HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

What You Need to Know To Fully Understand Spiritual Truth

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

PART 1: SPIRITUAL ISSUES

Chapter 1 The Bible Contains Spiritual Truth 1
Chapter 2 God Reveals Spiritual Truth 5

PART 2: BOOK ISSUES

Chapter 3 The Bible is A Book 13
Chapter 4 Determine The Overall Idea 19

PART 3: BIBLE ISSUES

Chapter 5 The Bible Contains History, Literature, And Languages 39
Chapter 6 Detect The Historical Data 43
Chapter 7 Discern The Literary Genre 57
Chapter 8 Discover The Linguistic Information 75
Chapter 9 The Confirmation of The Idea 93

Conclusion 95
The Author's Ideas 101
Bibliography 105
About The Author 111

PREFACE

Since I did not grow up in a Christian family or grow up regularly attending church, when I became a Christian at age 18, I did not understand the Bible—at all! I thought the Old Testament was written at the time of Christ, and the New Testament was written in the 20th century. After all, it's "new." I did not understand why they put a colon between the 3 and the 16 in John 3:16.

To make matters worse, as a young Christian, I heard preachers say things that seemed to contradict the text. For example, I heard sermons on Acts 8 that claimed Simon was not saved, but the text clearly says, "Simeon himself also believed" (Acts 8:13). That is exactly what it says the others did, and no one doubts they got saved. Doesn't the Bible say that what you have to do to be saved is believe (Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31)? Furthermore, Simeon was baptized and continued with Philip (Acts 8:13). Apparently, Philip believed Simeon was saved.

At the same time, I had an unquenchable thirst to know the truth of God's Word. That desire led me to attend Dallas Seminary. In seminary, I also took a course on how to study the Bible taught by Dr. Howard Hendricks. The textbook was *Methodical Bible Study* by Robert Traina, which taught that the way to study the Bible was: observation, interpretation, application, and correlation. While still a seminary student, I was also a pastor. I no sooner completed the Bible study course from Dr. Hendricks than I began teaching it to anyone at the church who would listen. After graduating, I continued teaching individuals and small groups how to study the Bible using Traina's method.

I also began to read books on Bible study. For the next several years, I rethought, revised, and restructured my approach

to Bible study several times. I slowly began to formulate a procedure for studying the Scriptures, combining the principles of hermeneutics, the methods of Bible study, and commands from the Scriptures themselves. I even wrote a book-sized manuscript on Bible study, entitled "Oh that I May Know the Truth." I also began to apply what I was learning to the New Testament. For thirteen years, I traveled about the country as an itinerant evangelist. Behind the scenes, I spent most of my time studying the New Testament, applying my procedure. Years later, I put that manuscript on my website. In 2024, I published that manuscript under the title *How to Study the Bible: A Method for Discovering Biblical Truth for Yourself.* In 2026, I changed the title back *to Oh that I May Know the Truth*. I have used the procedure I developed in the 1960s and wrote about to preach through every book of the Bible.

Although it covered how to study biographies and topics in the Bible, the book I wrote focused on studying a book of the Bible as a unit. This book is a condensed and simplified version of the procedure presented in *Oh That I May Know the Truth*. This material does not address how to study a whole book of the Bible, but rather how to understand individual passages.

I am not suggesting that a person must understand everything presented here to grasp the spiritual truth in the Bible. I do believe, however, that to *fully* understand and appreciate what the Bible is saying, these concepts need to be understood. In fact, in some cases, what is written here is necessary to *correctly* understand what the Bible says.

May the Lord use this material to help you better understand your Bible.

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Part 1
SPIRITUAL ISSUES

Chapter 1

THE BIBLE CONTAINS SPIRITUAL TRUTH

Understanding some things in the Bible is easy. For example, "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:13-15). Or, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Eph. 4:28).

There are, however, some things in the Bible that are challenging, not just for those reading it for the first time, but for mature Christians who have been reading it for years. The apostle Peter admitted that he found some of the things in Paul's epistles "hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Wow! Imagine: even after living with the Lord for three years and being filled with the Spirit of God on the day of Pentecost, Peter could not readily understand some of the Scripture written by the apostle Paul. Peter was certainly spiritually mature, yet he found some of the apostle Paul's writings hard to comprehend.

That raises questions concerning understanding the Bible. What does it take to understand the Bible? For one thing, there are spiritual issues involved in understanding the Bible's spiritual truth.

The Author of the Bible

The Bible claims to be divinely inspired. Over 3,000 times, the authors of the Old Testament declare: "Thus says the Lord" or "The LORD says." David, the author of half of the Psalms, said, "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me" (2 Sam. 23:2). The New Testament uses the phrase "the word of God" to refer to the teachings of Jesus, the preaching of the apostles, and the writings of Paul and Peter. Paul said, "The things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37) and "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter wrote, "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). Granted, human authors wrote the Bible, but those men wrote as they were "moved by the Holy Spirit." Ultimately, God is the Author of the Bible.

The Purpose of the Bible

Why did God write a book? What purpose did He have in mind when He had men record His Word? The Bible contains history,

stories, and doctrine. Is God a historian who desires us to know history? Is God a storyteller who delights in telling stories with moral lessons? Is God a theologian who is determined to teach us doctrine? Why did God give us His Word? Among other things, God moved men to write His Word to reveal **spiritual truth.**

Paul wrote, "In Him you also *trusted,* after you heard the word of **truth**, the gospel of your salvation" (Eph. 1:13, bold type added). That "word of truth, the gospel," is that "Christ died for our sins" and "rose again the third day" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). So, by the "word of truth, the gospel," the Bible is "able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by Your **truth**. Your word is **truth**" (Jn. 17:17, bold type added). The Greek word translated "sanctify" means "to be set apart." In this verse, "sanctify" refers to the spiritual life of believers. Thus, the spiritual "truth" in the Word enables believers to grow (1 Pet. 2:1-3) in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:18).

Paul says that all Scripture is inspired and profitable "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:17). Therefore, the Word of God, which is "truth" (Jn. 17:17), can thoroughly equip believers for every good work in serving the Lord.

Note carefully: the Bible is the Word of God, containing **spiritual truth** so that people can be saved, sanctified (set apart to the Lord), and servants of the Lord.

Understanding the Bible

God moved men to write His Word to reveal spiritual truth, but some passages are "hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Spiritual truth is "spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). In fact, it is hidden from some and revealed to others. Jesus said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Mt. 11:25). In other words, there are spiritual requirements to understand the spiritual truth in the Bible fully. They are described in the next chapter.

Summary: God moved men to write His Word, which contains **spiritual truth** so that people can be saved, sanctified (set apart to the Lord), and servants of the Lord, but spiritual truth is spiritually discerned, which means there are spiritual requirements to understand the spiritual truth in the Bible fully.

Chapter 2

GOD REVEALS SPIRITUAL TRUTH

According to the Bible, there are spiritual requirements for fully comprehending its spiritual truth. The question is, "To whom does God reveal His truth?" This chapter is a condensed version of the material on the requirements for understanding spiritual truths in my book, *Oh that I May Know the Truth.*

To The Converted

Paul explains, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Jude says the natural man does not possess the Holy Spirit (see Jude 19, where the Greek word translated "natural" in 1 Cor. 2:14 is translated "sensual"). The "natural man" has not been converted. Consequently, he does not *receive* (Greek: "welcome") "the things of the Spirit of God," that is, the spiritual truths of the Word of God.

Furthermore, Paul adds that the unsaved people *cannot know* the spiritual truths of the Word of God. The issue is not that they do not, nor will they, know those truths; it is that they cannot know those truths. There is a Greek word (oida) that means "to know by reflection." The Greek word translated "know" (ginosko) here means to know by experience (A-S, p. 92). So, the point is that unsaved people cannot know the spiritual truths of the Bible in their experience. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned. They do not have the Holy Spirit and, therefore, the capacity to receive spiritual truths.

Jesus told Nicodemus, "Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3). The Greek word translated "see" means "to perceive or discern." Without the new birth, there is no understanding of the kingdom of God, that is, of spiritual things. For you to understand the truth of God, you must know God.

The way to know God is to trust His Son, Jesus Christ, for the gift of eternal life (1 Tim. 1:16). If you have not done so already, tell God that you acknowledge you are a sinner. Tell Him that you believe Jesus died to pay for your sin and rose from the dead and that you now trust Jesus Christ to get you to heaven. When people trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone, plus nothing else, for the gift of eternal life, they come into a relationship with the living God. The Holy Spirit comes into them. He is the one who enlightens believers' minds so they can understand God's truth.

To The Clean

The apostle Peter says, "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you grow thereby if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:1-3). Peter lists five sins that must be removed if we are to desire the Word and grow by it. D. L. Moody said, "The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

To The Craving

First Peter 2:1-3 is a single sentence. Having laid aside sin, believers are to desire the Word of God so that they may grow. The one command in this sentence is "desire." Believers are to desire the Word of God like a newborn baby desires their mother's milk. The image suggests eagerness and intensity. Babies desire milk insistently and regularly. Likewise, believers are to crave the Word of God so that they may grow spiritually.

To The Dependent

The Bible teaches that God reveals truth to individuals. Jesus told Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in

heaven" (Mt. 16:17; see also Mt. 11:25 and Eph. 1:17-18). Therefore, believers must be dependent on the Lord to illuminate their understanding.

Remember, Jesus said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Mt. 11:25). The wise are those who are wise in their own eyes. The Greek word translated "babes" means "infant." Infants are dependent on their parents.

The psalmist cried, "Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law" (Ps. 119:18). A few verses later, he added, "Make me understand the way of Your precepts; So shall I meditate on Your wondrous works" (Ps. 119:27). The psalmist asked God for an understanding of His Word.

To The Spiritual Mature

Even when believers are cleansed, craving, and dependent on the Lord, they may not be able to comprehend some spiritual truth. In some cases, spiritual maturity is essential. The writer to the Hebrews told some Jewish converts that they ought to be teachers, but their spiritual condition was such that they needed to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God again. He says, "For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe" (Heb. 5:13). Spiritual immaturity will prevent an individual from understanding some of the truths of the Word of God, the meat. The writer goes on to

say that solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who have applied the truths that they have learned so that they will have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:14; see also 1 Cor. 3:2-3a and Jn. 14:21).

Summary: To fully understand the **spiritual truth** in the Bible, people must **trust** Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life, **deal** with sin, **crave** spiritual truth, **grow** spiritually, **depend** on the Lord, and, in some cases, **be spiritually mature**.

Every time you read the Bible, begin by doing what the psalmist did. Pray, "Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law" (Ps. 119:18). "Make me understand the way of Your precepts; So shall I meditate on Your wondrous works" (Ps. 119:27). Ask God for an understanding of His Word.

Part 2

BOOK ISSUES

Chapter 3

THE BIBLE IS A BOOK

Pardon pointing out the obvious, but the Bible is a book. If God had communicated through music, we would have to understand concepts like harmony to comprehend spiritual truth. If He had communicated through art, we would have to know such things as color and composition to understand the spiritual truth. Since God chose to communicate through written material, how it works must be understood.

Understanding written material is a problem not just for students of Scripture but also for people in other fields. Literary critics debate with each other over how to understand poems, novels, and plays. Attorneys disagree over the interpretation of legal contracts and even the Constitution! Expositors and experts differ in their explanations of virtually every portion of Scripture.

The Bible is not only written material; it is also well written. That involves several issues.

The Nature of Well-Written Material

An Overall Idea The nature of well-written is that, first and foremost, authors have an overall subject and something to say about that subject, which together are an **idea**. In school, when students write an essay or a paper, they must have a thesis, a one-sentence summary of the entire article. In other words, the overall idea is an idea, a thesis, a proposition, a message the author wishes to convey. Every paragraph has an overall idea, as do every chapter and the entire book.

The Selection of Material After formulating an idea, authors **select material** to communicate it. Traina observes, "Selectivity is inherent in all literature and, in fact, in all art" (Traina, p. 85). The famous author Goethe states, "The artist is known by selection." Traina also says, "*Purposive selectivity characterizes the Bible*. In other words, biblical authors had definite purposes, which motivated the writing, and they chose their materials and utilized them in such a way as to best accomplish the purposes" (Traina, p. 59, italics his). Types of material include biographical material (people; see Genesis), historical material (events; see Numbers), Logical material (ideas; see Romans), etc. (see Traina, pp. 55-56).

Selectivity involves what authors *include* and *exclude* (Traina, p. 59). Omission has been called "the one art of literature" (Stevenson quoted by Traina, p. 75). When Paul wrote Galatians, he followed the format of an ancient letter, which included a thanksgiving, but he did not include it in Galatians.

His exclusion of this standard part of a letter is significant. He was not thankful for believers departing from the gospel so quickly.

Selectivity involves the *amount* of material an author chooses to include. Authors devote the most material to the most significant portion of their work. Traina calls this the law of proportion, which he says "involves the principle that an author devotes the greatest quantity of material proportionally to what he feels is most significant and most helpful in conveying his message" (Traina, p. 61). He also says that the sheer weight of a series of similar events or ideas impresses the facts on readers' minds (Traina, p. 61).

Traina suggests asking a series of questions. "Why did the author include this particular event or idea? Why is it where it is? What does it contribute to the whole in view of its relation to the surrounding events or ideas" (Traina, p. 62)?

The Arrangement of Material Authors **arrange** their selected material. The arrangement of the material is the **structure** of the unit. It is the arrangement that makes written material literature. Literature is written material, but not all written material is literature. A grocery list and a legal brief are written, but neither would be considered literature. What, then, distinguishes a piece of written material as literature?

The subject matter of all literature is human experience. A written, scientific description of inanimate things is not literary. "Literature is a specially privileged subject matter which tells us more about man in his depth and breadth than any other

discipline" (Hirsch, 1967, p. 148). Even poems about trees deal with human experience. Thus, Joyce writes, "*I think* that *I shall never see* a poem as lovely as a tree." Not all written material about human experience, however, is literature. Psychology books are not literature.

To sum up, authors convey an idea about human experience by selecting material and arranging it into various forms that constitute literary genres. The Gospel of John is a biblical illustration. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Westcott says John is guided in the selection, arrangement, and treatment of his material by his desire to fulfill his purpose (Westcott, p. xlii). John's subject is Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Jn. 20:31). John selected stories, such as the conversation with Nicodemus, and arranged them chronologically to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. His purpose was to get his readers to believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life.

An Illustration

Suppose I were to write an article about my church. Obviously, the subject would be the Lindley Church. Many things could be said about the church. It occupies 3½ acres, including seven buildings and 11 huge trees. It was founded in 1949 by the local association of American Baptist Churches. Currently, it has a Sunday morning service which starts at 10:30 AM and a Wednesday night Bible study that starts at 7:00 PM. In addition, there is a children's church that meets on Sunday morning, a

men's breakfast that meets once a month on Saturday morning, and a ladies' meeting that meets periodically after lunch on Sunday afternoon. After the Sunday morning service, there is a free lunch for the whole church. The church observes the Lord's Supper once a month on Sunday morning.

How much of that material should be included in my article on the church? The article's overall idea determines the selection and arrangement of its material. So, the first thing to determine is the overall idea.

Suppose the article's **overall idea** is that the Lindley Church is patterned after the New Testament church. That idea raises the question, "What was the pattern of the New Testament church?" In Acts 2:42, Luke wrote, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." "Apostles' doctrine" is the teaching of the apostles. Fellowship is self-explanatory, and breaking of bread is a reference to communion. The article on the Lindley Church, arguing that it is patterned after the New Testament, would have to show that the Lindley Church practices those four things.

In other words, of all the things that could be said about the Lindley Church, the material **selected** for this article would include the facts that the Lindley Church has Bible study on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening, fellowship together at lunch every Sunday, communion once a month, and prayer by the congregation during the Sunday morning service. The information about 3½ acres, seven buildings, and 11 huge trees would be omitted because none of that material supports the idea

that the Lindley Church is patterned after the New Testament as described in Acts 2:42.

Now that the data needed to support the idea has been chosen, it needs to be **arranged**. The most obvious arrangement would be to follow the order of Acts 2:42, but other arrangements could be used.

Summary: To fully understand well-written material (literature), readers need to know the overall idea, the selection, and the arrangement of the material.

Chapter 4

DETERMINE THE OVERALL IDEA

One of the reasons God moved men to write His Word is to communicate spiritual truths expressed in ideas. Since the nature of well-written material is designed to first and foremost convey an overall idea, the first step in fully understanding the Bible is to determine the overall idea/spiritual truth of each paragraph.

Obviously, start by isolating the first paragraph. Unfortunately, English translations of the Bible are chopped up into verses. Ignore the verses and identify the paragraphs. In the New King James Version, the beginning of a paragraph is indicated by the number of the first verse of the paragraph being printed in bold print.

Then, determine the overall idea/spiritual truth of each paragraph. To do that: 1) look at the arrangement of the material in the paragraph, that is, the structure of the paragraph, 2) construct an interpretive outline, and 3) determine the overall idea/spiritual truth. This could be called the SOS method (**s**tructure, **o**utline, **s**piritual truth).

Look for the Author's Structure

The Overall Structure

Sometimes the overall structure is obvious. For example, the overall structure may be a series of commands.

Commands The literary structure of many passages consists of nothing more than commands. In Colossians 3:5-11, Paul exhorts his readers to 1) "Put to death your members" (Col. 3:5-7), 2) "Put off all these" (Col. 3:8), and 3) "Do not lie" (Col. 3:9-11). Paul's three commands to believers are the natural structure of this paragraph.

The Repetition of a Phrase Authors may choose to structure their material around a repeated phrase. Notice the repetition of "If we say" in 1 John 1:6, 8, 10.

Questions A unit organized with questions. Daniel 12:5-13 consists of two questions (Dan. 12:6, 8).

Activities The overall structure of a passage may consist of a series of activities. In Psalm 23, the psalmist begins by declaring that the Lord is a Shepherd. Then, he lists the activities of a shepherd. A shepherd makes sheep lie down (Ps. 23:2). He leads beside still waters (Ps. 23:2). He restores Ps. 23:3). He leads (Ps. 23:3). He comforts (Ps. 23:4). He prepares a table (Ps. 23:5). He anoints (Ps. 23:5). He pursues with goodness and mercy (Ps. 23:6), and He provides a dwelling forever (Ps. 23:6).

Places The structure of Nehemiah 2 is built around places. Nehemiah was in Shushan (Neh. 2:1-8), on his way to Jerusalem (Neh. 2:9-10), and in Jerusalem (Neh. 2:11-20).

People The key that unlocks some passages of Scripture is people. Psalm 1 describes the blessed man (Ps. 1:1-3) and the ungodly man (Ps. 1:4-6). In Titus 2:1-10, Paul tells Titus to speak to the older men (Titus 2:1-2) and the older women (Titus 2:3), who in turn are to speak to the younger women (Titus 2:4-5). Titus also exhorts the young men (Titus 2:6). Paul exhorts Titus (Titus 2:7-8) and concludes by telling Titus to exhort servants (Titus 2:9-10).

Reasons The structure of a passage may be a statement followed by reasons for making such a statement. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Paul says he was bold to speak the gospel in much conflict (1 Thess. 2:1-2). He then gives two reasons for his action (see "for" at the beginning of verse 3 and the beginning of verse 5). His first reason is that he was convinced his message was from God (1 Thess. 2:3-4). His second reason for boldly proclaiming the gospel was that he was committed to serving others (1 Thess. 2:5-8). Each of these reasons contains a negative and a positive. Paul first tells what his reason was not. Then, he gives his reason (see the outline of this passage below).

Explanations The structure of a passage may also be a statement followed by explanations. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians not to sorrow for departed saints (1 Thess. 4:13). He explains (see "for" at the beginning of verse 14 and again at the beginning of verse 15). His first explanation is that God will raise those who have departed (1 Thess. 4:14). His second explanation is that God will raise departed saints first (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

The above list is not exhaustive. For example, a passage may be constructed around a conversation. Additionally, within paragraphs, as well as between paragraphs, there are a number of possible literary relationships (Traina, pp. 50-52). Here is a partial list.

1. Comparison
2. Contrast
3. Repetition (reiteration of the same terms)
4. Continuity (repeated use of similar terms)
5. Continuation
6. Climax
7. Particularization (the movement from the general to the particular)
8. Generalization (the movement from the particular to the general)
9. Introduction
10. Interrogation

When the author's structure is not immediately clear, look for changes of subject. Sometimes, this change is noticeable, even abrupt; other times, it is subtle and slight. In Psalm 19, the subject shift is dramatic. In the first six verses, the psalmist writes concerning God's work in the world. Abruptly, in verse 7, he switches to God's Word. In verse 12, he turns his attention to his response to God.

The point is that analyzing the overall structure of a literary unit is a clue to what is going on in the author's head.

Structure within the Overall Structure

Relationships Within the overall structure, there is an arrangement (structure) of ideas. Some ideas further develop other ideas. For example, if the overall structure is a series of questions, there may be material after each question related to that question. The structure of that material needs to be analyzed. In diagramming that material, obviously, the *relationship* of all the material about that question would go "under" that question. All the material "under the question" may also need to be diagrammed to see the relationship of the various parts to one another.

A simple illustration is a grocery list. The grocery shopper writes on a piece of paper: Purchase these items at the grocery store: milk, bread, and cereal. Obviously, milk, bread, and cereal explain "these items." The *relationship* between those items can be graphically illustrated as follows.

Purchase these items at the grocery store.
Milk
Bread
Cereal

Milk further develops the idea of "these items." So it is placed under that sentence. Bread further develops the idea of "these items," so it is placed under that sentence, but because it is not related to milk, it is not placed under milk. It is placed parallel to milk. To say the same thing another way, milk and

bread are *subordinate* to purchasing these items at the grocery store. Milk and bread are *coordinate* or parallel to each other.

Suppose, however, the grocery list read: milk, bread, cereal, including Frosted Flakes for Jack and Raisin Bran for Jill. Frosted Flakes and Raisin Bran explain "cereal." Now, graphically, the relationships would look like this.

Purchase these items at the grocery store.
Milk
Bread
Cereal
Frosted Flakes
Raisin Bran

Since Frosted Flakes explains "cereal," its relationship to cereal is *subordinate*. Likewise, Raisin Bran also explains cereal, but its relationship to Frosted Flakes is *coordinate*; that is, both Frosted Flakes and Raisin Bran are parallel to each other.

Note carefully: when more than one idea is in a unit of thought, the issue is the *relationship* between the ideas. The relationship is either subordinate or coordinate. To say the same thing another way, one idea is the "main idea," and the other ideas are related to it. "Purchase these items at the grocery store" is the "overall, inclusive idea," and milk, bread, cereal, Frosted Flakes, and Raisin Bran are related to it. All the ideas related to the "big" idea are either subordinate or coordinate to each other.

Relationships within a Paragraph Each sentence in a paragraph is an idea and the paragraph as a whole constitutes a unit of thought (Traina, p. 37). That unit of thought is the all-inclusive "big" idea. The sentences within the paragraph further develop the overall inclusive "big" idea.

Suppose a wife emailed her husband, "Please stop by the grocery store on your way home. Buy a gallon of milk. Be sure to get the brand I like. We also need a dozen eggs. Pick up your shirts at the cleaners. Stop by the post office to buy a roll of stamps. We need more stamps to send invitations to our daughter's birthday party. That can be graphically illustrated as follows.

Please stop by the grocery store on your way home.
Buy a gallon of milk.
Be sure to get the brand I like.
We also need a dozen eggs.
Pick up your shirts at the cleaners.
Go to the post office to buy a roll of stamps.
We need more stamps for our son's birthday party.

What is the overall, all-inclusive idea? In this case, it is not stated, but it is "On your way home, run these errands." The sentences (ideas) that further develop that overall idea are: stop at the grocery store, pick up your shirts, and go to the post office. Those sentences (ideas) are subordinate to the overall idea and are coordinate with each other.

Within those three ideas are ideas that develop them. "By a gallon of milk" and "we need a dozen eggs" further develop "stop by the grocery store. Those ideas are subordinate to stopping by the grocery store and coordinate (parallel) with each other.

Trace the Development of Thought

Another way to analyze the entire structure of a unit is to trace the development of thought throughout the unit by rewriting the paragraph in a logical layout. A logical layout rewrites the literary unit *by sentences* in such a way as to reveal the logical relationship between them. The procedure of a logical layout is as follows.

Within a Paragraph To begin, write the first sentence across the top of a page. In passages with long sentences, like the epistles of Paul, an 8½ x 11 sheet should be sideways (landscape) to utilize the length of the page. Then, take the following sentences in order, one by one, and ask two questions: 1) What does this sentence go with? 2) How does it relate to that sentence?

1. Ask, "Which sentence does this sentence go with?" The second sentence is obviously somehow related to the first sentence. In fact, as a general rule, each succeeding sentence is probably related to the preceding sentence. However, it is possible that a later sentence could be *related to an earlier statement several sentences earlier*. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Paul gives several reasons for boldly speaking the gospel.

Verses 3 and 5 both begin with the word "for." Perhaps verse 5 is related to verse 4. More likely, however, it is related to verse 3, in which Paul gives two parallel reasons for his boldness.

2. Ask, "In what way does this sentence go with the one to which it is related?" Determining that two sentences are related is only the first step. The next step is to find out how they are related. Either the two sentences are subordinate to one another, or they are coordinate.

As a general rule, some words consistently introduce coordinating sentences. Such words as "and" and "but" fall into that category. Some words are used to introduce a subordinate sentence. Such words as "for" and "therefore" are outstanding examples. The layout of Psalm 1 is an example.

Blessed is the man who walks not ... nor stands ... nor sits;
But his delight is ... and ... he meditates ...
He shall be like a tree planted ... that ...

The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff ...
Therefore, the ungodly shall not ... nor sinners ...
For the Lord knows ...

For a New Testament example of relationships within a paragraph, consider First Thessalonians 2:1-3. Verse 1 states that they did not come in vain. Verse 2, beginning with the word "but," is a coordinate sentence parallel to verse 1. Verse 3 begins with "for." It is subordinate to those two sentences. Paul is about to explain why he became so bold. Thus, verse 3 should

be indented to show its subordinate relationship to verses one and two. Here is a logical layout of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8.

> For you ... know, brethren, that our coming ... was not in vain.
> But ... we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel....
> For our exhortation did not come....
> But as we have been approved ... even so we speak....
>
> For neither ... did we use....
> Nor did we seek....
> But we were gentle....
>
> So ... we were well pleased to impart to you....

To review, sentences are either subordinate or coordinate in their logical relationship with each other. In tracing the logical development of the thought on paper, subordinate sentences are indented and coordinate sentences are parallel to each other. One other technique: an extra line between sentences indicates a break in thought.

If you have a computer, use it to construct your logical layouts. On a computer, sentences can be moved around with ease.

Relationships among Paragraphs Written material usually has multiple paragraphs. Within a group of paragraphs, there is an overall, all-inclusive idea and other ideas that are related to it.

Psalm 19 also illustrates the relationship beyond a paragraph. Twice, the author abruptly changes subjects. Therefore, Psalm 19 is divided into three paragraphs. Each of these paragraphs has an "idea." In the first paragraph, the psalmist says the

heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1-6). Then, he abruptly changes subjects. In the second paragraph, the psalmist says, in essence, the Word of God reveals the will of God (Ps. 19:7-11). After that, he abruptly changes the subject again! In the third paragraph, the psalmist expresses a desire to be pleasing to the Lord (Ps. 19:12-14). The first two paragraphs are coordinate. In a logical layout, they would be parallel to each other. The third paragraph is subordinate to the first two. In a logical layout, it would be indented under the second.

Within a Book A book consists of sections (a group of paragraphs) and divisions (a group of sections). The various parts are related to each other and constitute *a unit of thought*; that is, each section and each division has an overall, all-inclusive idea. The entire book also has one overall, all-encompassing idea.

The book of Exodus has three main divisions: God redeemed Israel from Egypt (Ex. 1:1-18:27), God made a covenant with Israel (Ex. 19:1-24:18), and God established the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:1-40:38). First, the divisions are coordinate. The third division could be said to be subordinate because it was received as part of the instruction given at Sinai.

Construct an Interpretive Outline

The aim of studying any literary unit of Scripture is to follow the *development of the thought* through it, the *train of thought*. Mickelsen states, "To treat material fairly, the modern interpreter must enter into the total train of thought" (Mickelsen, p. 104).

Passages have major and minor ideas. The object is to determine the major concepts and identify the minor ones that support them. A simple way to analyze a literary unit to put the major and minor ideas into focus is to outline it. An outline can be extremely effective for understanding what a passage says.

Outlines can also be misleading. For example, many like to alliterate their outlines, which can be a helpful device for clarity, communication, and memory. However, it is possible to get so caught up in producing cute alliteration that the outline misses the ideas in a passage. Even a *textual* outline or *literary analysis* outline, as helpful as they may be, can sidetrack the student of Scripture. These kinds of outlines can accurately reflect a passage's content or literary nature, but miss the passage's main idea. An *interpretive* outline is the best kind of outline for accomplishing that goal.

Textual Outline A textual outline uses *the words of the text*. This type of outline of Matthew 28:18-20 would look like this:

I. All authority is given to me (Mt. 28:18).
II. Make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19-20)
    A. Going (In the Greek text, "go" is a participle.)
    B. Baptizing
    C. Teaching
III. Lo, I am with you always (Mt. 28:20)

Literary Analysis Outline This kind of outline consists of *identifying the literary components* of the unit. Such an outline of Matthew 28:18-20 would look like this:

I. A declaration (Mt. 28:18)
II. A command (Mt. 28:19-20)
III. A promise (Mt. 28:20)

Interpretive Outline In both its headings and subheadings, an interpretive outline follows the order and the content of a passage, but it *interprets the meaning* of the passage. It follows the text's words, is built on a literary analysis of the text, accurately analyzes the passage, and states the timeless truths of the passage. It interprets it in terms of its significance today. An interpretive outline of Matthew 28:18-20 would be as follows:

I. The authority of the commission is Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:18).
II. The task of the commission is to make disciples (Mt. 28:19-20).
    A. Step 1: Introduction (going and preaching the gospel; Mk. 16:15)
    B. Step 2: Identification (baptizing)
    C. Step 3: Instruction (teaching)
III. The power of the commission is the spiritual presence of Christ (Mt. 28:20)

Each point in the outline should be a complete sentence. A literary unit consists of ideas and not fragments. Therefore, all the points in an outline should be complete sentences to ensure clarity of thought and communication. A speaker may use an alliterated word or phrase outline when speaking, but behind

the words should be complete sentences. God did not speak, and people do not think in fragments. The Bible consists of ideas (spiritual truths) expressed in sentences.

In the previous section of this chapter (Trace the Development of Thought), a logical layout of several passages of Scripture was given. Look at those examples and think about how you would develop an interpretive outline of each of them.
Here is an interpretive outline of Psalm 1.

I. The Way of the Godly Leads to Happiness
  A. They Reject the way of the World
  B. They Receive the Way of the Word
  C. Illustration
II. The Way of Ungodly Leads to Unhappiness
  A. Their Description
  B. Illustration
  C. Their Destructiion

Here is an interpretive outline of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8.

I. Paul was Bold
  A. He did not Come Empty-Handed
  B. He Came Boldly With The Gospel
II. Because He was Convinced His Message was From God
  A. His Message was not from the Corruption of Men
  B. His Message was from God
III. Because His Motive was to Serve People
  A. His Motive was not to Serve Himself
  B. His Motive was to Serve Others

Here is an interpretive outline of Psalm 19.

I. The Revelation of God's Glory in the World (19:1-6).
   A. A Revelation (19:1)
   B. Continuous Revelation (19:2)
   C. Universal Revelation (19:3-4a)
   D. An Illustration (19:4b-6).
II. The Revelation of God in the Word (19:1-6).
   A. What the Word Is (19:7-11)
   B. What the Word Does (19:7-11)
III. Seeing God's Glory and God's Word, I want to Please God.
   A. Be Purified (19:12)
   B. Be Preserved (19:13)
   C. Be Pleasing (19:14)

Determine the Overall Idea/spiritual Truth

The process of analyzing a unit of Scripture is not complete until there is synthesis. Unfortunately, much Bible study consists of analyzing the details of a passage without ever putting them together into a meaningful whole. To succinctly synthesize a literary unit of Scripture, summarize the overall idea/spiritual truth in one sentence. To construct the one-sentence overall idea/spiritual truth, several critical questions need to be asked and answered.

What is the Subject? The subject is the answer to the

question, "What is the author talking about?" There are usually several topics in a unit of Scripture. Some develop or support others. They are subordinate to others. In well-written material, there is a single overarching subject that encompasses all the others. "The subject is the *organizing* or *unifying* topic within the literary unit" (Johnson, p. 83). The subject of the Gospel of John is Jesus.

What is the Narrowed Subject? Most subjects are too broad to cover in a single article or book. So, writers have to narrow their subject. The apostle John chose to write about Jesus, but knew he could write about everything concerning Jesus. He says if everything Jesus did were written, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (Jn. 21:25). So, John restricted his subject to some of the things Jesus said and did in Jerusalem. John's subject is Jesus. His narrow subject is Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Jn. 20:31).

What is said about the Subject? The something said about a subject (the completion of the subject) is called a complement (Haddon Robinson) or an assertion (Don Sunukjian). Once the subject has been narrowed to a concise phrase, it should be completed as a complete sentence. If the subject is incomplete, it is nothing more than a fragment, an open-ended phrase. What John has to say about Jesus as the Christ, the son of God, has to do with eternal life.

What is the overall idea/spiritual truth*?* The overall idea/spiritual truth is the combination of the subject and the assertion. John's overall idea/spiritual truth is that those who believe that

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, have eternal life (Jn. 20:31; 3:36).

The overall idea/spiritual truth of Psalm 1 is that when you want to be happy, remember that the way of the godly leads to happiness, and the way of the ungodly leads to unhappiness.

The overall idea/spiritual truth of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 is that Paul was bold to preach the gospel, even in the face of opposition, because he knew his message was from God and that his motive was to serve them, not himself.

The overall idea/spiritual truth of Psalm 19 is that when you see God's revelation of His glory in the world and His will in His Word, your response should be for God to cleanse you, keep you from sin, and give you the strength for your words and thoughts to be acceptable. That could be shortened to: when you see the glory of God in the world and the will of God in the Word, we should have the desire to please God. The *overall* idea of the entire psalm is not stated, but the sum of everything in each paragraph can be stated in a single sentence.

The overall idea/spiritual truth of the book of Exodus is that God not only redeemed Israel and gave them His Law, He also dwelt among them. Perhaps the point is that the purpose of redemption is for God to provide us with His Word and His presence.

Summary: To fully understand each natural literary unit of the Bible, believers need to understand its overall **idea/spiritual truth** and the relationship to all the ideas in that unit to each

other.

In high school, students are taught (or should be taught) how to write a paper. The paper has a thesis, which is a one-sentence summary of the entire paper, and an outline consisting of Roman numerals and subpoints designated as A, B, and C. Every literary unit in the Bible can be analyzed like that.

Unit analysis should be applied to every literary unit in a book, starting with the first unit and proceeding with each unit to the end of the book. The time required to complete a unit analysis depends on the unit's size and difficulty. Some passages are relatively easy and take no more than an hour. Others can take longer. The more you practice this procedure, the easier and faster it will become, even in difficult literary units. The analysis of each literary unit in the Scripture is the backbone of Bible study.

Part 3
BIBLE ISSUES

Chapter 5

THE BIBLE CONTAINS HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND LANGUAGES

Being well written, the Bible includes the elements of well-written material, including an idea/spiritual truth, the selection of material, and the arrangement of material, but it is different in that it was written over a period of 1500 years by over 40 authors, using different types of literature in different languages. So when it comes to fully understanding the Bible, additional elements need to be considered.

When the children of Israel returned from exile, they needed help to understand the Scriptures. Ezra and others (Neh. 8:5-7) "helped the people understand the Law" (Neh. 8:7). What did they do? "They read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8). Notice the process. Verse 7 says Ezra and the others helped the people understand the Law, which

was written by Moses about 1400 BC, but Ezra and the people to whom he was reading lived about 445 BC. There was a huge historical gap between what they were hearing and when they lived. They needed to understand the **historical situation**. They needed to understand that "the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month" (Neh. 8:14), which had not been done "since the days of Joshua" (Neh. 8:17).

Moreover, in Nehemiah 8, the people were hearing the Law, a particular **type of literature**. Compared to proverbs, another type of literature, laws are absolute, whereas proverbs are general truths that may have exceptions. The literary nature of the Bible also includes the selection and arrangement of material.

Ezra and the others read distinctly. There are two interpretations of the phrase "they read distinctly." One is that they explained, expounded, and exposed the meaning of the text (Keil; Ryle; Kidner), but that is the meaning of the next phrase, "gave the sense." The other interpretation is that they translated (NASB; NIV fn.; Fensham). This view says that they were from Babylon and spoke Aramaic, so when Ezra read, they translated Hebrew into Aramaic. The argument against this view is that Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all preached and wrote during this period, and they wrote in Hebrew. So, the people must have known Hebrew. However, later in Nehemiah, it says, "Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people" (Neh. 13:24). Is

it also significant that Ezra 4:8-7:18 and Daniel 2:4-7:18 were written in Aramaic? So it is likely that in Nehemiah 8, when Ezra read, they translated Hebrew into Aramaic. The **linguistic aspect** of the Bible involves issues such as the role of context in determining the meaning of words.

After they translated, "they gave the sense" (Neh. 8:8), which means "to be prudent, have insight, comprehend." In other words, they explained the text so that people gained a sense of and insight into what was being read, and they understood (Ryle). Understanding the sense is understanding **ideas** and the relationships among them. *The spiritual truths in the Bible are expressed in ideas.*

To sum up: Moses wrote at a different time and in a different language. They heard a Hebrew Bible with Babylonian ears. That meant they had to understand history (different times), literature (Law), and language (a different language) to grasp the ideas/ spiritual truth (the sense) of the passages. In other words, in the Bible, God communicates spiritual truth through human authors to specific situations, in various literary forms and languages.

Therefore, to fully understand the spiritual truth in the Bible, believers must know the **historical situation**, the **literary genre**, and the **linguistic information,** to reconstruct the **idea/ spiritual truth** in the mind of the Author/author.

Today, we hear a Hebrew/Greek Bible with English/ American ears. The Bible spans well over 2000 years of history and contains various literary forms, including law, narrative, proverbs, parables, and prose. And, of course, the Bible was

written in three different languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew (with some sections in Aramaic), and the New Testament was written in Greek. So, we, like the people in Nehemiah 8, must understand history, literature, and language to discern its ideas/spiritual truths.

Summary: To fully understand the Bible, believers must grasp the **spiritual truths** expressed in written **form within historical contexts**, using various **literary forms** and several **languages**.

Keep in mind: the aim is to find ideas/spiritual truths that enable believers to have a relationship with the Lord, grow to be like Him, and serve Him. Never lose sight of that. God's Word is about **ideas/spiritual truths** that set us apart to Him. The immediate purpose is to find **ideas/spiritual truths** that produce godliness. The ultimate aim is to be godly. In short, seek the **ideas/spiritual truths** that transform.

There are historical truths in the Bible, but historical facts do not produce godliness. Remember, God is not functioning as a historian, a storyteller, or a theologian who wants us to know history, stories with a moral, or even theology. The cry of God's heart is that we know Him and grow in grace and godliness.

Concerning his book, *Methodical Bible Study*, Traina says, "It should never be forgotten that the ultimate purpose of mechanics and of this manual is that the reader may, through their use in studying the Scriptures, come to know the real author of the Scriptures, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent" (Traina, p. 19).

Chapter 6

DETECT THE HISTORICAL DATA

Moses wrote about 1400 BC. (It is possible and probable that Job wrote before Moses.) John wrote the book of Revelation in AD 95. Hence, the Bible was written over a period of fifteen hundred years. (If Job was written during the Period of the Patriarchs, the period is more like two thousand years.) That is a lot of history. God used hundreds of people, events, and historical situations to reveal spiritual truth.

Thus, if we are to fully understand spiritual truth, we must know the historical situation. Students of text written in the past are historians (Hirsch Jr., 1967, 138). Historical data is more important in some books than others, but, with a few exceptions, understanding the historical situation will help anyone better understand the spiritual truth of a given book.

Warren and Shell put it like this: “It is much easier to understand and appreciate a play if all the props and background scenes are in place. The actors on stage perform against a

backdrop of props and painted scenes. It is the same way with Scripture. God's revelation was given in the midst of history, and the 'dramatis personae' of the Bible act out their God-given roles against the background of their times. We understand the Word of God more clearly when we see it against the backdrop of the days in which it was written" (Warren and Shell, p. 140).

Different types of historical information are beneficial. The historical *period* places a biblical book in one of ten historical periods. The historical *situation* focuses on issues such as the author, the audience, and the purpose for writing. Historical *references* need to be understood.

The Historical Period

The Historical Periods The Bible can be divided into ten historical periods. As a student of the Scripture, you should have this historical outline of the Bible firmly fixed in your mind. You should be able to rattle it off as you can the alphabet or your Social Security number. It will enable you to think historically about the Bible. In addition, it will facilitate putting each book of the Bible in its historical setting.

1. The Period of the Patriarchs
2. The Period of the Exodus
3. The Period of the Conquests
4. The Period of the Judges
5. The Period of the United Kingdom

6. The Period of the Divided Kingdom
7. The Period of the Captivity
8. The Period of Restoration
9. The Period of the Ministry of Christ
10. The Period of the Acts of the Apostles

It is also helpful to have the date and basic details of each period in mind. At least have a general idea of the date and content of each period.

Origins (Genesis 1-11) Earth, Man, Sin, Present State, Language

I. Patriarchs (Genesis 12-50) 2167-1860 BC
   A. Abraham
   B. Isaac
   C. Jacob

II. Exodus (Exodus-Deuteronomy) 1527-1407 BC
   A. In Egypt
   B. In Wilderness
   C. At Sinai
   D. In Wanderings
   E. In Plain of Moab

III. Conquest (Joshua) 1407-1390 BC
   A. Conquest
   B. Dividing
   C. Charge

IV. Judges (Judges-1 Samuel 8) 1390-1043 BC
   A. Deborah
   B. Gideon
   C. Samson
   D. Etc.

V. United Kingdom (1 Samuel 9-1 Kings 11, Chron., 2 Chron. 1-9) 1043-931 BC
   A. Saul
   B. David
   C. Solomon
VI. Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 16, 2 Chron. 10-36) 931-606 BC
   A. Northern Kingdom
   B. Southern Kingdom
VII. Captivity (2 Kings 17-25) 606-536 BC
   A. Northern Kingdom
   B. Southern Kingdom
VIII. Restoration (Ezra-Esther) 536-400 BC
   A. Zerubbabel
   B. Ezra
   C. Nehemiah
IX. Ministry of Christ (Matthew-John) 6 BC-30 AD
   A. Preparation
   B. Ministry
   C. Suffering
   D. Triumph
X. Acts of the Apostles (Acts) 30-95 AD
   A. Jerusalem
   B. Judea and Samaria
   C. Uttermost parts

The Historical Situation

Determining the historical period only indicates the general context in which the book's events occurred. The particular historical situation of each book needs to be determined. Authors do not write in a vacuum. They write about a specific

subject with a particular audience in mind. Authors write about subjects "occasioned by a historical audience" (Johnson, p. 85). That is true of the books of the Bible. "The letters of the New Testament, like the prophecies of the Old, were addressed to specific assemblies struggling with particular problems" (Robinson, p. 27).

Author "Who wrote this particular book?" Sometimes, the human author of a biblical book is not important. In fact, there are times when God does not even bother to tell us who the human author was! Apparently, we do not need to know. For instance, we do not know for certain who wrote Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Esther, Job, many of the Psalms, and the book of Hebrews.

In other instances, however, knowing the human author can be valuable. A simple illustration is Psalm 51. Knowing that David, who had committed adultery with Bathsheba, is the author of this extensive confession is useful information in understanding the psalm.

The author of the third Gospel was Luke, a doctor. As a doctor, it is significant that he included the story of the virgin birth. When he records Jesus' statement about the camel going through the eye of the needle, he uses the Greek word for a surgeon's needle, indicating that Jesus was referring to an actual needle, not a hole in the wall of Jerusalem.

Recipients "To whom was the book written?" The more that is understood about the recipients of a book, the better the understanding of that book. In many cases, it is not going too

far to say that *understanding the book's recipients is the key to understanding the book*. The original recipients often had a problem that provoked the writing of a book. The author received a spiritual truth from God that addressed their situation and similar situations. Therefore, understanding the historical context will provide insight into the author's meaning and spiritual truth. The student needs to ask such questions as: what were the recipients' characteristics and conditions, for what were they commended, and what seemed to be their problem(s)?

Obviously, the book of Galatians was written to the Galatians, but what were they like? What were their circumstances? What were their problems? From the book itself, we know they were believers. Paul asks, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. 3:2). Yet they were beginning to keep Jewish holy days. Paul says to them, "You observed days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain" (Gal. 4:10-11). They had gone so far as to contemplate being circumcised. Later in the book, Paul says, "If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing" (Gal. 5:2). In fact, that seems to be the issue in the book, for when Paul comes to the close of the book, he makes the statement, "As many as desired to make a good showing in the flesh, these try to compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ" (Gal. 6:12). Furthermore, some questioned Paul's apostleship and authority. They charged him with being a man-pleaser (Gal. 1:10) and, therefore, he preached circumcision among the Jews

but not the Gentiles (Gal. 5:11).

Isolating the historical background material in Galatians helps to understand what is happening in the book. Paul begins by defending his apostleship (chapters 1-2). He proves that justification is by faith apart from the law (chapters 3-4) and concludes by teaching that neither is sanctification by the law; it is by walking in the Spirit (chapters 5-6). His purpose is to prevent these believers from trying to keep the law, particularly circumcision, to please God. The problem in Galatia was circumcision; the book was designed to address it.

Subject What is the subject of the book? The two basic questions to ask to determine the subject are: 1) what is the author talking about (subject)? 2) what is the author saying about the subject? For a more detailed explanation, see the previous chapter.

Purpose Clearly, two of the most important questions concerning any book of the Bible are: "Who were the recipients?" and "Why was it written?" *Knowing why a book was written is vitally important*. Traina says, "There should be a complete mastery of the Scriptures in view of the purpose of each book and of the entire Bible" (Traina, p. 11).

Why did Moses write Genesis? Did he write to answer questions concerning origins? Hardly. It was written to the Jews during the Exodus to explain why they were leaving Egypt and why they were going to Canaan. The purpose of Genesis is to explain the Abrahamic Covenant and not just the creation of the world or humanity. That is why Moses gives only two chapters

to creation and twelve to Abraham.

Why did the authors of the synoptic Gospels write their books? Was the purpose evangelism? Did Matthew, Mark, and Luke write to unbelievers to get them saved? If they did, why is there an absence in those three books of a clear emphasis on salvation by grace through faith? John wrote a Gospel and made it clear that a person obtains eternal life only by believing. That spiritual truth is conspicuous by its absence from the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Was the purpose of the synoptic Gospels, then, to give *believers* information concerning the ministry of Christ?

How does one determine the immediate, historical situation of a book of the Bible? *With very few exceptions, virtually everything that is known today about the immediate historical background of any book in the Bible comes from that book itself*. The way to determine the immediate historical background of any biblical book is to read and reread that book to answer the questions mentioned in this chapter.

After reading a biblical book for yourself to determine its historical background, it is helpful to read what others have written. A study Bible or commentary will include an introduction at the beginning of each book, providing historical background for that book. I would recommend the *NKJV Study Bible* (I wrote some of the notes in it) and/or the *Ryrie Study Bible*. I have written a commentary on every book of the Bible, free at http://www.insightsfromtheword.com. I would highly recommend "Dr. Constable's Expository (Bible Study) Notes."

His commentary on every book of the Bible is free at https://soniclight.com/constable-notes. In addition, my book *The Books of the Bible: the Subject, Structure, Situation and Significant Verses of Each Book,* gives that information on one page for each book of the Bible.

After you have read and reread a biblical book to glean its historical context, and after you have read other sources, write a summary of the historical survey of that book. In one page or less, give the period during which the events of the book took place, the name of the author, and the date the book was written. Most of the summary should focus on the recipients. From the book itself, determine what was going on in their situation. Ask such questions as what the characteristics and conditions of the recipients were, what they were commended for, and what seemed to be their problem(s). Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the English philosopher, said, "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man."

The following are examples of historical situations for the books of Nehemiah and James. Notice that the material comes from the books and focuses on what is happening to the recipients.

The Historical Situation of Nehemiah

The author of the book of Nehemiah was Nehemiah (1:1). It is possible and even likely that Nehemiah compiled portions of the book (see Neh. 7:5-73). Nehemiah 2:1 indicates that Nehemiah served under Artaxerxes, who reigned in Persia from

464 through 423 BC. Nehemiah departed from Persia in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:1, 444 BC). He returned to Persia 12 years later in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes (Neh. 13:6, 432 BC). Later, he returned to Jerusalem, probably around 425 BC. Conservative scholars date the book of Nehemiah about 425 BC. It was written and took place during the Period of the Restoration.

The recipients of the book, the remnant in Jerusalem after the captivity, experienced the events of the book. Nehemiah was not written to address the needs of the recipients, but to remind them of what God had done among them in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem and restoring the people to Jerusalem.

The Historical Situation of James

According to the opening verse of the Epistle of James, the author was James. The problem is which James? Early tradition says it was James, Jesus' half-brother. The information we have concerning James from the rest of the New Testament fits the picture we have from the book. For example, he speaks with authority, and the style of speech in Acts 15 matches that of the epistle of James. The book of James was written during the Period of the Acts of the Apostles.

The recipients were Jewish (Jas. 1:1) Christians (see "brethren" throughout, except Jas. 5:1-6). The book is addressed to "the twelve tribes, which were scattered abroad." This is probably a reference to the Jewish Christians who were scattered abroad because of the persecution in Acts 8:4 (Acts 9:2; 11:19).

If so, they were only as far away from Jerusalem as Syria (Acts 11:19). If this identification is correct, and many conservative scholars believe it is, the date of James is about 45 AD, making it the first, or one of the first books in the New Testament to be written.

From the book itself, it is obvious that these Jewish Christians were still meeting in synagogues (Jas. 2:2) and had elders (Jas. 5:14). Strangers sometimes attended their meetings (Jas. 2:2-4). While some among them were rich (Jas. 1:10), some were even traveling traders (Jas. 4:13 ff), the majority were probably poor (Jas. 1:9; 2:6; 5:1-6).

They were having various kinds of trials. The rich were oppressing them by hauling them before the courts (Jas. 2:6-7) and wrongfully withholding their wages (Jas. 5:4). Perhaps religious persecution was involved (Jas. 2:7). Furthermore, these believers were having trouble among themselves. They had disagreements, ambitions, and strife (Jas. 3:13-18; 4:1, 2, 11). Some were weak from sickness (Jas. 5:13), probably due to God's chastening.

To make matters worse, they were not enduring their trials with joy and submission. They were being partial (Jas. 2:1-13). Many were trying to give advice, assuming the role of a teacher (Jas. 3:1). They had bitter jealousy and strife in their hearts (Jas. 3:14), causing them to misuse the tongue to abuse one another (Jas. 3:9-10), arguing with one another (Jas. 4:1), speaking against one another (Jas. 4:11), and groaning against one another (Jas. 5:9). They were lusting after things (Jas. 4:2)

and were not praying properly (Jas. 4:4). Acting as if they were self-sufficient, they did not consider the will of God (Jas. 4:13, 16). Since they needed to take oaths (Jas. 5:12), it appears that they were not completely honest with each other either.

Historical References

Because the Bible was written in the context of a historical situation, it contains references to customs that pertain to that time. A custom is a practice or habit, a culture's usual course of action. Since the cultures and customs in the Bible differ from our own, when we come upon a custom, we often have to investigate it to understand its meaning and significance.

For example, people in the ancient world often settled disputes and made decisions by casting lots, a custom no longer practiced, at least in the Western world. The Bible nowhere explains to us the mode by which lots were cast. From outside the Bible, we know that the method, at least among some people, was to mark a piece of wood or stone, put the various pieces in a jar or an apron, shake them up, and draw one out. To obtain information concerning customs mentioned in the Bible, consult a study Bible or a commentary (see pp. 50-51).

When Boaz redeemed Ruth, he "took off his sandal" (Ruth 4:8) and gave it to the near kinsman. That was a practice then, but it is no longer practiced. In fact, it wasn't still being practiced at the time Ruth was written. So, the Bible explains the custom. "Now this was the custom in former times in Israel

concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything: one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was an attestation in Israel" (Ruth 4:7). In this case, the Bible explains the custom. At other times, the Bible does not explain the custom, but research both inside and outside of the Bible helps us understand its nature.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two" (Mt. 5:41). He is referring to a Roman law that said a Roman soldier could compel people to carry their burden one mile. When the Scribes and the Pharisees were compelled to help a Roman soldier, they did it, but hated it. They carried the load and counted the steps. At exactly one mile, they put the load down, refusing to go another foot, and they felt righteous because they had done what the law demanded. Jesus is teaching that they would go two miles if they had true righteousness. Rather than going one mile in anger, go two miles.

Matthew 27:45 says that while Jesus was on the cross, "from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land." What does the "sixth hour" mean? Is it 6 a.m. or 6 p.m.? The answer is, "neither." The Jews began the day at midnight. So the sixth hour was noon and the ninth hour was three in the afternoon. There was darkness for three hours from noon till three in the afternoon.

Summary: To fully understand a book of the Bible, one must grasp the *general* **historical period**, the *particular* **historical**

situation, and specific **historical references.**

While it is not possible to answer all historical questions for every book of the Bible, the more the historical circumstances and situations are understood, the better the book's purpose and content will be understood. Traina emphatically wrote, "Because the books of the Bible were written in a specific historical setting, and because they were addressed to those who lived in a concrete, historical situation, it is imperative that one utilize their historical background if one is to recreate the message of their authors." Later, he wrote, "The beginning point of exegesis should be the meaning of a scriptural unit in its specific historical situation" (Traina, pp. 152 and 182).

Kaiser concurs, "It is exceedingly important that the interpreter complete a thorough investigation of the biblical book's author, date, cultural and historical background. It is virtually impossible to locate the book's message in space and time without this essential material" (Kaiser, p. 150).

Suppose you were watching a film about the Civil War in the 1860s. The more you understand the history of that period, the easier it will be to appreciate the film fully. It is the same with the Scriptures. God's Word was written in the midst of history. The people in the Bible thought, spoke, and acted against the background of their times. We understand the Scriptures more clearly when we see them against the backdrop of the times in which they were written.

Chapter 7

DISCERN THE LITERARY GENRE

The Bible contains different types of literature, called literary genres. The word *genre* means "type, class." Ramm says, "An appreciation of literary genre is indisputable for the understanding of Scripture because so much of Scripture (in a sense *all* of Scripture) is expressed in some kind of literary genre" (Ramm, p. 142). Later, Ramm says that no book of the Bible can be intelligently interpreted without first noting its literary genre (Ramm, pp. 146-47).

By virtue of the fact that God chose the medium of literature to communicate, He is abiding by the norms that govern each of these literary forms. As Hirsch points out, "If I write a novel, then what I write must partake of the nature and the implicit aims of a novel" (Hirsch, 1967, p. 151).

Therefore, for us to fully understand what God is communicating to us in His Word, we must understand these types of literature and the principles that "regulate" them.

Longman observes that the correct interpretation of the Song of Solomon depends on accurately identifying the literary genre. If it is an allegory, it describes the relationship between a believer and the Lord. If it is a poem, it is extolling the love between a husband and wife (Longman III, p. 27).

Frankly, the literary genre of the Bible is a field of study by itself. Whole books have been written on this subject. The following briefly describes the major types of literature in God's Word.

Narrative

In the Bible, narrative is the most dominant literary genre (Johnson, p. 168). A narrative is a story, a unified sequence of events. The storyteller selects material and proportionately arranges it to make a point. The historical books in the Old Testament and the Gospels in the New Testament are of this type.

The basic story pattern consists of characters, conflict, complication, climax, and conclusion (or denouement). First, characters are introduced, followed by conflict, complications ("the plot thickens"), climax, and conclusion. Of course, narrators may choose not to follow that exact order. They may, for example, begin with the conflict and then introduce the characters, or they may begin with the conclusion and flashback to the beginning of the story. There is an old distinction: the *story* is the chronology of events apart from the way the author arranges them, and the *plot* is the order of events in the story as

arranged by the storyteller. The story can and does, especially in the Bible, contain dialogue.

Why do authors put their spiritual truth in story form? What is the significance of the story form? Stories convey spiritual truth by *example* rather than by *explicit statement*. The example may be good or bad. The characters in the story may be individuals to emulate or people whose choices are to be avoided. The lesson may be stated at the beginning, somewhere within the story, at the end, or not at all.

Stories have universal appeal. The human heart of the young and the old cries, "Tell me a story." Stories are also easy to remember. Paul told the Corinthians the "story" of the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1-5) to teach and to motivate (2 Cor. 8:8). This sort of literature appeals primarily to the imagination and to the emotions (Traina, p. 69).

Therefore, the reader should ask: 1) Who are the characters? 2) Are two of the characters in contrast to each other? 3) What are their choices? 4) What are the consequences? 5) What are the conflicts? 6) How are the conflicts resolved? 7) What does this setting contribute to the story? (For additional questions, see Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, p. 69.)

The narratives in the Bible are historical. No history can be exhaustive. All historical narratives are selective (Ramm, p. 181). The composition of historical stories limits the author to two techniques: selection and arrangement. Discovering these features is critical to interpreting narrative literature (Johnson, pp. 116-117). Also, the *biographical material* in the Bible is

not just character sketches of people. They are an example of spiritual truth, especially examples of people's relationship or lack of relationship to the Lord.

Poetry

The most concentrated artistic form of literature is poetry. Whereas the basic unit of a story is an episode or scene, the basic unit of poetry is usually said to be the image. The poet packs sentences with images, symbols, allusions, metaphors, similes, and emotive vocabulary and artistically arranges them in a poem.

Poets from different cultures have also used various literary techniques. English poetry employs rhythm and rhyme. Hebrew poetry does not. The basic poetic technique of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Parallelism, unlike rhyme, survives in translation. Robert Frost said, "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." That is true with the rhythm and rhyme of English poetry, but not with the parallelism of Hebrew poetry. Is that why God used parallelism and not rhyme in His Word?

Hebrew parallelism consists of *thought* arrangement rather than *word* arrangement. Three types of parallelism can be found in the poetry of the Old Testament.

Synonymous parallelism is the repetition of the same thought in different words. The second line of the poem says the same thing as the first, using different expressions.

Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous (Ps. 1:5).

Antithetical parallelism is the repetition of a contrasting thought. The second member of the couplet states the opposite of the first. It introduces a contrast or states the truth of the first negatively.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous
But the way of the ungodly shall perish (Ps. 1:6).

Synthetic parallelism is a progressive flow of thought. The second (and maybe the following) line either explains the first or adds something. The second adds a new thought to the first.

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

In other words, the statements or phrases interpret each other. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the type of parallelism being used.

Poetry also expresses emotion. "Poetry is the emotions of life made audible" (Traina, p. 69). It contains thought and reflection but is primarily a vehicle of intense emotion. Hence, the use of hyperbole (the conscious exaggeration to communicate

strong feelings), exclamatory idiom, emotive words, and vivid descriptions are designed to stimulate emotion. The psalms express the deep, spiritual feelings of praise, adoration, awe, joy, sorrow, and depression.

It is important to remember that poetry expresses feelings rather than rigid logical concepts. At the same time, poetry has logic, purposeful selection, and literary structure. Traina says, "Good poetry is not illogical and without purpose. It is true that it appeals *primarily* to emotions, but it is still an expression of the mind. One must, therefore, attempt to keep the emotional and logical elements in balance in its interpretation" (Traina, p. 129).

Beware of rigid analysis when explaining Hebrew poetry, such as the psalms. Do not try to make two different thoughts out of the two lines of a synonymous parallelism. Be sure to capture the emotion, which is an integral part of poetry.

The reader should ask: 1) What emotions does the poet express? 2) What is the meaning of the figures of speech? 3) What is the meaning behind the images?

Proverb

A proverb is a concise statement of a general truth. It is literature in the smallest possible unit, one short, pithy sentence. Proverbs are memorable.

The great danger in interpreting a proverb is to make a universal, absolute law out of it. The Bible does contain laws

such as "You shall not commit adultery." This law is a universal, absolute truth applicable in all situations at all times. There are no exceptions. A proverb is not a law; it is an axiom, which is usually true in most situations, but there may be an exception.

For example, one proverb in the Bible states, "For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty" (Prov. 23:21). That axiom is not absolute. There are exceptions. Some wealthy people are drunks and gluttons, but, as a general rule, that is not true, because people who lack the discipline to control their appetites will usually not have the discipline to control their money.

Parable

The Greek word translated "parable" comes from two words, "beside" and "throw." The verb form means "to lay beside, compare," and the noun means "placing beside, comparison, illustration, analogy, parable." Thus, a parable consists of two parts: the spiritual truth, which is being illustrated, and the physical narrative, which is placed beside it (Traina, p. 71). A parable is a short, simple story with a moral lesson. While there are a few other parables in the Scripture, most occur in the teachings of Jesus.

If a story today begins with, "Once upon a time in a far-away land there lived a fairy princess," it would not be taken literally as a historical fact. Parables are like that. They are fictitious short stories. They do not make use of talking animals.

They reflect real-life experiences of people.

Parables "arouse attention" and "etch themselves on the memory" (Tan, p. 148). They appeal to the imagination and involve the hearer in the situation. They are meant to stimulate thought, to provoke reflection, and to lead people to a decision (Taylor, p. 250). They entice the hearer to judge the situation and challenge them to apply that judgment to themselves. In a sense, they take on the character of an argument (Lane, p. 151). The parables of Jesus are designed to test the spiritual responsiveness of the hearers (Cole, p. 88).

Beware of trying to make everything in the parable mean something. A story with significance in every detail is an allegory, not a parable. Parables are stories with one main point: the details do not necessarily have meaning. In other words, "Do not make a parable walk on all fours" (Ramm, p. 283). In this commentary on Matthew 9:17, Alexander says, "In explaining Aesop's fable of the Fox and the Grapes, no one ever thinks of putting a distinctive meaning on the grapes, as a particular kind of fruit, or on the limbs of the Fox as having each its own significance" (Alexander, *Matthew*, pp. 263-264).

The error of making everything in a parable significant was exposed by Augustine, who said that the whole plow is needed in plowing, but the plowshare alone makes the furrow and the whole frame of an instrument is useful, but the strings alone produce the music (Alexander, p. 86). Since the classic discussion of A. Julicher, in 1899, the consensus is that a parable has one and only one point (Taylor, p. 249). A parable is a story

with one main point, but it would be a mistake to conclude that the details are never significant.

When interpreting parables, several things should be kept in mind. As a general rule, a parable teaches one essential truth. "A parable, like regular figures of speech, has but one central truth" (Tan, p. 148), "one chief point of comparison" (Mickelsen, p. 224). The golden rule of parabolic interpretation is to "determine the one central truth the parable is attempting to teach" (source unknown).

There are, however, parables where some of the details have meaning. For example, in the parable of the husbandman (Mt. 21:23-39), it is evident that the landowner represents God, the vineyard represents Israel, the servants represent the prophets, and the son is Jesus Christ. At the same time, it is equally apparent that not all of the details have meaning. The parable says the landowner sent His son, "saying, 'They will respect my son'" (Mt. 21:37), but God knew they would not respect His Son.

The explanation of a parable is often given, or clues to it can be found in its context (Ramm, p. 284). For example, the Lord Himself explains the parable of the Sower (Mt. 13:18 ff.). Luke introduces the lost sheep, coin, and son parables with a word about the setting that explains them (Lk. 15:1-2). These parables were given to explain why the Lord was eating with publicans and sinners. The individuals, or objects, in a parable are used figuratively. For example, the prodigal in the parable of the prodigal son represents the sinners with whom Jesus ate (Lk. 15:1-2).

Prose

Discourse or prose is technically not literature as such. It lacks proper artistic arrangement in the literature. Didactic material addresses the audience directly, states the truth in propositional form, and uses logic and argumentation. Ideas are developed. There is a logical development of thought, a train of thought. Grammar can be critical. "This type of literature appeals primarily to the intellect" (Traina, p. 69). Biblical examples include the prophetic sermons in the Old Testament, the discourses of Jesus, and the epistles of the New Testament.

While the letters of the New Testament are didactic, written material conveys information; they also contain several literary elements. The letters of the New Testament are seasoned with rhetorical questions (one asked for effect, not to elicit information), figures of speech, repetition, contrast, triplets, personification, etc.

To fully understand discourse: trace the author's argument or explanation step-by-step and summarize the overall spiritual truth in one sentence.

Type

The Greek word for "type" means "impression," that is, "the stamp made from a dye," hence, "figure, image, example, pattern." A type is a person, thing, or event used as an example, model, or pattern. To say of a teacher, "She is a salesperson,"

means she has a salesperson-type personality; she is an example or pattern of a salesperson.

Campbell defines a biblical type: "A type is an Old Testament institution, event, person, object, or ceremony which has reality and purpose in biblical history, but which also by divine designs foreshadows something yet to be revealed" (Campbell, p. 250). What is interpreted in the Old Testament as type is not "foreign or peculiar or hidden" to the text of the Old Testament but rises naturally out of it (Ramm, p. 223). The connection between the Old Testament item and its New Testament counterpart "must not be accidental or superficial but real and substantial" (Ramm, p. 228).

Types are illustrations (Ramm, p. 231). Types are also a "prefiguring" (Terry, p. 246). They are "prophetic symbols" (Ramm, p. 229). They are a "species of prophecy" (Davidson, quoted by Ramm, p. 229). In contrast, a symbol has "no essential reference to time" (Terry, p. 246). It is a timeless, figurative representation. A lion is a symbol of strength and does not predict anything in the future (Ramm, p. 232).

Types are similar to, but not the same as, prophecy (Campbell, p. 250). Both point to the future and are inherently predictive. Nevertheless, there are differences. Prophecy verbally delineates the future, while types prefigure coming reality. Prophecy is couched in words and statements, and types of speech are expressed in events, persons, and acts. Prophecy is active and types are passive (Tan, p. 168).

Most types in the Old Testament are of Christ. Adam (Rom. 5:14, 17-19) and Melchizedek (Heb. 7:1-3) are types of Christ. There are, however, other types of things. The ark is a type of baptism (1 Pet. 3:21). The wilderness experience is a type of spiritual experience today (1 Cor. 10:6)

Prophecy

Prophecy permeates the Bible. "It has been said that every fourth verse in the Scripture was predictive when written" (Tan, p. 25). "There is hardly a book in the Bible which is wholly devoid of the prophetic element" (Girdlestone, p. 8). The essence of prophecy is prediction, telling beforehand a future event for motivation.

Traina differentiates between a pure prediction and a prophecy. According to him, "pure prediction" is totally unrelated to the historical setting in which it was made. On the other hand, in the Old Testament, prophecy was an aspect of preaching. Its primary purpose was to support the prophet's message. Therefore, there is a relationship between the historical situation and the prophecy that came out of it (Traina, p. 177).

The form of prophecy can be a statement, a historical situation, a type, or a vision or dream containing symbols. The Bible contains hundreds of predictions given in plain statements. A simple example is: Jesus told Peter, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Mt. 26:34). There are also plain predictions about Israel (see the seventy-year captivity predicted in Jer. 25:11-12, 29:10), other nations including Samaria (Micah 1:6-7), Tyre (Ezek. 26:3-16), Babylon (Isa. 13:19-21; Jer. 51:26, 43), and

the Messiah (Micah 5:2). In the Old Testament, the prophets sometimes used historical situations to predict the future (Isa. 7). Dreams and visions, which include symbols, often appear in prophetic literature (Dan. 2).

Apocalyptic literature is a specialized form of prophecy. The word "apocalyptic" comes from the Greek word for revelation. It means "uncovering." Apocalyptic literature uses symbols to predict the future. It appeals to the imagination. Daniel and Revelation are the two apocalyptic books in the Bible.

There are several guidelines for interpreting prophecy.

1. Prophecy should be interpreted literally. Bible prophecy that has already been fulfilled was fulfilled literally. Therefore, the unfulfilled prophecies of the Bible will be fulfilled literally. For example, the Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and He was (Lk. 2:11, 15).

2. Nevertheless, prophecy uses symbols. Those symbols have a literal meaning. For example, Jesus said He is a door (Jn. 10:9). Moreover, just because a prophecy contains a symbol does not mean that everything in the prophecy is symbolic (Tan, p. 156).

The author often gives the key to interpreting the symbols in the passage. Chafer says, "Where symbolism is employed in the text, it will almost, without exception, be so indicated" (Chafer, vol. IV, p. 259). Tan says, "The identification and interpretation of Bible figures by the Bible itself is a rule and not an exception" (Tan, p. 143) and "The best possible material for

the interpretation of symbols is the immediate context in which given symbols are found" (Tan, p. 162).

Daniel and Revelation, the two great prophetic books of the Bible, both contain numerous symbols, but those symbols are usually explained. Terry testifies, "The symbols employed in the Book of Daniel are, happily, so fully explained that there need be no serious doubt as to the import of most of them" (Terry, p. 262). Stanton states, "When a symbol or sign does appear in the Revelation, it is often plainly designated as such in the immediate context, together with what the symbol represents" (Stanton, p. 311).

For example, in Revelation 1:20, the seven stars are interpreted as representing the seven angels, and the seven lampstands stand for the seven churches. In Revelation 17:9-10, the seven-headed beast symbolizes the seven hills, and in Revelation 17:18, the woman is identified as the city that rules the earth. Thus, it is evident that the images are figurative descriptions of real things.

3. Prophecy uses types. For example, a literal historical judgment may prefigure a future worldwide judgment. That is not to say there is a double sense, that is, a double meaning. To say there is a double sense is to deny the laws of language, leaving the recipient with no rules for understanding what is meant. The law of language that makes communication possible is that "No passage in any literature has more than one sense" (Kaiser, p. 64). What father would use language that goes beyond his child's ability to understand to teach his child? (Kaiser, p. 65).

There is one and only one meaning, but there may be "multiple fulfillment" (Ramm, p. 252). This is related to the area of typology (Tan, p. 179). "Milton S. Terry, who rightly rejects double sense and accepts typology, says that 'the types themselves are such because they prefigure things to come, and this fact must be kept distinct from the question of the sense of language'" (Tan, p. 181).

When the New Testament says that an event "fulfilled" an Old Testament statement, it does not always mean that the Old Testament was predicting that event. The expression "fulfilled" means "to fill to the full." Hort, of Westcott and Hort fame, says, "The idea of filling or giving fullness to is always contained in the biblical use of fulfilling." He explains that the Divine word is conceived of as receiving a completion, so to speak, in events that are to come to pass in accordance with it (see Hort's comments on James 2:23 in his commentary on James). In other words, to say that a prophecy is "fulfilled" suggests that the prophecy was given in the past and that its one and only fulfillment is now, but that is not exactly the meaning of the word. The meaning of the word "fulfill" allows for fulfillment in the past, but now the prophecy has been fulfilled to the full.

In other words, there was an immediate fulfillment in the Old Testament and an ultimate fulfillment in the New Testament. This does not mean that there is a double sense. As the New Testament authors looked back at the Old Testament, they saw what was written as a type that was to be fully realized in the New Testament. They saw a comparison and concluded that the

New Testament event was *the ultimate example*; therefore, it "filled to the full" what was said in the Old Testament (Traina, pp. 177-178).

4. The nature of prophecy involves time. After all, it is a prediction of the future. If nothing else, there is a difference between the time the prophecy is given and the time it is fulfilled. There are also instances in which the prophecy itself may include two or more events separated in time. In some cases, two future events separated in time may be presented together, making them appear to occur simultaneously.

To say the same thing another way, "two or more future events, which are separated in time, may be seen by the prophet in a single profile or side by side" (Tan, p. 91; see Ramm, p. 249). It is like looking at the stars. The observer groups them as they appear to the eye, rather than according to their actual positions in space. It is like looking at a series of mountain ranges from a distance. The peaks appear close together, or even as one, when there are valleys between the mountains (Tan, p. 92).

In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read Isaiah 61 and said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:21). A comparison between what Isaiah wrote and what Jesus read indicates that Jesus stopped reading in the middle of a sentence (Isa. 61:2). He did not read the phrase "day of vengeance of our God." He did not read that phrase because He read what was being fulfilled "today" (Lk. 4:21) and the day of vengeance would not be fulfilled until later. In other words, there was a time gap between the prophecies in Isaiah 61, but they are grouped as

if they occurred simultaneously.

Several passages place the resurrections of saints and sinners side by side: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2) and "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (Jn. 5:28-29). These passages seem to be saying that there is *one* general resurrection.

Revelation 20 presents an entirely different picture. It indicates that the righteous will be resurrected and shall reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4) and that "the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 20: 5). This is called "the *first* resurrection" (Rev. 20:5). The two resurrections that are grouped together in Daniel 12 and John 5 are actually separated by at least a thousand years. Furthermore, the first resurrection is not a single event but a series of resurrection events. Paul's statement sustains that conclusion, "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 15:23). As Tan says, "Under the single profile of the *first* resurrection, therefore, is to be comprehended the resurrection of Christ, the rapture-resurrection of church saints, and the resurrection of tribulation saints (such as the two witnesses of Revelation 11). It also comprehends the resurrection of Old Testament saints at the end of the tribulation" (Tan, p. 95).

5. There are two kinds of prophecy: conditional and unconditional. Conditional prophecies contain a condition humans must meet; therefore, those prophecies depend on human obedience. If the human condition is met, the prophecy will be fulfilled; if it is not, it will not be fulfilled. The blessings and the curses of Deuteronomy are an illustration (Tan, p. 187). Ramm lists a number of conditional prophecies (Jer. 18:8, 10; 26:12-13; Jonah 3:4; Ezek. 33:13-15; 18:30-32; Ramm, p. 250). On the other hand, some prophecies depend solely on God and, therefore, are unconditional (Ps. 110:4; Mt. 26:24).

Summary: To fully understand the Bible, one must grasp its **literary genres.**

Types of Literature in the Bible

The Name	The Essence	The Significance
Narrative	Tells a story	Appeals to imagination; good or bad example
Poetry	Uses images	Appeals to emotion, do not apply rigid logic
Proverb	A general truth	Appeals to the will; may be an exception
Parable	A short made-up	Appeals to intellect, usually, details do not apply
Prose	Direct discourse	Appeals to reason; trace the line of thought
Type	An example, pattern	Appeals to thought; a person/event convey a future reality
Prophecy	A prediction	Appeals to curiosity; given to motivate

Chapter 8

DISCOVER THE LINGUISTIC INFORMATION

The spiritual truth God recorded in a historical situation using various types of literature is written in words, that is, language. To understand God's spiritual truth, we need to know the meanings of words and the significance of their arrangement. Yes, we need to know a bit about grammar.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic and the New Testament was written in Greek. The meaning of a word or phrase in the original language is the correct meaning. An accurate translation will communicate those meanings. (In my opinion, the New King James Version is the most accurate translation, especially for Bible study.)

Needless to say, this is a vital part of the study of the Scripture. "One cannot by-pass the techniques of exegesis and expect to become a profound interpreter of the Bible any more than one can expect to become a great pianist without mastering

the mechanics of fingering the keyboard" (Traina, p. 18).

At the same time, the danger in textual exposition is that the explanation of grammar becomes an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Traina says, "Grammar is a servant, not a master. In fact, if the use of grammatical terminology is so burdensome that it attracts attention to itself and thereby hinders observation, it should, by all means, be discarded" (Traina, p. 131).

Theoretically, each sentence should be analyzed. However, the practical reality is that such a study is more profitable in some passages than others. In narrative material, the sentence adds more detail, and close scrutiny of its details is not as necessary as in didactic material. The most productive place in the Scripture for the close analysis of the details within a sentence is in didactic material, especially in the epistles of Paul, Psalms, and Proverbs. To explain all the details in any passage, systematically follow this procedure.

Look at the Sentence as a Whole

When it comes to reading or studying the Bible, American Christians are so accustomed to thinking in terms of chapters and verses that they sometimes forget that all written material is composed of paragraphs and sentences. In the English translation of our Bible, a verse is sometimes only part of the sentence. In other cases, a verse can contain two or more sentences. It is helpful, therefore, to look for the periods and not just the verse

numbers. There are three kinds of sentences.

Statement Most sentences in the Bible are either simple or complex statements. Other than the content of the statement itself, not much can be learned from the observation that the sentence is a statement. There are, however, observations about statements that can be helpful. For example, in the New Testament, when a statement begins with "for" (the Greek word *gar*), it will often be a reason or explanation for what was said in the previous sentence. Paul does this frequently. For example, in Ephesians 5, he says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). In the next verse, he says, "For the husband is the head of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23). The statement in Ephesians 5:23 is the reason for submission, as given in Ephesians 5:22.

Question Questions expect an answer. Even rhetorical questions are asked for the listeners to answer for themselves. Most questions can be answered with a "yes" or a "no." The Greeks had a way of writing that alerted the reader to the answer the author had expected. An English translation does not indicate that literary device, but the context and question usually make the anticipated answer obvious.

An illustration is in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30. Paul asks a series of questions: "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" In the Greek text, there is no doubt that each of these questions expects a "no" answer, but one does not have to know Greek to determine that. It is

apparent from the English translation alone.

Besides the technicality of a New Testament question expecting a yes or no answer, it is also helpful to ask yourself what answer you would expect to a question. By answering that yourself, you may discover that the answer is not the answer you would have expected, or the answer might help you interpret the question.

For example, John 13:36 says, "Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, where are you going?'" I would expect the answer to be the place where the Lord was headed. However, John 13:36 goes on to say, "Jesus answered him, where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you should follow me afterward." In other words, John 13:36 is like a small son asking his father, "Daddy, where are you going?" What he means is, "Daddy, can I go with you?" Jesus' answer to Peter's question indicates this is what Peter had in mind. Thus, asking yourself what answer you would expect might help you interpret the question itself.

Command The third type of sentence is a command. Of course, the nature of a command is that someone is exhorting someone else to do something. A Scripture command can be universal, occasional, or individual. "You shall not commit adultery" is a universal command given to Israel (Ex. 20:14) and believers in the New Testament (Rom. 13:9). It is also obviously intended to be applied to all men at all times (Rom. 1:28). "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16) is an occasional command, meaning when the occasion arises, obey this command. "Go and prepare the Passover for us" (Lk. 22:8)

is an individual command Christ gave to Peter and John and is not intended for anyone else at any other time.

Focus on the Parts of a Sentence

Few understood, much less enjoyed, grammar in elementary school. Some did not even have the privilege of studying grammar in elementary school! I must confess that I never really understood grammar until I was forced to take a foreign language course in college. However, as painful as it may sound, looking at the parts of a sentence grammatically can be a pleasure, not to mention an aid, in understanding.

Rather than going into all the technical details concerning the various parts of speech, I would recommend that while looking at the parts of a sentence, you concentrate on four factors—the subject (the doer of the action), the verb (the action), the object (the receiver of the action), and the modifier (a further description of the subject, the verb or the object). In some cases, especially in the long sentences of the apostle Paul, it might be helpful to write the subject, verb, and object on one line and write the modifiers under what they modify.

For example, Ephesians 2:4-7 is one sentence that says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show

the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." What is that long, complicated, cumbersome sentence saying to us? To determine that, it would be helpful to analyze the various parts of the sentence.

What is the subject (the doer of the action)? The answer is "God." It is at this point that the complications begin. The rest of the phrases in verse 4 and the first part of verse 5 are descriptive phrases of God. In other words, they are modifiers.

What is the verb (action)? In this case, in this long sentence, there are three verbs. The first is in verse 5 ("made us alive") and the second and third are in verse 6 ("and raised us up ... and made us sit").

What is the object (the receiver of the action)? The object of each of the three verbs is "us." We receive the actions done by God.

What are the modifiers (the further descriptions of the subject, the verb, or the object)? In this sentence, the modifiers are further descriptions of God.

The basic thought of this complicated sentence is that God has made us alive, raised us up, and seated us in heavenly places in Christ. In short, God saved us. That's the basic thought in these four verses. Paul amplifies the God who did this by telling us that He was rich in mercy, He had great love toward us, and that His love was so great He did all of this even when we were dead in trespasses and sins.

A word of caution. Some see more in grammar than is there. For example, the present tense does not always mean continuous

action. According to Dana and Mantey, the present tense in Greek can denote continuous, recurring, or complete action (Dana and Mantey, p. 178). In a conversation, Zane Hodges, who taught Greek for twenty-six years and edited a Greek New Testament, told me that if a point depends on grammar, it is usually wrong because language is not that precise. Therefore, scrutinize such points.

Explain Clauses and Phrases

As we have seen, not all sentences are simple sentences. In fact, most sentences are compound or complex. There is a basic thought, to which are added phrases and clauses that contain additional thoughts. It is helpful and fruitful to analyze the phrases and clauses within a sentence to see the *relationships* among the different types of clauses. The following list contains the most common types of phrases and clauses, along with the words used to introduce them.

1. Temporal: after, until, when, while, before, then
2. Reason: because, for, since
3. Result: so, then, therefore
4. Purpose: that, so that, in order that
5. Contrast: although, but, much, more, nevertheless, yet
6. Comparison: also, as, likewise, so also
7. Emphatic connectives: indeed, only, even, behold

Note: those are only the most common examples. There are many, many more examples. In his book, *Methodical Bible Study*, Traina gives a more complete list of connectives.

Expected Temporal Connectives
- after (Revelation 11:11)
- as (Acts 16:16)
- before (John 8:58)
- now (Luke 16:25)
- then (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- until (Mark 14:23)
- when (John 11:31)
- while (Mark 14:43)

Geographical Connectives
- where (Matthew 6:20)

Logical Connectives
- Reason
  - because (Romans 1:23)
  - for (Romans 1:11)
  - since (Romans 1:28)
- Results
  - so (Romans 9:16)
  - then (Galatians 2:21)
  - therefore (1 Corinthians 10:12)
  - thus (1 Corinthians 8:12)
- Purpose
  - in order that (Romans 4:16)
  - so that (Romans 5:21).
- Contrast
  - although (Romans 1:21
  - but (Romans 2:8
  - much more (Romans 5:15
  - nevertheless (1 Corinthians 10:5)
  - otherwise (1 Corinthians 14:16)

yet (Romans 5:14)
Comparison
also (2 Corinthians 1:11)
as (Romans 9:23)
as-so (Romans 5:18)
just as-so (Romans 11:30-31)
likewise (Romans 1:27)
so also (Romans 4:6)
Series of Facts
and (Romans 2:19
first of all (1 Timothy 2:1)
last of all (1 Corinthians 15:8
or (2 Corinthians 6:15
Condition
if (Romans 2:19
Emphatic Connectives
indeed (Romans 9:25
only (1 Corinthians 8:9)

Decipher Figures of Speech

The plain sense is usually the intended sense of written material. An old adage says, "When the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense." Plummer says that when the literal sense makes excellent sense, it is to be preferred (Plummer on 1 Timothy, p. 144). David L. Cooper formulated what he called "The Golden Rule of Interpretation," namely, "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise" (Cooper, p. xviii). It would

be a grave mistake to interpret the plain sense of Scripture in a figurative sense (spiritual sense) when that is not the Author/author's meaning.

Nevertheless, the Bible is loaded with figures of speech. Boonstra says, "Metaphor, simile, and image are central to scriptural language." He goes on to say, "Such comparisons often capture a truth or a situation or an insight more succinctly than a propositional statement could do" (Boonstra, p. 22).

In all languages, words are used in a literal and figurative sense. When authors use figures of speech, they do not intend their words to be taken literally. For example, "John is a chicken," which does not mean that John is literally a bird. It means that John is a coward (Johnson, p. 193). Authors sometimes give clues about how they use figures of speech. One way they do that is by using terms of comparison, such as "like," "as," or a genitive construction ("the sword of the Spirit"). Another way is hyperbole (overstatement). For example, Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother" (Lk. 14:26).

Thus, words have a literal meaning and are often figurative. The literal meaning is the *plain* meaning. For example, the word "iron" is a specific metal (atomic number 26, atomic weight 55.847). A word's literal meaning can have an alternative meaning while still being its plain meaning. The word "iron" can mean something made of iron, such as an appliance used to press fabric or a golf club. That same word may have a figurative meaning. The expression "he rules with a rod of iron" uses the

word "iron" figuratively to convey the idea of a strong ruler. The two most common figures of speech in any literature are similes and metaphors.

Simile A simile is a *comparison* utilizing words such as "like" and "as." For example, "Life is like a circus." "His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire" (Rev. 1:14). In a simile, two things are similar.

Similes are easy to grasp because what follows "like" or "as" is usually readily understood. To interpret a simile, explain the two things being compared. In His lament over Jerusalem, Jesus cried, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Mt. 23:37). The care and concern, the provision and the protection that Jesus wanted to extend to the inhabitants of Jerusalem is compared to that which a hen extends to her chicks, only the inhabitants of Jerusalem were not like chicks—they were rebellious.

Metaphor A metaphor is a *comparison* that omits "like" or "as." For example, "The world is a stage." "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer. My God, my strength, in whom I will trust. My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Ps. 18:2). A metaphor is a direct comparison in which the author describes one thing in terms of something else. When Jesus said, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk. 12:32), He employed the metaphor of "little flock." He is comparing

Himself to a shepherd and His followers to sheep. As the shepherd protects and provides for the sheep, so the Lord will care for His own. When Jesus said, "I am the door" (Jn. 10:9), He was using a metaphor. He also used a metaphor when He said, "This is My body" (Lk. 22:19). He intended for this statement to be understood metaphorically rather than literally or physically.

Thus, the figurative meaning is a *comparison* in which the primary or ordinary use is applied to something else that is non-literal, but there is a correspondence between the two. To say that a king rules with an iron hand does not mean that he has a hand made of iron. As iron is strong, so he rules with strength.

Hyperbole The word "hyperbole" comes from the two Greek words, one for "to throw" and the other for "beyond." Hence, it means to throw beyond excess. Hyperbole is an overstatement, an exaggeration for effect. It is used "when more is said than is literally meant" (Bullinger, p. 423). To say, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse" is obviously not literally true. It is an exaggeration that conveys the idea of extreme hunger.

Using hyperbole, Jesus said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right-hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Mt. 5:29-30).

John used hyperbole when he wrote, "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen" (Jn. 21:25). John painted a graphic picture of how much Jesus did; he was overstating his point to make a point. A complete account would be infinite (Westcott).

Personification Personification is portraying an inanimate object as a person. "The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands" (Isa. 55:12). Mountains do not sing and trees do not clap their hands.

Anthropomorphism An anthropomorphism uses human characteristics to describe God. For example, John 4:24 says, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth," but Luke 24:39 says, "He is a Spirit and a spirit does not have flesh and bones." So when human characteristics are applied to God, it is an anthropomorphism.

The Psalms are full of anthropomorphisms. For example, "Behold, the eye of the LORD *is* on those who fear Him" (Ps. 33:18).

In fact, anthropomorphisms appear throughout the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah 53:1 says, "To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" God is also said to repent (Ex. 32:12; Jer. 18:8; the NKJV says, "relents, regrets"). Does God change His mind, or do these verses describe God from a human point of view?

Figures Of Speech

The Name	The Essence	The Significance
Literal	plain meaning	to plainly state something
Simile	comparison using "like" or "as"	to illustrate something
Metaphor	comparison without "like" or "as"	to illustrate something
Hyperbole	overstatement, exaggeration	for effect
Personification	inanimate object as a person	for dramatic effect
Anthropomorphism	pictures God as human	to help humans understand God

Define Words

A word may have any number of meanings. For example, the word "trunk" may mean back end of a car, the front end of an elephant, a large container for storing possessions, the thick, main stem of the tree from which branches grow, or the central part of a person's body, not including the head, arms, or legs. All of the meanings are of little role, physical things.

A word may have a figurative meaning. The word "ball" is meaningless if it appears alone. It could be a ping-pong ball, golf ball, tennis ball, baseball, softball, basketball, football, dance, or a good time. "Ball" can be used literally (football) or figuratively (a good time).

It is also true that the same word can have different meanings to different people. Winston Churchill talked about a serious misunderstanding because the same word meant two different things to different people. In a meeting of the British and American chiefs of staff, the British delegation proposed to "table" an important resolution. To them, that meant to discuss it immediately. To the Americans, the word meant an indefinite postponement. A heated argument resulted until the committee realized they all wanted the same thing!

In *How to Listen,* Ted Pollock says, "The 500 most commonly used English words have more than 2,500 dictionary meanings! Do not believe it? Look up the word 'fix' in a good dictionary."

A dictionary only lists possible meanings. English dictionaries, Hebrew lexicons, Greek lexicons, and grammars give little help concerning how to use a word in a particular sentence. In an article entitled "The New Hermeneutics," Mickelsen writes, "Unfortunately, the best dictionaries and the best grammars give the student little help concerning how to use this information in particular contexts. It is simply not true that a student smart enough to use a lexicon or grammar automatically knows how to apply that knowledge in a variety of contexts. He needs to know how to relate all his skills to particular passages"

(Mickelsen, p. 6).

When a word is used in a sentence, it has only one meaning. Schleiermacher's second canon of interpretation is, "The meaning of a word in a given passage must be determined according to its coexistence with words that surround it" (Hirsch, p. 201). Hirsch adds it is also true that "the sense of a word must determine the senses of the surrounding words" (Hirsch, p. 201). *Context determines meaning.*

Two people were walking down the street. One said to the other, "You're beautiful." What does that mean? Because that sentence can have several meanings, more information (context) is needed to determine which meaning was intended by the speaker.

If the speaker was the captain of the football team talking to the head of the cheerleading squad he was dating, he meant she was physically beautiful. If, however, the speaker was an 80-year-old lady talking to another 80-year-old lady, both of whom had just come from a soup kitchen where they were helping to feed homeless people, the speaker meant that her friend was a beautiful person inside; she was kindhearted. If the speaker was a 20-year-old man talking to another 20-year-old man who had just said something unkind, the speaker meant the exact opposite of 'beautiful,' namely, that what the other man had said was ugly.

In the Bible, there is immediate context (the paragraph and surrounding paragraphs), basic context (the book), and ultimate context (the Testament and, beyond that, the Bible). The context

determines the meaning of words and sentences.

Immediate Context In John 3:5, Jesus said, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." The expression "born of water" has been explained in many ways, including the repentance involved in the baptism of John the Baptist, baptism, and inward purification. A popular view is that "water" refers to the written Word of God (Eph. 5:26). It has spirit" means "born of water and wind!" The immediate context of the conversation with Nicodemus must determine the correct interpretation of John 3:5. When Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again, the only birth Nicodemus could think of was physical (Jn. 3:4). In response, Jesus spoke of being born of water. Therefore, in the context of the conversation, when Jesus speaks of being "born of water," He is referring to physical birth. He either did that or totally ignored Nicodemus' question. John 3:6 confirms that "born of water" is physical birth. In verse 6, Jesus contrasts being born of water (flesh) with a second birth (being born of the Spirit). So, the context of the conversation indicates that "born of water is physical birth." Every mother knows that all babies are born out of water.

Basic Context In Acts 10:46, people spoke "with tongues." What does speaking with tongues mean? In Acts 2, people "began to speak with other tongues" (Acts 2:4). Luke explains that meant they spoke in their "own language (Acts 2:6). He then lists the languages spoken (Acts 2:8-11). Therefore, the context of the *book* of Acts defines what speaking in tongues is.

Ultimate Context Several passages in the New Testament refer to inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5; Gal. 5:21). Many interpret "inheriting" to mean "entering." The ultimate context, including the Old Testament, indicates that "inheriting" means "inheriting." For example, in the Old Testament, there was a double inheritance (Deut. 21:17). It is one thing to enter the house. It is another thing to inherit it.

Summary: To fully understand the Bible, one must understand **sentences as a whole, their various parts, figures of speech, and the definition of words,** which is determined by context.

Chapter 9

THE CONFIRMATION OF THE IDEA

As people grapple with the historical situation, the type of literature, and the meaning of language to grasp the idea/spiritual truth in the mind of the Author/author of Scripture, a process naturally occurs. People either read the written material with a *preconceived notion* of its meaning or develop a *preliminary concept* of its meaning as they read it. This notion of the whole will determine their understanding of the details, which is why interpreters differ and disagree. A *preconceived notion* or a *preliminary concept* is an *interpretive hypothesis*, which tends to be self-confirming (Hirsch, 1967, p. 166). Rather than doing that, the interpretive hypothesis should be a *working hypothesis* that needs to be verified by data in the text.

There is an interdependency of the whole and the parts. The whole can only be understood through its parts. The parts can only be understood through the whole. If the parts do not explain the original idea of the whole, that idea must be discarded or revised. Often, interpreters begin with a vague or broader idea

and, in the course of interpretation, merely narrow it down or make it more explicit. The process of interpretation is a trial-and-error, revision, and refinement until the interpreter arrives at an overall idea that explains all the details and an explanation of all the details that fit the whole.

In his famous "Essay on Composition," John Ruskin defines composition as "literally and simply, putting several things together, to make *one* thing out of them." That one thing is the key to understanding the Bible's spiritual truth. When that one thing explains the details (and the details fit the one thing), the reader understands the meaning of the Author/author of Scripture.

Thus, a passage of Scripture has a subject, an idea/spiritual truth, material selected to develop the idea/spiritual truth (selection and amount), and structure (arrangement and relationships). When your explanation of the spiritual truth fits the details (what is said, the material used, arrangement) and the details fit the overall idea/spiritual truth, you have the mind of the Author/author.

Summary: The correct understanding of the Bible is the Author/author's meaning as determined by an examination of the historical, literary, linguistic, and subject context that results in the overall idea/spiritual truths that explain all the details, and the details explain the overall idea/spiritual truth.

CONCLUSION

Let's review and summarize the concepts covered in this presentation.

The Nature of the Bible

The Bible is unique in that it is both a divine and a human book. It has, in the words of Kuist, "two sides" (Kuist, p. 25). The Bible is a spiritual book authored by the Holy Spirit; therefore, spiritual requirements apply to anyone who would experience and explain its spiritual truth. The other side is that the Bible is a book, and, like any other book, sacred or secular, certain "regulations" apply to its full understanding. Both of these dimensions must be kept in perspective as we approach the Scripture. Both have a direct bearing on the understanding of the Bible.

Traina says that because the Bible deals with spiritual matters, interpretation requires spiritual sensitivity and because it is a library of books, each of which is written by a different person

in a different historical situation using different terminology and different literary forms, interpretation must also utilize these and related considerations (Traina, pp. 163-164).

Without spiritual sensitivity, our approach may become mechanically academic and even critical. Without a "scientific" approach to the Scripture, our understanding of it may be merely mystical and intuitive. There should be no divorce between spiritual sensitivity and scientific sanity. Meeting the spiritual requirements and following specific regulations are essential to arriving at a correct understanding of the Bible. As Traina claims, the interpreter of the Bible needs spiritual sense and common sense (Traina, pp. 136-137).

In his book, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Terry lists intellectual, educational, and spiritual qualifications (Terry, pp. 151-158). He says, "A large proportion of the sacred volume is sufficiently simple for the child to understand, and the common people and the unlearned may find on every page much that is profitable for instruction in righteousness; there is also much that requires, for its proper apprehension and exposition, the noblest powers of intellect and the most ample learning" (Terry, p. 151).

Under the topic of intellectual qualifications, Terry mentions having a "sound, well-balanced mind." He points out that some people are given to "hasty judgment," and others are "constitutionally destitute of common sense." He adds that such "mental defects disqualify one for the interpretation of the word of God" (Terry, p. 151).

Intellect, Terry says, is needed to not only understand the meaning of words and phrases but also "the drift of the argument." For example, one must be able to discern the "unity" and the "scope" of an epistle so that the picture of the whole can be seen. The "connection of thought" and the "association of ideas" must be discerned. The interpreter needs the "power of analysis" to comprehend the relationship of the parts to the whole. Imaginative power is needed because the interpreter "must often transport himself into the past, and picture in his soul the scenes of ancient times." That calls for a "disciplined imagination." Therefore, "sound and sober judgment" is needed. One must have the ability to "analyze, examine, and compare." He adds, "The Bible comes to us in the forms of human language and appeals to our reasoned judgment; it invites investigation and condemns a blind credulity. It is to be interpreted as we interpret any other volume, by a rigid application of the laws of language, and the same grammatical analytic" (Terry, p. 153).

As for educational qualifications, Terry says the interpreter must be acquainted with the geography of Palestine, familiar with history, and knowledgeable about chronology, customs, and the languages used in the Bible (Terry, pp. 154-156).

Spiritually, interpreters need "a disposition to seek and know the truth." Since the Holy Spirit wrote the Scripture, the interpreter must be "a partaker of the same Spirit." As Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-18, interpreters must never cease to pray for enlightenment (Terry, pp. 156-158).

Terry, of course, is correct. There are intellectual and educational requirements to understand the Bible fully. As Traina says, "Since biblical interpretation is basically a rational process, the mind must function properly if it is to be valid" (Traina, p. 19). Jesus says we are to love God with our mind (Mt. 22:37).

The Specifics

To be specific, let's review. To fully understand the **spiritual truth** of the Bible, spiritual, book, and Bible issues are involved. Spiritually, people must **trust Jesus Christ** for the gift of eternal life, **deal** with sin, **crave** God's truth, **grow** spiritually, **depend** on the Lord, and, in some cases, **be spiritually mature**. Believers must also be aware of the **ideas/spiritual truths, historical**, **literary,** and **linguistic** elements of the Bible to understand the mind of the Author/author. Those divisions have subdivisions. So to fully understand the Bible, the believer must:

Depend on the Lord
Determine the Overall Idea/spiritual truth (Relationships)
    Look for the Author's Structure
    Construct an Interpretive Outline
    Determine the Overall Idea/spiritual truth
Detect the Historical Data
    The Historical Period
    The Historical Situation
    The Historical References

Discern the Literary Genre (Selection and Arrangement)
- Narrative
- Poetry
- Proverb
- Parable
- Prose
- Type
- Prophecy

Discover the Literary Features
- The Sentence as a Whole
- The Parts of the Sentence
- The Figures of Speech
- The Definition of Words (Context)

The Task

To say the same thing another way, the Bible consists of form and substance. The form is a statement, a story, a poem, a parable, etc. written years ago to a specific situation (history) in a literary genre (literature), and another language (language). The substance is the ideas, spiritual truth, the message. The form is the vehicle to communicate the substance. The form (statements, stories, poems, etc.) is the wrapping. The substance (spiritual truth) is what is inside. The cow is the form; the steak is the substance.

The reader must deal with the form to get to the substance. Kuist emphatically declares, "Form is the key which unlocks the door of content and discloses the essence of the subject matter" (Kuist, p. 92). Jensen concurs, "A Christian who studies a book

of the Bible with serious intentions must learn its facts by way of its form" (Jensen, p. 29).

The reader's task is to unwrap the package, peel away the form, get past the form, and find the substance. The student must crawl through *history*, *literature*, and *language* to understand the *spiritual truth*. The substance (spiritual truth) sanctifies us. The Spirit of Truth uses the *Word of Truth* to transform believers (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Summary: To fully understand the Bible, the reader must deal with spiritual, book, and biblical issue.

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About The Author

G. Michael Cocoris is a gifted communicator. He can make even complicated subjects simple, clear, and practical. His breadth of experience has allowed him to relate to a wide range of audiences.

Michael received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Tennessee Temple University, a Master of Theology degree from Dallas Seminary, and a Doctorate of Divinity from Biola University. He traveled the United States for over a dozen years as a speaker. He has also been a seminary professor, visiting lecturer, and world traveler, including hosting tours to Israel and China.

Michael has pastored three churches, including a rural church when he was in seminary, an urban church, the historic Church of the Open Door, first in downtown Los Angeles and later in Glendora, California, and a suburban church, the Lindley Church in Tarzana California, a suburb of Los Angeles. While at the Church of Open Door, he had a daily radio broadcast.

Michael has written numerous magazine articles, mainly for *Biblical Research Monthly*. He has authored a number of books, including *Seventy Years on Hope Street, A History of the Church of the Open Door*; *How To Live A Biblical Spiritual Life, Clarifying the Confusion; Repentance, The Most Misunderstood Word in the Bible; Evangelism: A Biblical Approach; The Salvation Controversy; Lordship Salvation: Is It Biblical?; The Books of the Bible, the Subject, Structure, Situation, and Significant Verses of Each Book; Psalms, A Song for Every Situation, Each Summarized on One Page; and Counseling Theories, A Biblical Evaluation.* In addition, he was a contributor to The *NKJV Study Bible* and *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*.

Michael is the pastor of the Lindley Church in Tarzana, California. He and his wife, Patricia, live in Santa Monica, California.