate's authority over the Jews is critically important for understanding the Gospels. So, determining the historical, political, religious setting; understanding who the Pharisees were; understanding who the Sadducees are; that background is part of our understanding the big picture. Then within the Gospel itself trying to determine the portrait of Jesus Christ, what is most important to this Gospel writer in terms of his presentation of Jesus Christ. For example, as you read through the Gospel of Mark you would notice that Jesus as the mighty and powerful Son of God is a central theme of the portrait of Christ found in the Gospel of Mark. You would also see, however, that the suffering role of the Messiah, the suffering role of the Son of God, is a central and important part of Mark's portrait. How do you get that? Well, you get that by reading through the text and discerning it from the text. The historical background of key characters and groups like the Pharisees and the Sadducees, as we mentioned before, would be part of the historical context

Important settings within the Gospel would be important parts of the historical context. For example, Mark's Gospel, the early part, is centered in Galilee and the whole Gospel then becomes a movement from Galilee to Jerusalem where Jesus will suffer and die. In Luke's Gospel, Jerusalem and specifically the temple play a key central role throughout the Gospel because Jerusalem and the temple represent Judaism but they also represent the presence of God; God's city, God's presence in the temple, and so that ambivalence between Jerusalem as God's city as representing his presence but then Jerusalem is representing Israel in opposition to God. That play between those two becomes important setting for the Gospel of Luke. You would be looking in a Gospel for plot. How does the narrative progress from beginning to end? Where do conflicts arise in the Gospel? Where does the gospel climax? What is the resolution in the Gospel? We might say there are four Gospels, they are all the same with reference to those features, but they are really not, the plot progresses somewhat differently in each of the Gospels and the climax is in some ways come at different points in the gospels. Just to illustrate this, Mark's Gospel in many ways the announcement of the resurrection is the resolution because at least in most of our earliest manuscripts there are no narrated resurrection appearances in Mark's Gospel, rather it is the announcement, the proclamation of the resurrection, that is the great resolution Mark's Gospel. Matthew's Gospel has a different resolution. Matthew's Gospel – the resolution is not just the resurrection and the resurrection appearances but the Great Commission as Jesus goes up on a high mountain and commissions his disciples to make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So the Great Commission becomes the great resolution in Matthew's Gospel. In Luke's Gospel the resolution is somewhat different because the resolution is not just the resurrection appearances but Jesus' ascension, Jesus ascends. That is the final scene in Luke's Gospel. But Luke's Gospel really does not resolve at that point because Luke's Gospel is followed by a sequel which is the book of Acts. So the resolution in Acts is really when Paul eventually gets to Rome, when the gospel goes from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth, and Paul reaches the center of the known world, Rome, the center of civilization in the first century and proclaims the gospel there and even then the resolution is open-ended as the gospel is continuing to move outward. So the point here is that following the plot, the narrative progression, is a key part of the historical and literally contexts, the historical context of reading a gospel. So we looked at how to read an epistle, how to read a gospel.

Prophetic Literature

Let me just leave you one more example of how to get the big picture of a particular literary form and that would be prophetic literature. Getting the big picture of prophetic literature would mean understanding the general historical setting within Israel‘s history. When Isaiah wrote, what was going on in Israel‘s history? Well, Isaiah wrote during the period of the Monarchy when kings were ruling, when Israel was divided into a southern and a northern kingdom; the southern kingdom of Judaea, the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah writes and predicts the coming devastation of the northern kingdom by the kingdom of Assyria, the empire of Assyria. Understanding that historical setting is crucial for understanding the book of Isaiah. The second part of understanding the prophets, getting the big picture would be determining their central message. What is the central message of the author? What is their purpose in writing? What within Israel is provoking this writing and what is the goal? Isaiah is calling Israel back to repentance as many of the prophets are doing. A third key thing we need to look for in prophetic literature are the key themes. What themes does Isaiah return to again and again? What is Isaiah‘s theological prospective? All of these are part of getting the big picture of prophetic literature.

So, once again, this is our second step of exegesis and it is to get the big picture, to read the document entirely through, in one sitting if possible, to try to determining the overall message of the book. We do that inductively by reading the entire document through, several times, if possible.

Now there is another side of getting the big picture, and that is reading the book deductively or confirming and refining the results that we have discovered by reading inductively. How do we confirm and refine? Well, we will talk about this a little later on, but we can check the commentaries, see what they say. What do the commentaries on Mark‘s Gospel tell us about things like author and recipients and occasion and purpose?

How do they enlighten us about the specific and general historical contexts of these books? What do the commentaries say about the main theme? So what are we doing, if you recall, and I will take a step back to clarify, if you will recall

inductively is moving from facts, the text itself, to conclusions. Deductive methodology then goes from conclusions to proof. You say okay, my reading suggest that this is the central theme of Mark‘s Gospel. How I can check and confirm that? We will find out what biblical scholars are saying and read some of the commentaries. Alright, so, getting the big picture is both an inductive methodology as well as a deductive methodology.

b. Literary Context

We have been talking about historical context. Getting the big picture by determining the historical context, that is the life setting of the letter or the book, but we also need, then, to identify the literary context. And if you recall from our discussion of literary context, literary context refers to the progress of the book as it moves through the argument that is developed or the plot as it is developed. The best way probably to determine the literary context is to outline the entire book; to outline it in terms of its basic structure. Now I have a method of outlining a book that I am going to briefly describe and you can use this

method when you make your own outline of a book, so it is basically a four-step method to outline a book. The first step is to break the book down into each of its main paragraphs. Most Bibles will separate a book into its many paragraphs. Your goal then is to identify each paragraph and summarize each paragraph with a brief phrase, a short phrase.

The second step then is to group those related paragraphs into sections; maybe the first five paragraphs of a book have one theme and the second five paragraphs have another theme, the third five or seven paragraphs have another theme, group those into a larger section and summarize what those paragraphs relate to. Summarize the theme of those paragraphs. The third point then would be to look at those groups of paragraphs and see if they can be grouped together in even larger sections. From there then you can reverse that process and take each of those larger sections as a major point within your outline and then each of the smaller sections becomes a sub point and each of those smallest sections then become your sub-sub points and by reversing the process that we have just described you can develop an outline.

Our cardinal rule with reference to getting the big picture is no matter how short on timeyou are in terms of your sermon or lesson preparation it is essential to establish the historical and literary context of the passage under study. In other words, to get the big picture; it is absolutely essential. Determining who wrote the book, why they wrote it, what is its central themes, what is its purpose; these kinds of questions are critical for any passage that you are going teach. Now at times you would not have time to read through an entire book. Suppose you need to teach on a particular passage that has a specific theme and you do not have time to do an entire survey of a long book. Well, this is where you can take certain shortcuts; you can avoid making errors in interpretation by using some of the better tools. For historical context, for example, you can consult the introductions to the Bible or the survey, the biblical surveys, because a biblical survey or a biblical encyclopedia or a bible dictionary will give you brief overviews of what each of these books are all about. Look for things like the author, the recipients, the purpose, the themes, the theology in these reference tools.

For literary context a good tool is a Bible handbook, because a Bible handbook goes passage by passage and summarizes every section of a book. And so, let‘s just say, for example, that you were teaching on Romans 8 and you want to teach on Romans 8, but you have not systematically studied the entire letter to the Romans. Well, two things you need to do; you need to find out what the overall message of Romans is. You can do that by consulting a Bible introduction, a Bible survey book, a Bible dictionary, a study Bible itself as well as reading through maybe certain sections and once you have identified what is the overall message, what is the central theme of Romans, then you need to establish the literary context. You can do that by consulting a Bible handbook and reading through briefly how Paul has developed his thought leading up to Romans 8. How Romans 8 serves as a particular climax for Paul‘s thought in chapters 1-7. And so, our point here is that sometimes you simply cannot do a detailed study of an entire book in preparation for teaching it. In those cases you can use the tools that will give you the information you would gain by a detailed reading of the text. But once again, the cardinal rule, no matter how short on time you are it is essential to establish the historical and literary context of the passage under study. Alright, that is our second step to exegesis; our first was identify the genre or literary form. Our second is to get the big picture; get the overall message of the book by establishing the historical and literary context.

3. Develop a Thesis Statement

Our third principle is to develop what I would call a thesis statement. You are moving now from the overall book to an individual passage, a passage that you want to study or passage that you want to teach and the most important thing, it seems to me at this point, is to identify the central idea or

the big idea or a thesis statement; all of those things mean the same thing. When I hear young preachers or young teachers teach it seems to me the two greatest problems they tend to exhibit when they teach or preach is they either preach too little, we could say, too little of the text, and by that I mean they might read the text at the beginning of the sermon, but then they preach on something entirely different. They might have something they want to say to the congregation and they essentially ignore the message of the text they have just read and they preach on their own agenda, their own thing. That is one problem I sometimes see in young preachers or in old preachers as well. The other problem is preaching too much, not preaching too little of the passage, but preaching too much of the passage. And this is where the preacher or teacher will back a dump truck full of information up to the congregation, up to the audience, and will dump it on them. They will have done so much wonderful study of the passage, they will have all the details of the historical background and culture and context. They will have done a detailed verse by verse, word by word exegesis and they will want to share with the congregation absolutely everything that they have learned about this passage. And the problem is the people leave after that message and they haven't the slightest idea what they have heard, because there has been an information overload, there has just been too much information. So the two greatest dangers, it seems to me, are passing on too little information, in other words missing the point of the passage, or passing too much information. Well this third step, developing a thesis statement or a big idea or a central message or central idea of the passage helps us to avoid that difficulty, because here you establish in one sentence, and I would stress you should do it one sentence, what the central message, what the main point, the key emphasis of this passage is and then by doing that you will always be focusing on that particular central message, you will not waiver into extraneous details if you clearly identify the central message. There is lots of ways to do this. I would refer you to a wonderful book by Haddon Robinson, a very classic book on preaching called Biblical Preaching. Haddon Robinson describes this process as identifying what he calls a subject and a complement. The subject is the question of what is the passage talking about, what is the central theme of the passage; identifying that is identifying the subject. Identifying the complement then is identifying what does the passage say about this particular subject. So the subject is what is the central message, what is the theme, what is the passage talking about. The complement, how does this passage describe that or what is the passage saying about the subject? And so, identifying the subject and the complement to a particular passage will enable you to clearly and concisely identify the central message or the thesis statement. Identifying what is the main idea of this passage. Now this is hard to describe apart from just doing it and so let me just give you a passage to examine, I will give you a couple of passages, maybe an Old Testament one and a New Testament one to examine and try to come up with a thesis statement, and then I am going to give you some principles as to how I think you can go about identifying the main idea, the thesis statement of a passage.

Take Psalm 23, for example. Here is a Psalm, a self-contained unit. Psalm 23, one of the most beloved Psalms in the Psalter. Read that Psalm and then try to identify a subject and a complement. That is, what is the central message, what is the main point of this Psalm and what does the Psalm say about the main point. So, you might want to turn the tape off and do that, I will not read the Psalm for you right here, and then I will come back and talk briefly about some of the options here. Alright, Psalm 23, what is the big idea? What is the thesis statement, the central point? We talked about dividing that central point into a subject and a complement. When I do this in my classes often times my students will come up with a big idea; something like, "Because the Lord is my shepherd I can trust in him to provide for me and to protect me." Or something like, "Using the

metaphor of a shepherd, the Psalmist expresses his trust in God's provision and protection." And that clearly is at least part of the central idea.

The Psalm begins,

—The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.‖ So it certainly describes this shepherd image. But as we then read through the Psalm we check to see if this entire Psalm is summed up in that thesis statement. I just want to read the Psalm and point out to you how that thesis statement actually misses something. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.‖ Okay, there is that shepherd imagery and the provision.

—He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff they comfort me. Now up to that point the Psalmist is clearly describing, this is all shepherd imagery. The shepherd leads me in green pastures. He brings me to quiet waters where I can drink. He guides me along the path. He takes me through the valley of the shadow of death. His rod and his staff comfort me.‖ All of that is shepherd imagery. But suddenly, at this point, the metaphor changes.

—You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.‖ Notice how the metaphor changes; the metaphor changes from shepherd imagery to a household and this would be particularly maybe a king whose subjects, maybe his noblemen, are invited to his home for protection, to his castle for protection and for a rich banquet. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.‖ The king provides protection for his subjects.

—You anoint my head with oil.‖ That is a sign of hospitality in a banquet image.

—My cup overflows.‖ There is abundance of food and drink at this banquet. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." There is that household image of provision and protection. So we will realize that though the Psalm is certainly about shepherd imagery, there is a metaphor change in the middle of it. So a complete big idea or a complete thesis statement would encompass those two ideas. So here is an idea for a thesis statement for this Psalm. Using the metaphors of the Lord as his shepherd and as a banquet host, the Psalmist expresses his trust in God as protector and provider. So you have got the dual image of both shepherd and banquet host. Now let me give you some hints. Students sometimes struggle with how to find the big idea. Let me give you some hints for identifying the main idea and I will illustrate them with the Psalm that we just looked at and then we will do one more of these big ideas. Here is the first hint. Ask the question, what one theme gives this passage unity? As you read through it, what one theme? Well, Psalm 23 the Lord as shepherd and as banquet host clearly gives this passage a unity from beginning to end. Our second hint, here is a second hint, after asking what one theme gives this passage unity, and these hints are related to each other; the second hint is look for a theme that occurs repeatedly, especially at the beginning and the end.

A good writer, as a good speaker, will state first of all what they are going to be talking about and then at the end they will summarize what they just talked about. Well, obviously this Psalm begins just like this,

—The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.‖ Well, that is going to be the central theme, it is at the beginning and the banquet imagery continues on into the end,

—I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.‖ So look for a theme that occurs repeatedly, look for a theme that occurs at the beginning and the end. Here is a third hint. Try outlining the passage. If you are having trouble, particularly identifying the thesis statement or the big idea, try outlining the passage and by that I mean follow the progress of thought in the passage. That will give you clues as to what the main idea is. If you outline this passage, Psalm 23, you will see that the first half of the Psalm deals all with shepherd imagery, the second half turns to a protective household or king protecting his subjects in a banquet context. So, if you outline the passage you would see that there are two central metaphors there. Here is a fourth point, a fourth hint for how to identify the main idea. Test out a theme. Ask, does every verse relate to this theme? Now if we had done that with the Psalm we would have seen there were problems with identifying solely the shepherd image. Here is the question, ask does every single line, every sentence relate to this theme? And as we move through Psalm 23 we see that the first half of the Psalm, the first two-thirds of the Psalm, every single sentence relates to shepherd imagery. But suddenly it changes to imagery related to a banquet scene. And so, by testing the theme you would recognize what this thesis statement is. Fifth and finally, turn your subject into a question and the complement should answer this question. Let me do that with Psalm 23. If I ask, in what way is God a shepherd and banquet host? Well, the answer to that would be he provides provision, he provides protection, and so you can identify the complement by asking a question. First of all by identifying the main overall arching theme, what the passage is talking about, and then raising a question about what is it saying about that and what it is saying about that becomes your complement Alright, let‘s try this process with another passage. Turn in your Bibles to Philippians 1, an introductory section in Philippians, Philippians 1:12-18. Let me read this passage.

—Now I want you to know brothers and sisters that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. The latter do so out of love knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way whether from false motives or true Christ is preached and because of this I rejoice.‖ Alright, take that passage now and try to develop a thesis statement and we will come back together. Alright, let me just suggest a possible thesis statement. There are many different ways this can go. We are looking for a subject and a complement. What one theme holds this entire passage together? I am not sure what you would have come up with, but let me just make a suggestion; here is what I came up with anyway. I said, Paul rejoices that the gospel is advancing despite or even because, we might say, of his imprisonment.

That is the subject and then the complement could be through a variety of means, simply through a variety of means or you could identify those means. Through his testimony to the palace guard, through the courage given to others and even through those who preach with false motives. So the passage is about the gospel advancing despite Paul‘s imprisonment; the complement would be how

the gospel is advancing despite Paul's imprisonment. Either by listing those means or simply by sayin g through a whole variety of means. Now once again our hints for identifying this main idea. What one theme gives this passage unity? Well, the advancement of the gospel is clearly something that is repeated all the way through from beginning to end. Our second hint, a theme that occurs repeatedly, especially at the beginning and the end. Paul says at the very beginning,

—I want you to know that what has happened to me has served to advance the gospel.‖ So he introduces that theme right at the very beginning.

Our third hint, outlining the passage. If you were to outline the passage you would begin to identify the ways in which the gospel is advancing despite Paul's imprisonment. Fourth, you would test the theme. Does every verse relate to the advancement of the gospel? It certainly does, each verse from beginning to end. And finally turning your subject into a question. If the advancement of the gospel is your subject within your thesis statement, the complement is how does the gospel advance and Paul answers that question, how is the gospel advancing despite Paul's imprisonment. So there is just a methodology of how to develop a thesis statement. Alright, that was our third step of exegesis. Let's review. Our first step was identifying the genre. Our second step was getting the big picture. Our third step was developing a thesis statement.

4. Outline the Progress of Thought in the Passage

Our fourth step is to outline the progress of thought in the passage. Now we have already talked about doing this as a means of identifying the main idea or the thesis statement, but now we will talk about a few helpful points on how to actually do this. Ask, how is this thesis statement developed in the progress of the passage? Your points, your sub points, in other words, the progress of thought should reflect this development.

There are various ways to outline a passage, but however you outline the passage, every point in a good outline must do two things. Every point in a good outline must first relate directly to the big idea, relate directly to your thesis statement. Once you have established a thesis statement every sub point or every point you are going to teach should relate directly to the big idea. Secondly, every good outline should clearly and accurately explain the progress of the argument in the passage. In other words, every point you should be able to see how it relates to the big idea, but also how it relates to the point made before it and how it relates to the point afterwards. When I am testing my students on this, one of the problems I often see is I will read an outline, I don't really have any idea how each of the points relate to each other. Understanding how they relate to each other is essential for a good outline. Now it seems to me there are two main kinds of outlines, and I will illustrate them for you.

Two main kinds of outlines, particularly when you are teaching or preaching a passage, one kind of outline I could call parallel outlines. A parallel outline is where each of the sub points is parallel to one another generally answering some question about the thesis statement.

Here is example; narrative literature often has progressive outlines. Mark 2:13-17, the Call of Levi. You might do that as an assignment. Let me then suggest for you a thesis statement. Mark presents Jesus' mission as directed not to the self-righteous, but to sinners who recognize their need of salvation. The outline would progress. The first point would be the call of Levi. The second main point would be the meal in Levi's home. Then you would have sub points under that, the challenge

by the religious leaders, why does Jesus eat with sinners. The sub point under the meal in Levi's home, the first sub point A we could call it. The challenge by the religious leaders, why does Jesus eat with sinners.

The second sub point would be Jesus' response. And Jesus response is two-fold so we could have sub-sub points. The first of his response is the proverb that only sick people need a doctor. The second response sub-sub point would be the application. The Son of Man came to call sinners. So we have got the proverb only sick people need a doctor and the application the Son of Man came to call sinners. So those are just examples of how an outline works. Alright, our first four points,

our first four steps of exegesis are

1) identify the genre,

2) get the big picture,

3) develop a thesis statement and

4) outline the progress of thought. In our next session we will go through the remaining six steps of exegesis.

5. Consult Secondary Sources (a Good Commentary) on Your Passage.

Our fifth step of exegesis is to consult secondary sources, especially, I would say, to consult good commentaries, if they are available to you. At this point it is time to go deeper beyond our surface reading of the text. In fact, steps five through seven are intended to help us resolve the interpretive questions and problems that may have arisen from your studies so far. You have simply been reading the text in your language, in English or whatever language you are reading it in, and trying to determine its meaning. Even if you do not see any problems or questions, the passage may seem perfectly clear, they may be there. Perhaps you have not examined the passage closely enough to detect certain problems or perhaps the problems may arise from the original Greek or Hebrew and the translation you are reading has resolved the problem already by taking a particular interpretation or your understanding of the historical background may be inadequate to recognize the problem.

We tend to read the Bible from our historical perspective and so maybe you are missing something because you do not understand the historical background. For all of those reasons it is a good idea, at this point, to check a good commentary on this passage, this will alert you to the problems and issues that arise in the passage that may not be immediately evident to you, or questions or problems may have arisen in the passage and you are wondering what the solution is. So it is a good idea at this time to find out what others, what biblical scholars are saying about your passage. Have you misread the passage or missed an important point? You might end up refining your big idea or fining your outline based on what you find in the commentaries.

More often than not the author of a commentary, particularly if it is a good, well-written commentary by a reputable scholar, the author's understanding of the historical, linguistic, and cultural context of the book will be greater than yours. Their insights are, therefore, worth consulting to help you make a more informed decision on the passage. Now that does not mean, of course, that you should uncritically accept everything a passage says. The author may be wrong at certain points. This makes it important to consult more than one commentary if there is more than one available to you. It also makes your choice of which commentaries to use, to purchase, to have all the more important.

Commentaries and Their Proper Use

First of all a commentary is a work which comments on a particular book of Scripture. This definition is intentionally broad, because there are an enormous range of types of commentaries and various lengths and detail of commentaries. Commentaries may deal with a host of topics including discussions of background issues like the historical background, the geographical background, political, cultural, religious background; all the kinds of things we have been talking about in terms of the historical context of the passage. A commentary will deal with introductory issues such as author, date, purpose, occasion, literary form or genre. It will deal with textual issues, the issues we talked about when we discuss textual criticism. Issues of interpretation, questions of what words mean, of problem interpretation, what confusing passages.

Commentaries will deal with the progress of thought in the book. They will deal with the theological and thematic issues. They will give you cross references to biblical material as well as extra-biblical material, say inter-testamental Jewish material. Some commentaries deal with a history of the interpretation of the text. Commentaries also give you bibliographies where you can do greater research. Some commentaries today provide personal application of the text. Some provide preaching helps, homiletic or preaching helps, including outlines, illustrations, applications, and other types of information.

6. Analyze Syntactical Relationships

Analyzing syntactical relationships means examining the sentences and how they relate to each other. It means identifying the main clause of each sentence and the subordinate clauses and identifying the function of those subordinate clauses.

7. Analyze Key Terms and Themes

Analyzing key terms would mean doing word studies, if necessary. We are going to have an entire session, in fact, our next session will be on avoiding word study fallacies and how

8. Resolve Interpretive Issues and Problems

Step eight, then, is to resolve interpretative issues and problems. Every passage, most passages anyway, will raise interpretive questions. Some of those questions will be essential to resolve because they will directly relate to your lesson or your sermon. Some of them will not be essential and can be safely bypassed, except in your more detailed study in attempt to understand the passage. It is important to discern which problems are essential to resolve.

The key principle for discerning what is an essential issue is does it affect the essential meaning of the text. Is it going to change your thesis statement? Is it going to change your main points of your outline? Is it going to change the way you approach, teach and apply the text?

There are all types of problems that you may encounter; let me just summarize a few of those. There are textual problems, issues of textual criticism. For example, suppose you are teaching on the letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians 1:1 Paul says the letter is written to the church in Ephesus, but if you look at the footnote you will see that some manuscripts do not use the word Ephesus, do not have the word Ephesus there, and there is a question as to whether this letter was originally sent to Ephesus or originally meant as a circular letter to be sent around to a variety of churches.

Obviously your decision on that interpretative question will determine, to a certain extent, how you teach the letter to the Ephesians. Is this meant to address specific issues and problems and concerns in Ephesus, or is it a more general letter to Christians in all of Asia Minor in the first century? So there are textual questions.

There are genre identification questions. For example, you are telling the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke chapter 16. One thing you will have to resolve is whether this is meant to be a parable or whether Jesus is actually describing an historical event. That is a question of genre; how you teach it could be determined in part, at least, by that identification of the genre. Suppose you are teaching Genesis 1–2. One of the major questions related to the creation account is what is its genre. Is this a poetic description of the creation of the heavens and the earth or is this meant to be something of a historical, almost scientific description of how the time frame within which the heaven and earth were made? That genre identification question is critical for understanding that.

There are problems related to the meaning of words. What do certain words mean? We will talk more about that when we discuss word studies in the next session. There are syntactical questions and problems. Questions of how sentences relate to one another. Questions of how words and phrases function within a sentence. Take Matthew 28:18-20, for example, the Great Commission. If you study that passage in Greek you will see that there is only one imperative and that is to ―make disciples.‖ The rest of the verbs are participles; ―Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.‖ That going, that baptizing, that teaching are participles subordinate to the main imperative which is ―make disciples.‖ Now there is a syntactical question as to whether, in fact, ―make disciples‖ is then the controlling idea of that. There is a problem, an interpretative question that needs to be resolved. There are problems of historical reference. For example, you are teaching on Philippians and Paul is clearly in prison in Philippians. But where is he in prison, in Rome, in Ephesus, in Caesarea? Most scholars think Rome, but there is a debate about that. The letter to the Colossians speaks about a particular heresy in the church. What is that heresy? That is a problem of historical referent.

Questions of historical veracity or historical truth. For example, Luke 2 describes a census under Cesar Augustus and there have been challenges as to whether that census actually occurred or not. There is an interpretative question you might need to resolve.

Apparent contradictions, chronological problems between one Gospel narrative and another Gospel narrative. Apparent errors as in when Matthew in Matthew 27:9 seems to quote from Zechariah and attribute it to Jeremiah. These are some of the kinds of problems that you would face when doing your exegesis.

Principles for Resolving Problems

Let me just, then, give you a few brief principles on how to resolve problems and my first principle is that there are no really unique principles to solving problems, it really is a matter of doing good interpretation. So some of the basic principles we have set out for exegesis apply directly to solving problems. Principles like identify correctly the literary genre. Principles like carefully examine the literary and historical context. Consult outside sources, but always check their proposals against the text. So, there are three key principles that arise directly from what we have been talking about before.

Here is a fourth principle; keep an open mind. Neither the traditional solution nor the one that best fits your theological persuasion may be the correct one. Even when you reach a conclusion beware of being overly dogmatic about it since further light may arise in further investigation. And finally, most importantly of all, a fifth principle is to pray about the passage.

Remember the Holy Spirit is the one who illuminates Scripture. John 14:6,

―The Holy Spirit will teach you all things.‖ There is a passage given to Jesus‘ original twelve disciples but certainly has application for us. 1 John 2:20, 27,

―You have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know the truth.‖ We can know the truth because the Holy Spirit is our guide. That does not replace detailed study of the text. It does not replace examining the text in its historical and literary context, but it does remind us that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth. Alright, steps six, seven, and eight then once again. Step six was analyzing some tactical relationship, step seven, analyze key terms and themes, and step eight, resolving interpretative issues and problems. Now you have done your basic exegesis of the passage you want to then relate your passage to the broader meaning of Scripture.

9. ***Evaluate Your Results From the Perspective of Wider Contextual and Theological Issues***
Step nine, then, is to step back after you have determined the meaning of the passage. You have done a detailed interpretation. This particular passage is to relate the passage to the broader teaching of Scripture. And here just as in our context, we move outward in concentric circles from a word to a sentence to a paragraph to a section; here we are just moving further out in concentric circles. You would relate the message or theology of this passage to the teaching of the passage in the context of the book as a whole.

For example, 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul has been talking about the return of Christ, the rapture of the church, and the fact that believers who die in Christ will be raised first to meet Christ in the air. At this point in the passage you could compare that text to what the rest of 1 Thessalonians says about the return of Christ, that theme arises again and again throughout the letter of 1 Thessalonians. What is Paul‘s purpose in repeatedly referring to the return of Christ? Well, the purpose appears to be that this church is suffering persecution and Paul refers to the return of Christ as our ultimate vindication, out ultimate salvation and deliverance form the persecution that Christians undergo. So there is our first concentric circle, examining our teaching of this passage in the context of the book.

Then we would move outward, the teaching of the passage in the context of the author‘s writings as a whole. We might then say, okay, what does Paul teach about the return of Christ or the final consummation of our salvation in the rest of his writings and we might turn to passages like 1 Corinthians 15 where he discusses in detail the resurrection and its significance. We would compare, perhaps, the teaching in 2 Thessalonians to 1 Thessalonians where Paul gives further discussion related to the end times and the rise of the man of lawlessness and so forth. Then finally, third, the teaching of the passage in the context of broader biblical teaching in general. Here, of course, we could look at the broader teaching related to the return of Christ in the gospels. Jesus‘ own teaching in the Olivet

Discourse, Matthew 24 and 25. We could talk about the return of Christ in the book of Revelation and references to Christ‘s return in other New Testament documents. Here, then, we are

synthesizing what we have discovered from this passage in the broader context of Paul's letters moving outward in our concentric circles and in the broader context of the New Testament, and ultimately in the whole biblical revelation of both Old and New Testament. So that is step nine. Step nine is to evaluate our results in the context of a theology of the Bible as a whole.

10. Summarize Your Results

Finally, step ten is a summarizing step that simply says summarize your results, revise and refine the literary context. Now that you have studied the passage in its context, now that you know what the book as a whole says, revise any particular areas related to literary context. Revise and refine your thesis statement and revise and refine your outline, the progress of the passage. Alright, these are our ten steps of exegesis. From this point we would move then to our steps of contextualization or application. You have crossed the bridge back to its original life setting, its original context, you have determined what the text means, the authors intended meaning writing to those particular readers in that context; you are on that side of the bridge, you have moved from us to the them. Now you want to take that message and bring it back.

So our final lecture is going to be on contextualization, but before we do that we are going to have one lesson on word studies. Word studies can be a profitable area of research, but it can also be an area of some abuse and so we are going to have a session on word studies and then a final session on contextualization or application.

Word Studies Alright, in this session we are going to zero in on one of our ten steps of exegesis which was analyzing key terms and themes. We focus on this topic both because it can provide helpful insight into God's word, but also because it has been an area of particular abuse in the past and we want to caution against the misuse of doing word studies. This topic is under step seven; analyze key terms and themes of our ten steps of exegesis. The topic itself we call Lexical Semantics. Lexical refers to words, semantics refers to meaning, so this topic is about words and their meaning.

Biblical Authority and the Original Text

I would like to start with a caution related to biblical authority and the original text of scripture. Pastors sometimes use their knowledge of Hebrew and Greek as a way of asserting their authority and there is a danger of this; I would encourage you not to use the power of ―the Greek says‖ or the power of ―the Hebrew says‖ to gain authority over your congregation. Authority lies in the meaning of the text not in mysteries of Greek or Hebrew words. I would encourage pastors to only refer to the original Greek or Hebrew when it explains or provides insights that cannot be seen clearly or cannot be recognized from a translation. So only when it provides insights that cannot be recognized from reading the English translation. So my overall point is being cautious in using the original languages.

Basic Principles for Biblical Word Studies

1. Words generally have a semantic range, not one all-encompassing "meaning"

When using them, then, let's talk about some basic principles for word studies, some basic principles of lexical semantics. Here is our first principle. Words generally have a semantic range, not one all-encompassing meaning.

- Let's take the English word ―***field.*** what does the English word ―field‖ mean? Well it does not have a literal meaning; it has a range of possible meanings. Field could mean a cultivated piece of land. Field could refer to a background area as in a flag with a field of blue. It could refer to a topic or subject of academic interest like the field of mathematics. It could be an area where a sport takes place, like the players took to the field. So words do not generally have a literal meaning or an all-encompassing meaning, they have what we call a semantic range. And it is the same with Greek or Hebrew words, that is words that are in the Bible.
- Take the word ***charis***, for example. A beginning Greek student might say, ―Charis, oh that word means ―grace‖ as in Ephesians 2:9, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith.‖ But, in fact, the word charis can mean much more than grace, it can mean favor, for example. ―Do not be afraid Mary, you have found favor with God‖ in Luke 1:30. It can mean not undeserved favor sometimes we think of grace but credit earned. Luke 6:32 says, ―If you love those who love you what charis, what credit, is that to you?‖ It can mean good will earned. Acts 7:10, ―He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the good will of Pharaoh King of Egypt.‖ It can mean thanksgiving. Luke 17:9, ―Would he thank, or give grace, to the servant because he did what he was told.‖ So the word has a semantic range, not one all-encompassing meaning.

2. Context determines which particular "referent" or "sense" within this semantic range the author intended.

So what determines which meaning is correct? The answer, of course, is a word we have used a lot in this class, this course, and that word is context; context determines which sense is intended.

- I know that the word char is means undeserved favor or grace in Ephesians 2:8-9, because it says, For it is by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of ourselves,‖ it is nothing you have done.
- I know that it means credit earned or good will in Luke 6:32, because of the context ―what credit is that to you,‖ or ―what have you earned‖ in that case. So it is the context, the words around it, the literary context that determines which sense, which meaning within the semantic range that the author intended.

3. Words normally have only one "sense" in any particular literary context.

So two principles, words generally have a semantic range, not one all-encompassing meaning. Secondly, context determines which sense the author intended and third words normally have only one sense in any particular context.

- If I say, ―he planted corn in his field, I mean by ―field a cultivated piece of land. If I say, ―he is an expert in the field of mathematics,‖ then I mean a field of study. I do not mean both meanings when I say the word, I only mean one. So our third point again, words normally have only one sense in any particular context.

4. The meaning of words often changes over time.

The meaning of words often changes over time. In English this becomes very obvious when we read the King James Version, first published in 1611. Sometimes we read a word whose meaning has significantly changed.

- For example, James 5:11 in the King James Version says, ―The Lord is very pitiful. Well, ―pitiful‖ in contemporary English means weak. Pitiful means to be pitied, but in fact when the King James Version was translated pitiful meant full of pity or compassionate, so modern translations say the Lord is compassionate in James 5:11.
- James 2:3 in the King James Version says, ―You have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing.‖ Now in contemporary English the word ―gay‖ has come to mean homosexual, but that it not what it meant in the King James Version, it meant fancy or expensive in that context. And so our fourth principle, once again, is the meaning of words changes over time and we see that very clearly throughout the King James Version as the Elizabethan English meaning of words is very different than the contemporary English meaning of words.

5. Etymology is never a reliable guide to meaning.

Etymology is never a reliable guide to meaning. Now etymology refers to a word's component parts or to its history, its historical derivation. Let me explain to you what those mean. Etymology refers to component parts.

- Take the word ―***pineapple***.‖ Well that word has two parts, pine and apple, yet a pineapple is neither a pine tree, nor it is a kind of apple. So our point again is etymology is never a reliable guide to meaning. The component parts of pine and apple do not tell us what the word means.
- Take the word ―***understand***.‖ Understand does not mean to stand under, understand means in English to comprehend. Or take the word ***undertake,*** undertake does not mean to take under, it means to begin a task or an undertaker is someone who prepares bodies for burial.

So we can see that the component parts of a word do not determine its meaning. Etymology can also refer to historical derivation, where a word actually comes from or what its meaning originally was.

- Take the English word ―***Monday***.‖ Where does the word Monday come from? Well Monday originally referred to the moon day, the day of the moon, the day dedicated or named after the moon, yet few English readers even know that, we would never say that Monday is moon day, we would say Monday is a day of the week, the second day of the week, the first day of the work week.
- ***Sunday*** originally referred to the day of the sun, but when we mention Sunday we mean the first day of the week, the day we worship in church. We do not mean the day we worship the sun. So historical derivation of the word has nothing to do, or can have nothing to do with its meaning.
- Here is another example, take the word sophomore. The word sophomore refers to a student in their second year of high school or their second year of college. A second-year student is a sophomore. Well, the word sophomore comes from two Greek words, sophos and moros and it means a wise fool. A sophomore is a wise fool because a freshman knows nothing and recognizes they know nothing. A sophomore thinks they know everything, but in fact they are just a wise fool. That is where the word originally came from, but the word does not mean that in contemporary English. The meaning of a word is not derived from its historical origin.
- Here is one final example, take the months of the year, this is very interesting. The months of year in English – September, October, November, December, what does September mean? Well sept means seven and so we would expect September to be the seventh month,

but it is the ninth month. October, oct means eight, we would expect October to the eighth month, but in fact it is the tenth month. November, nov means nine, November is the eleventh month. December, dec means ten, December is the twelfth month. So you can see the names of the months are misnamed with reference to which month they actually are. Now how did that happen? It happened historically because the Romans moved from a ten month calendar to a twelve-month calendar. They added two months, July and August, named for Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus and therefore all the months moved down one, but etymology had nothing to do with the meaning of those months because they kept the names – September, seventh month, even though they were referring to the ninth month. So our point, once again, is etymology is never a reliable guide to meaning. That will become very significant when we talk about avoiding word study fallacies.

6. Two Steps for Word Studies

Here is our conclusion to this initial section and that is that the meaning of a word is determined by two things, its contemporary semantic range, that is, what the word can mean. How would you determine a contemporary semantic range? Of a word in English you would look it up in a dictionary that is how you would find out. You would look it up in a dictionary, because dictionaries tell us basically what a word can mean. Its contemporary semantic range and secondly a meaning of a word is determined by the literary context in which it is used. What the context determines that it does mean in this particular context. So there are two basic steps to doing a word study. The first is to determine what the word can mean by looking it up in a dictionary or by looking it up in a lexicon. A lexicon is another word for a dictionary referring to the use of the biblical languages in English, a Greek lexicon, a Hebrew lexicon, and then examining the context. The second step is to examine the context to determine which of its possible senses the word means.

Avoiding Word Study Fallacies

some common mistakes that are made when studying Greek and Hebrew words are the following;

1. The "root meaning" fallacy

The first fallacy is known as a root meaning fallacy. A root meaning fallacy is the fallacy that every word in Greek has a single core meaning and we can apply that meaning to every passage.

- One of the errors that is sometimes made is claiming that there are three distinct words for love in Greek and they each have a very distinct meaning. You may have heard this before. It is sometimes said that: Agape means God's kind of unselfish love, self-sacrificial love. Philia means human love and eros means lust or self-centered love. Three different kinds of love that Greek explains – agape, God's love; philia, human love; eros, self-centered love. Well, that is really not the whole story because, in fact, the Greek word agape, or the verb form agapaõ, can mean a variety of kinds of love. It does not always mean God's kind of love and philia can refer to God's kind of love, not just to human love. Here is an example, 2 Timothy 4:10 says, "For Demas, because he loved this world has deserted me." Paul says that Demas loved, agapaõ, loved this world, but that was not a self-sacrificial, God-like love, that was a desire for the things of the world, that was a selfish love. So whereas agapaõ can mean God's kind of love, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world," it can also mean human love, or it can also mean selfish love. In other words agapaõ can mean some of the same things that the English word love means. So it is simply not correct to assume that

agape or agapaõ have one root meaning.Another example for agapaõ is 1 John 2:15. John says, ―Do not love the world.‖ John 3:16 says, ―God loved the world.‖ 1 John 2:15 says, ―Do not love the world nor the things in the world.‖ Well, we are talking about two different kinds of love. God loved the world in a self-sacrificial, giving manner, but we are not to love the world to desire selfishly the things of the world, same Greek word. It is a root meaning fallacy to assume that every Greek word has only one meaning.

2. The "etymology" fallacy

Alright, here is another kind of fallacy; we call it an etymology or etymological fallacy. We mentioned the danger of etymology, that etymology is not a reliable guide.

- Matthew 16:18 Jesus says, ―On this rock I will build my church.‖ The Greek word for church is ekklesia. Ekklesia is built from two Greek words, ek, which means out of, and klesia, which means called. And so sometimes it is said that the church means the called out ones. But that is actually an etymological fallacy. Ekklesia means an assembly or a gathered group of people. It came to be used as a technical term for the New Covenant people of God, that is the church. But nowhere in the literature of the first century do we find ekklesia meaning the called out ones. That may be part of its etymology but by the first century it had lost that meaning. It meant an assembly or a congregation or a church. Those are the correct translations of the word; congregation, gathering, assembly, or church, but called out ones is an illegitimate translation because the word is never used that way in the first century.

- Let me give you another example of an Etymological fallacy. John 14:16 refers to the paraclete, the parakletos. John 14:16 says, ―And I will ask the Father and he will give you another counselor‖ or parakletos. Well, parakletos is built off two Greek words; para, alongside; kletos, meaning called. So some have said that the Holy Spirit is the one called alongside to help. Well, that may be true that the Holy Spirit is the one called alongside to help but that is not what the word parakletos means. Parakletos means a counselor or a mediator or an advocate or an encourager, that is its semantic range. It does not mean a called alongside one in that sense. If you looked that word up in a lexicon you will not find called alongside as one meaning. By the first century that etymology had been lost and the word simply meant a counselor, an advisor, a mediator, an advocate or even a lawyer. Those are the possible senses and then we determine from the context which of those senses it means.

3. The "anachronistic meaning" fallacy

A third kind of fallacy is what we call an anachronistic fallacy. An anachronism means something taken out of time, something placed in the wrong time or placed backwards or forwards in time. This is the fallacy where a Greek or Hebrew word comes to mean or is used in a different or later sense and it is imposing that sense back on its first-century usage.

- Let me explain what I mean. Romans 1:16 says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation." The Greek word for power there is dynamis. We get our word dynamite from dynamis and so sometimes it is said that the gospel is the dynamite of God for salvation. In other words, it is taking a later meaning of dynamis, dynamite, and

applying it back to the first century. Well, obviously there is a problem there. When Paul wrote Romans 1:16 he did not mean dynamite, dynamite had not yet been invented, would not be invented for a very long time, so he could not have been thinking about dynamite. That is a later meaning of a word, that is a later word actually that is derived from an earlier Greek word, but the later meaning does not impose itself back on the earlier usage. There is, of course, another problem that the power of God for salvation is not explosive destructive power. But that is beside the point because we simply should not impose back a later meaning onto an earlier one. Dynamis in this context clearly means power, it does not mean dynamite, it does not mean explosion.

- Here is another anachronistic fallacy that is quite common. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, ―For God loves a cheerful giver.‖ The word cheerful is the Greek word hilaros. Well, we get our word hilarious from hilaros, so some have suggested that God loves a hilarious giver, someone who laughs, who greatly enjoys laughing while giving. Well, that is another anachronistic fallacy, because the Greek word hilaros did not mean hilarious in the first century, it meant cheerful. Now later that word, the English word hilarious, was derived from that word, but that is a later meaning, you cannot impose that later meaning on the earlier use. So that is an anachronistic fallacy. So these word study fallacies are very common among preachers and teachers who know some Greek words, but are misapplying the meaning of those words in order to make a point, to illustrate a point.

Principles to Avoid Word Study Fallacies

Alright, let me give you some final principles to avoid word study fallacies, principles based on these points that we have made in relation to lexical semantics.

1. Meaning is determined by context not word roots.

Here is our first principle. Meaning is determined by context not word roots. We have seen the etymology, the component parts of a word or some core meaning of a word does not determine its meaning. What determines its meaning is its context.

2. Study sentences, not Greek words.

Here is a second principle to avoid word study fallacy. As a rule study sentences not Greek words. Study English sentences if you are reading the Bible in English, not Greek words. In other words read larger sections of the text, they will give you a better idea of the meaning of these words then will minute study of individual vocabulary.

3. Read for the big idea, not the hidden meaning.

Here is a third principle. Read for the big idea not the hidden meaning. It is more important to identify the central message of a larger text or paragraph than it is to unpack the secret meaning of a particular Greek or Hebrew word, because that secret meaning probably is not there. Good English translations are trying to find the closest English equivalent. It is unlikely by discovering some secret message or meaning in the Greek you are going to determine the meaning more fully than reading the entire sentence or paragraph.

4. Compare various English versions and check commentaries

Here is a fourth principle, compare various English versions. In addition to a good translation your second best tool for Bible study is another good translation, because comparing various English versions will give you some of the possible senses that a word can have.

Principles of Contextualization

So why do we need contextualization? Well, because not every passage in the Bible was meant to be applied to believers of all time. So that brings up a significant question. How do we decide what commands are meant for all time and which are meant for a particular cultural context? How do we decide? Let‘s look at some basic principles of contextualization or principles of application.

1. Proper contextualization begins with sound exegesis.

Here is our first principle. Proper contextualization begins with sound exegesis. That is determining the original meaning. Proper contextualization or application begins with sound exegesis. Ask these questions – What is the original intent of the passage? Ask yourself, what is the cultural and historical setting in which the message was given? Basic questions of exegesis, what did the text mean in its original cultural and historical context?

2. All Scripture is authoritative, because it is inspired by God.

Here is a second principle of application or contextualization and that is that all scripture is authoritative. All Scripture is inspired by God, 2 Timothy 3:16. Application concerns not whether a particular passage is relevant because all passages of scripture are relevant. The question is how to apply it to our contemporary situation.

- Take for example a passage that I just mentioned, 1 Peter 5:14, ―Greet one another with a kiss of love. The question is not whether that passage has relevance, has application, it certainly does, the question is how do we apply that passage to our lives.

3. Scripture can be applied at the surface level, or at the level of principle.

Here is a third principle. Scripture can be applied at the surface level, that is directly, or at the level of principle.

- Greet one another with a kiss of love, well the surface level would mean that we are commanded to kiss one another in greeting. The principle would mean something like, this verse affirms that Christian affection should be shown. If we look at kissing in the first century it was generally between family members, it was a sign of familial love and affection and so Paul, or Peter in the context, is telling us to shown Christian affection.

4. Distinguish between the cultural, which is relative, and the supercultural, which is absolute.

Here is a fourth principle. To apply correctly we must distinguish between the cultural, which is relative, and the super-cultural or above culture, which is absolute.

- Take one passage in 1 Corinthians 11:5, “But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head.” Our goal is determine whether this passage is a command for all time or whether it was a specific cultural command for the Corinthian church. Alright, this fourth principle can be unpacked into a number of factors or

sub points and here is the first. Questions to ask, some factors to consider to determine whether a text is cultural or super-cultural.

1. **Is the command inherently moral?**

The first factor to consider is, is the command inherently moral? Now, the definition of what is moral can be a difficult one. I would define moral as something that is directly related to the character of God. Something that is right or wrong not based on culture or external circumstances but based directly on the character of God.

- Here is an example of a moral command. Ephesians 4:25 says, ―Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor. Speaking truthfully is a moral command, it is directly related to God's character, God is true.
- Ephesians 4:28, another moral command, ―He who has been stealing must steal no longer. Stealing is a moral issue; it runs contrary to the nature and character of God.

2. Does the context give indications that the passage is above culture?

Here is a second factor to consider. Does the context give indications that the passage is above culture?

- Ephesians 6:1 says, ―Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.‖ A statement, a kind of a universal statement that ―this is right‖ would suggest that Paul is making a command that is not just culturally specific.

2. **Do we share comparable particulars?**

Do we share comparable particulars, that is, similar, specific life situations with the first-century context? If so, the command is likely to apply today.

- Let me give you an example of this. Ephesians 5:18 says, ―Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.‖ Do not get drunk with wine. We can ask the question as, do we shape comparable particulars with the first century context in which this statement was written? In other words, is drunkenness the same basic issue today as it was in the first century? And I think we can certainly say it is, it is the same basic issue. The abuse of alcohol causes family problems today just like it caused family problems in the first century. It causes lack of judgment, it can produce violent behavior, it can result in poor work habits, it can result in difficult family relationships. So drunkenness is the same issue, basically, today as it was in the first century, we share comparable particulars.

- Here is another verse though, ―I also want women to dress modestly,‖ Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:9. ―Not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes.‖ Here the question is, is the issue of braided hair or gold or pearls the same today as it was in the first century? Well, braided hair today is not a sign of lack of modesty or ostentatious behavior. Wearing gold or pearls is not usually viewed as flaunting wealth. So, Paul is clearly directly addressing a specific cultural situation where Greco-Roman women would wear large coiffure, large hairdos with jewels and pearls, precious stones in it to show off their wealth and he calls on the women of Ephesus not to dress in that manner. So, obviously that

passage does not have a comparable particular or a similar life situation to today. Now here is an interesting verse however because first of all Paul states the universal, ―I want women to dress modestly;‖ there is a moral command right there, and then the cultural application, ―not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes. So a good example where we see both the universal principle followed by the cultural application.

4. Is the command connected to cultural practices current in the first century but not present today?

Here is a fourth factor to consider as to whether something is cultural or universal. Is the command connected to cultural practices current in the first century, but not present today?

- Take John 13, for example, where Jesus says, ―Now that I your Lord and teacher have washed your feet you also should wash one another‘s feet.‖ The command to wash feet, that cultural practice is very significant in the first century where roads were dusty. People walked barefoot or wore sandals; when they arrived at a home where they received hospitality, a slave or servant might wash their feet. It was a task designated only for someone of the lowest cultural and social status. So, Jesus' calling on his disciples to function as servants, lowering themselves, submitting themselves to one another. Now we practice foot washing, many churches practice foot washing today, but it does not quite have the same cultural significance. Often times the person who is embarrassed or who feels humbled is the one who has to take off their shoes and have their foot washed. Now I am not saying this cannot be a significant ceremony and something that has great spiritual significance and devotional significance, but clearly the issue of washing the feet has a different significance in the first century than it does today.

5. What cultural options were open to the writer?

Here is a fifth factor to consider when asking whether a passage is cultural or universal and that is, what cultural options were open to the writer? When only one option was open the passage is more likely to be culturally relative.

- Paul says in Ephesians 6:5, "Slaves obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ." Repeatedly in the New Testament Paul and others command servants or slaves to obey their earthly masters. In other words they seem to affirm the practice of slavery, which we know is an abhorrent and evil institution. How can this be? Well, we have to recognize what options were open to Paul. Slavery was a fundamental institution in the Roman world where over half of the population, by some estimates, were slaves. The Roman Empire was built on the backs of slaves. When there were occasionally slave revolts, they were violently put down. Anyone who would call for the manumission, for the freeing of all the slaves, would quickly be arrested and almost certainly executed. Now what cultural options were open to Paul? Paul had been called by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul‘s commission is to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. For him to call for the freedom for slaves would certainly distract from that task. Paul would immediately be arrested and would lose any opportunity for proclaiming the gospel further. In addition to that, Paul probably felt like Christ was returning soon, so the greatest task, the most important task, was not to free the slaves, it was rather to get the gospel to the ends of the earth as quickly as possible. So here again our point, what cultural

options were open to the writer. It really was not an option for Paul to call for the manumission of slaves in that particular context, if, in fact, he was going to obey God and accomplish the commission that he had been given.

6. What is the ultimate purpose of this command in its cultural context?

Alright, that is our fifth factor, here is our sixth factor to consider when trying to determine what is universal and what is culturally specific and that is, what is the ultimate purpose of this command in its cultural context? What is the ultimate purpose? Purpose is a critically important question when looking at a biblical text. What was the author's ultimate goal and purpose? Was Paul's ultimate purpose to make sure women covered their head in worship or was Paul's ultimate purpose propriety of worship? Then we have to ask, how would this purpose best be fulfilled in our cultural context? How would propriety in worship best be fulfilled in our cultural context? Now we have to bear in mind all the other principles we have just mentioned, but this issue of purpose can function as something of a guiding rule, because if we can get to the heart of God, if we can get to God's ultimate purpose and recognize what he would desire, based on the nature of God, based on the nature of us as human beings, we will be able to face a wide variety of issues, issues that are not dealt with specifically in the Bible.

A whole range of issues are not even mentioned in Scripture.

- Take an issue such as drug abuse, an issue only mentioned with reference to wine and alcohol in the Bible. Take modern issues of euthanasia or genetic manipulation, or stem cell research. Take issues like gambling or pornography, issues that simply are not even mentioned in Scripture because they are not a part of the cultural context of Scripture. How do we make a decision about those? Well, we determine God's nature and purpose, who God is and who we are as human beings, and building from that nature and purpose we can then draw appropriate conclusions. Alright, we have seen six sub-points, six factors to consider when seeking to determine whether something is culturally relative or absolute.

5. Individual statements must be placed in the broader context of Scripture.

A couple other principles of contextualization, here is a fifth principle of contextualization, a main point. Individual statements must be placed in the broader context of Scripture. We call this the analogy of Scripture. And I can give you two sub points under this larger point.

5.1 Is all of biblical teaching uniform or does it reflect differences of perspective?

The first is the question, is the New Testament teaching uniform or does it reflect differences of perspective? Is the New Testament teaching, we could actually say all of biblical teaching, uniform or does it reflect differences of perspective?

Let us just take a couple of issues, the issue of homosexuality, for example. Scripture uniformly condemns homosexual behavior. I want to stress this, I am not referring to homosexual inclination, because obviously some people feel attraction to the same sex, but they do not act on that. Scripture condemns, not homosexual feelings, but when those feelings become lust or when those feelings are acted upon. So, we are talking about homosexual behavior here and there is no question that Scripture uniformly condemns homosexual behavior, both in the Old Testament, the Levitical Law, Leviticus 18:22, 29; 20:13. Then in the New Testament, Romans 1:18-32 where Paul views homosexual behavior as a distortion of God's created order, God's created order of sexual relations

between a man and a woman. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1 8-11. You cannot find teaching to the contrary in Scripture, so Scripture is uniform in its condemnation of homosexual behavior.

On the other hand, if you take another issue, let's say women in leadership positions within the church. We see what is at best a mixed picture in Scripture, though Paul makes specific commands that he does not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, 1 Timothy 2. Yet, in other cases we see women who seem to be functioning in some kinds of prominent positions of authority. Women like Priscilla, wife of Aquila, who is almost always named first. Women like Phoebe who is identified as a deaconess, possibly a deacon. Women like Junia, who may be identified, in fact, as an apostle. Women like Euodia and Syntyche who are identified by Paul as his coworkers. And so we get at least a fairly mixed picture of whether women were exercising any kind of leadership role. I did not mention Lydia who appears to have a house church in Philippi in her home, possibly a leader of that house church. Now I am not making definitive statements that these women were leaders, but I am suggesting that New Testament teaching does not seem to be absolutely uniform nor does Old Testament teaching when we consider a woman like Deborah fulfilling the role of a judge. And so we at least need to be cautious when making application of passages like these that do not seem to reflect absolutely uniform teaching, in contrast to the issue of homosexual behavior, where we seem to see universal condemnation in Scripture. So here is our point once again, our sub point under individual statements must be placed in the broker context of scripture. Is the New Testament teaching uniform?

5.2 Is this part of core biblical teaching or it is peripheral?

Our second sub-point is, is this part of core biblical teaching or it is peripheral, is it on the edge, is it something that occurs only once or twice and is obscure in Scripture?

A classic example of something that is certainly not core biblical teaching is 1 Corinthians 15:29. 1 Corinthians 15:29 says, ―Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all why are people baptized for them? Paul is arguing for the resurrection and he refers to this practice of baptizing for the dead. He does not state he approves of it nor does he state he disapproves of it. He never refers to it elsewhere. Was this something that was happening in Corinth? Was it happening in other places in the empire, among the other churches? What were the Corinthian believers doing? Was this baptism for those who had died as unbelievers? Was this baptism for those who were believers but had not yet been physically baptized? We simply do not know and commentators list dozens of possibilities here. This is an extremely obscure verse; it does not command baptism from the dead, it does not explain baptism from the dead. To practice something or to command the practice of baptism from the dead would be totally inappropriate from this passage since it is clearly not part of core biblical teaching.

On the other hand, something like living a moral life, faithfulness to a wife, abstaining from sexual immorality, not lying or slandering or gossiping about others; these kinds of commands occur again and again in Scripture and so are clearly part of core biblical teaching and so we can safely assume that they are commands for us today.

God's word is meant not just to be read and understood; God's word is meant to be applied to our lives. So, the ultimate task of biblical interpretation is to allow God's word to transform us, to allow it to make us into the image of Jesus Christ so that we can boldly proclaim his message to the ends of the earth so that we can bring the knowledge of God to all people everywhere.

CHAPTER SIX
TOOLS FOR HERMENEUTICS

The Best Tools for Word Studies

What are the best tools for word studies? Well, if you are able to use Greek tools, the standard Greek lexicons are your best tools. For the New Testament that is the Bauer Lexicon – Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich. If you cannot use lexicons, the commentaries always provide good help; they provide good help, because they study the Bible in context.

The tools for studying the historical cultural background

- Bible Handbooks
- Old Testament and New Testament Introduction and Surveys
- Commentaries
- Bible Atlas
- Bible Dictionaries and encyclopedias
- Background Commentaries
- Old Testament and New Testament Histories
- Special Studies in ancient Life and Culture

Different Types of Commentaries

There are a variety of kinds of commentaries.

1. **Expository commentaries**

Expository commentaries are commentaries whose goal is to identify the original meaning of the text in its original context. In other words, they are exegetically focused, focused on determining what the author‘s meaning is in its historical and cultural context.

Some books on Bible study, particularly books on inductive Bible study, discourage the use of commentaries. They say do not use commentaries except as a very last resort. They might even say something like, ―you want to read just the words of God, not the words of man, and a commentary represents human interpretation. But as we have already seen in studying Bible translation, even that translation you are reading, even a simple reading of the text is an act of interpretation. It is an interpretation when the text is translated; it is an interpretation when you are reading the text. So, even though we should not allow a commentary to determine and govern our reading of the text. Good commentaries will be your best secondary resource for serious study in preparation for teaching and preaching. To those who would completely shun commentaries it might be asked, would you ever ask another pastor, your pastor perhaps, or a Bible professor what the best interpretation of a particular passage is or what the original Greek or Hebrew tells us about this passage. Really, consulting a commentary is just asking and expert in the field what their perspective is on the passage.

2. **Devotional commentaries**

Devotional commentaries focus on application of the text. There are homiletical commentaries. These commentaries focus on helping the preacher prepare a message. Sometimes they will have outlines, they will have illustrations; they are very helpful for last-minute sermon preparation. Then there are expository commentaries, which as I mentioned before, they seek a middle road between practical and technical. They usually interpret using the English text, though the authors are experts in Hebrew and Greek. Sometimes they will put Hebrew and Greek in the footnote, but not in the main body of the text.

3. **Technical or critical commentary**

Technical or critical commentary which tends to be focused on detailed study of the Hebrew or Greek text, a detailed study of historical, cultural, social, religious background. These commentaries can be very long; thousands of pages long for a single book, sometimes multiple volumes for a single book. For most pastors and teachers these commentaries will be more detailed than usually is necessary, though they can be helpful when dealing with a very difficult interpretational problem. Of these four kinds of commentaries; devotional, homiletic, expositional or expository, and technical the most important tools for most pastors will be the expository commentaries, because their focus is on exegesis. Their goal is to determine and explain what the text means in its original context, which is where most pastors and teachers will need the most help. In terms of the application of the text, pastors and teachers should draw that from their context. They should look at their audience, consider their present cultural situation and apply the text accordingly.

Commentary Series

Let me give you the names, very briefly, of some of the most important commentary series within these various kinds. I am just going to give you expository commentaries and some technical commentaries. Some of the better expository commentaries, the Expositors Bible Commentary, a twelve volume set, over the whole Bible. The New International Commentary, the NIC. The Tyndale Old Testament and New Testament Commentary, the New International Biblical Commentary, the Anchor Bible Commentary, the New Century Bible Commentary, the Baker Exegetical Commentary; these are standard expository commentaries. There is also the NIV Application Commentary which is expository, but also gives application to the text. Some of the technical or critical commentaries include the International Critical Commentary, the Word Biblical Commentary, Hermeneia, and the New International Greek Testament Commentary. So some examples of commentaries. Evaluating and Choosing Commentaries Alright then, let me give you a few hints in terms of evaluating a commentary and choosing commentaries. Here are some questions to ask when evaluating a commentary. Ask the question, is the commentary well organized and easy to use? Does it provide a good introduction to the book including the literary genre, historical context, purpose and occasion? Does the author demonstrate competence in the original languages? Does the author discuss interpretational problems? Some commentaries are too brief and skip many important interpretational questions. Does the author give a fair and balanced treatment of problems or is the author clearly biased in one particular direction? Does the work

comment on each verse or is it only section by section? Is there a bibliography to pursue further research in the commentary? Does the author exhibit awareness of recent works related to the issues in the book or is it only older works that are cited? Does the author document his or her sources, especially references to ancient writers or customs? Sometimes an ancient custom will be mentioned without any reference to evidence for that custom from ancient documents. Does the author include hints for application or contextualization as part of the work? Does the author take unusual or novel interpretations which seem to go beyond the author of the biblical book‘s intended meaning? Does the commentary follow the main theme or argument of the book well relating each section to the flow of the book or are there just many scattered exegetical comments? So those are just some questions to ask when evaluating a commentary. Here are some points to consider when choosing which commentary to use; questions to ask yourself in other words. What are your needs, first of all? As I mentioned for solid exegesis, good expository commentaries tend to be better than the devotional ones. The devotional ones can help when seeking application, but in terms of determining the meaning of the text expository commentaries, or if you are able to use them, critical commentaries are the best tools.

A second question, what are your original language skills? If you have studied Hebrew or Greek you can use the technical commentaries. If you have not studied them it probably would not be worth the financial investment to have them simply because they will be too difficult to use. Third, how much time do you have to study the text in question? As we mentioned before, commentaries come in all sizes and all levels of detail. Most commentary series have a separate volume on each book.

Some, however, are whole Bible commentaries; one volume for the whole Bible. And some gather multiple books in a single volume.

The Expositors Bible Commentary, for example, gathers all the Old and New Testament into twelve volumes. Usually a one-volume Bible commentary will not help you a great deal on your passage because it will be just too brief, but it will give you a good general idea of what the passage is all about. So depending on your needs you choose a commentary with either greater or lesser detail. Fourth, ask those with more experience what the best commentaries are. Check with others who have done a great deal of biblical study; they can be your best source. They can say, I really like this author, this particular author. I really like this particular series.

There are such things as commentary survey books. Don Carson has a good book called New Testament Commentary Survey which surveys well a variety of New Testament commentaries. Tremper Longman has a good Old Testament commentary survey, both of those is published by Baker, that analyzes and tells at least this author‘s perspective of what the best commentaries are. Gradually you can learn to recognize which commentary series you like the best and also which commentators are most trustworthy. Those are points on how to choose and evaluate a commentary.

Brief Guidelines for Exegetical Papers

These are basic guidelines to assist in interpretation of a biblical text, not rules to be followed. While the actual process of analysis of the text may not necessarily follow this order, these steps provide a basic structure to develop and write an exegetical paper. Since the kinds of passages vary widely, some may require a slightly different presentation of the results of exegesis. Also, the individual parts of the format may need to be adjusted to suit the needs of the individual text. For example, some texts will involve more attention to structure while others will require more attention to historical background. However, this format should provide the basic structure of the paper. While these guidelines were formulated specifically with Old Testament passages in mind, they can vbe used for New Testament passages as well. The guidelines in Stuart (Old Testament Exegesis, pp. 21-43) and Fee (New Testament Exegesis, pp. 25-50) will also provide guidance.

1. The TextThis should be a personal translation of the text either from the original languages or from a comparison of several modern English versions (Jerusalem Bible, NRSV, NASB, NEB, NIV,etc. No paraphrases!) to identify any problems of translation which might affect the communication of the text. 2. The Structure and Composition of the Text

2. The Structure and Composition of the Text

Structure:

This is an analysis of the physical organization of the unit. This assumes a canonical shape for most passages; that is, that the structure is deliberate and is related to the communication of the passage. The aim here is to begin hearing the text on its own terms. a. the limits of the unit, the reasons for setting them (as chosen, given, or changed), and how this might affect the communication of the passage. This would include the use of rhetorical devices (inclusio), narrative breaks (time, characters, location), formulaic constructions, or other devices that help define the unit.

b. a sentence outline of the passage identifying major parts, their components, and any other elements that play a role in the structural composition of the unit. This outline should clearly delineate the flow of thought of the passage. Any deliberate structural patterns, such as an acrostic, chiasmus, parallelism, etc., should be made clear here.

c. the function of the parts in the unit as a whole. This should (usually) be a short paragraph summarizing how the unit is organized, and how the various parts of the outline fit together. This will be quite easy in some texts (narratives), and will be more difficult in others (proverbial sayings).

d. points of emphasis in the passage that are highlighted by the structure. What does the analysis of structure begin telling you about what this text is attempting to communicate?

Composition

This section should include the identification and relevance of those features which begin to pull the reader (hearer) toward the message of the passage, including:

e. key words and phrases and their significance in the passage. Don't include words here simply for information; identify key words that directly bear on the communication of the passage, and explain why you think they are key terms. If necessary, you may need to define precisely how the terms are used in the passage, especially if they can have a range of meaning (words like nephesh, mishpat, chesed, ruach, sarks, harmartia, etc.). In some cases, you may need to compare terms in this passage with how they are used elsewhere.

f. compositional techniques such as repetition of words, catch phrases, refrains, etc., and their relevance. Be sure you show how these techniques are used, and why; that is, how are they used as a means of communication.

g. literary devices, such as metaphor, imagery, word play, rhetorical questions, etc., and their significance in communication

h. the significance of formulaic phrases, such as "Woe!" or "Thus says YHWH" or "this happened so that it might be fulfilled." How are these used in the passage, what effect do they have, and how do they help us understand the communication of the passage?

i. the genre that is most closely associated with these features. This should include not only the identification of the genre, but also how it has been altered and adapted into the present context and its function in the present context. If possible, this should be a specific genre that goes beyond "narrative" or "poetry." However, in many passages, the exact identification of genre, although perhaps interesting, is not crucial to understanding the passage. You will have to determine if it is important or not.

3. Context: The Setting of the Passage

Literary

This section should include an analysis of the physical context of the passage within Scripture, most importantly in terms of its immediate placement as well as it relationship to larger literary contexts; the focus here should be on significance for interpretation.

a. the relation of the passage to its immediate literary context. How does the passage fit into the flow of thought of the preceding and following passages? Is this passage integral to a sustained coherent idea, or does it stand somewhat disconnected from its context and function independently? How do preceding or following passages affect how this passage is heard

b. the role of the passage in the larger composition of which it is a part, either a large literary unit or the book as a whole. How does the passage fit into the overall flow of thought of the larger units of the book? Is there a discernible macro-structure of which this is a part?

c. the place and role of the passage in the entire canon of Scripture. (This is an important step for a full exegesis. However, for most exegetical exercises this is simply beyond the scope of what can be done in a limited amount of time. The lack of experience of most students in doing exegetical work would also make this very time consuming.)

Historical Background

This section should include an analysis of the historical setting of the text (if apparent). An important part of this step is to decide the relative importance of historical issues for interpretation. The focus here should be on significance for interpretation

d. any pertinent data that can be deduced from the passage about the religious, cultural or sociological setting of the passage and its importance for interpretation. Do not include here a lot of descriptive historical material. In most cases it is sufficient simply to reference a period of time. However, some passages will require more specific data than others.

e. comparison of this data with the posited setting of the genre of the passage, as identified above. In most cases, this will not play a large role in the exegesis since most scholars have become pessimistic about their ability accurately to connect genre with a Sitz im Leben. However, if there is some consensus concerning your passage, it may be important to include. Be careful to show the relevance of this information to the text's message.

f. any specific historical facts about the writing which bear directly on communication, such as author, the purpose of the book (or passage), the audience to which it was addressed, etc. Use only solid historical data here, and only if it is crucial for understanding the passage.

g. the world situation and political setting (if known) at the time of the passage and its significance for interpretation. Caution should be taken to use only well documented data and not speculative reconstructions of history. Again, some texts will require more of this larger context (Elijah narratives, Amos, Gospels) than do others (Psalms, Leviticus, Romans).

4. Communication of the Passage

This section should begin moving toward synthesis, a drawing together of the various parts already identified to see how they function to communicate a message. Be sure that your conclusions in this section are drawn rather directly from your analysis in the previous sections. There should be very little new material here. This is the place to pull together the various aspects of your analysis.

a. identification of the major concerns or issues being addressed in the passage. This should be done through a combination of several elements of your analysis above.

b. the 'effect' or impact of the combination of genre (or lack or adaptation of it), literary devices, and structure.

c. identification and summary of motifs highlighted by these features

d. the relationship between the motifs and the concerns of the passage; that is, how the ideas highlighted by composition, literary devices and structure address the major concerns.

e. the relation of these motifs and concerns to the historical setting of the book; how can the historical setting further clarify the communication of the passage? This should also concern the effect of the passage in that particular historical setting; what did it speak to the audience then?

f. formulation of the communication of the passage into theological affirmations; what the passage says about God, what the passage says about us as human beings, and what the passage says about humanity's relation to God. These should be short, concise statements of the theological dimensions of the text.

g. the relation between the theological affirmation of the passage and the theological perspectives of other books or traditions within the canon. (Here, too, while this is important for a full understanding of the passage, for most students, this lies beyond their expertise and may be omitted or done very briefly.)

5. Application: The Significance of the Passage

Simply put, this section should answer the question "What difference does it make?" This should be a carefully thought out judgment of the theological value (importance, implications, claim) of the message of the passage as an authoritative part of the canon of Scripture for the community of faith. This will, of necessity, be filtered through one's own theological views, but should not be of a doctrinal or dogmatic nature. It should be one usage to which the particular passage can be applied in the life and ministry of the church. This should be the central idea around which an expository sermon on the passage would be constructed, although it should not be "sermonic." This is the last step you would take before the actual writing of a sermon. It may be necessary here to identify an "audience" to which your application is aimed.1

Assignments

Do two exegetical out lines based on the above guidelines and using exegetical tools and steps of exegesis; one assignment must be one book which may not have more than one chapter; the second assignment may be one chapter of a Bible book, both papers must have Title pages, table of contents, introduction, main body, summary and conclusion, bibliography.

N.B

An exegete needs to know that Prophetic passages may not be interpreted by their contexts alone.

[1] Taken from Dennis Bratcher in a bit modified form