

**DON'T CONFUSE ME WITH
THE FACTS!**

Lessons in Biblical Hermeneutics

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PREFACE

I wrote the original manuscript for this work several years ago while doing doctoral work at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary. My assignment for the class was to write a book that taught laymen how to perform proper hermeneutics—a fancy word for biblical interpretation. Although my professor, Dr. Earl Radmacher, suggested that I pursue publication, I am only now doing so. Nevertheless, the information has not grown old. These are basic, time honored principles of interpretation that every serious Bible student should know.

INTRODUCTION

A dramatic change is in the air. What started as a cultural phenomenon of the western world has gone global. It affects the economy, the work force, education, social life and even the Church. We have become an information society.

The onset of the personal computer has had something to do with the rapid growth of this cultural phenomenon. But even the personal computer is more a by-product or a symptom than a cause. Data bases filled with important and unimportant factoids seem to grow exponentially. Never before has the world possessed such dearth of knowledge on so many topics. Medical science is capable of nearly miraculous feats. Space technology has advanced to a point that was considered science fiction only a few generations ago. Even as I write we are on the verge of developing new energy sources and technology that will revolutionize energy consumption; and if we ever learn to harness the potential of antimatter, life will truly be like the Jetsons.

Our love affair with information has even spawned a new form of entertainment. We call it trivia. Played on television, in homes, in schools, by the young and the old, its popularity is almost cultic. We are a society of trivia buffs. We even have Bible trivia.

Unwittingly, however, with our enthusiasm for trivia some have effectively lowered the Bible to that of another information book, a mere database of facts. Not that Bible trivia itself is a problem, or even that it is wrong. But it is a

symptom of an attitude that permeates the western Evangelical Orthodoxy.

Bible knowledge abounds. Radio programs, TV programs, commentaries, books and more books litter our airwaves and bookshelves. What used to be the domain of the theologically educated is now open territory. Everybody seems to have an opinion. Not that a body should not have an opinion; but the opinionated should first be educated in the subject. And although Biblical knowledge abounds, it is a pseudo Biblical knowledge, more a compilation of disjointed facts than cohesive theological knowledge.

Today, there is little respect for the theologian. This is aptly illustrated by the near demise of the degree, Th.D. (doctor of theology). Once considered the highest degree in academia, today even most Christians don't know what it is.

These respected leaders educated in ministry, theology, hermeneutics, Greek, Hebrew, logic and philosophy are being replaced by virtually untrained spiritual cheerleaders. Oh, these new leaders have memorized a lot of biblical data and they are able to make the congregation feel good about themselves; but to truly understand the faith and to effectively guard against false teaching, is not their forte, and we suffer for it.

I am convinced that although Bible knowledge abounds, we are in a theological famine. Christians are reading their Bibles; but are they understanding what they read? Can they understand what they read without the proper tools? Who is providing those tools? Not the cheerleaders; they, themselves do not possess them.

A few things must be understood about Bible study. Accurate Bible knowledge leads to accurate theology; but accurate Bible knowledge requires accurate study, which requires an accurate historical knowledge. The Bible was written many hundreds of years ago and therefore, by

necessity, requires more attention than does yesterday's newspaper. Merely reading these ancient, sacred passages and leaping to some manufactured modern application is a leap of ignorance. Secondly, we have a rich history of educated theologians, spiritual men used of God to defend the faith—it is in our best interests to consider what they have to say. Thirdly, we must know why we study the Bible. Our obedience to its precepts is far more important than understanding the proper eschatological implications of 2 Thessalonians 2, or knowing the name of Lamech's two wives.

The scope then of our personal Bible study is not the memorization facts to ensure the Tuesday night Bible trivia championship; the scope is application and obedience. But we cannot apply what we do not understand; and it is counterproductive to apply what we misunderstand. Understanding does not come without a price. The price is diligent, accurate, study.

I hope that your personal Bible study is for accuracy, understanding, application and obedience, rather than mere trivia. If so, then this book is for you. It does not tell the reader what the Bible is saying, but it does provide you with the tools to determine that for yourself. Section I, explains the need for and the philosophy behind hermeneutics, or biblical interpretation. Section II, presents a systematic procedure for biblical interpretation. And Section III, demonstrates this systematic process using 3 John 8 as a model text. You will find the material concise, informative and an excellent text for classroom or group study.

PART 1

THE HERMENEUTICAL PURPOSE

Lesson 1

RECEIVING GOD’S WORD

Revelation & Inspiration

God has communicated to man in various manners throughout history. To some, such as Joseph the son of Jacob and Joseph the husband of Mary, He spoke in dreams. To Adam and Moses, He spoke as though face to face. To the nation of Israel, He spoke through the prophets. And alas, to the world, He spoke through His Son, the Lord Jesus who is the Christ and whom the world crucified.

God’s direct communication to the various men and women in history is called divine revelation. He chose certain individuals to receive these revelations and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, He directed the written record of these revelations.

While revelation is solely the activity of God—through which He directly reveals truth to men, inspiration involves man in an active sense. By inspiration the prophet passed on to others what he had received from God.¹ Today, we call their works the Bible or Holy Scripture. Through this medium—the inspired, recorded Words of revelation—God has indirectly spoken to all of us.

Transmission of the Message

When these chosen men received God’s revelation, there

¹ Norman Geisler, and William Nix. A General Introduction to the Bible. Chicago: Moody Press 1968, p. 30.

were no copy machines or printing presses. The original and subsequent manuscripts were copied by men called scribes. It was the scribes' job to transcribe these documents with accuracy. This methodic and tedious process was carried on for almost three thousand years with the Old Testament and over sixteen hundred years with the New Testament.

During this time relatively few variant readings evolved. Such longevity of literature is without precedent in history. Even with the advent of modern technology this remains an accomplishment without equal as to accuracy. It has been observed that more variant readings exist in Shakespeare's documents than in ancient biblical transcripts. This is a feat made possible only by God's providential care.

The Languages of the Bible

The authors of Scripture wrote in one of three languages: Hebrew, Chaldean and Greek. To date, many of their works have been translated into more than 19,000 languages throughout the world. The English speaking world has been blessed with several fine versions, most of which represent the original languages with astounding accuracy.

Interpretation and Illumination

But now that we have God's Word in our hands, what do we do with it? His Word was revealed with the intent to change our actions and attitudes, but how do we apply these ancient writings to our modern lives? That is, how do we apply it with meaning and accuracy? This is where interpretation and illumination come into focus. They bridge the gap in the transmission of God's Word from His mind into our mind; and thereby make possible the application of His Word through our mind to our soul and into our life experience. The concepts of interpretation and illumination are developed more fully in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Study Questions

1. In what ways has God communicated to man?

2. What role has Israel had in God's communication to man?
3. What role does the Holy Spirit have in God's communication to man?
4. What role did Jesus have in God's communication to man?
5. Characterize and define God's direct communication to man.
6. Characterize and define God's indirect communication to man.
7. Who was a scribe? What was his function?
8. What were the languages in which the Scriptures were written?

Lesson 2

INTERPRETING GOD'S WORD

The Dual Nature of Scripture

God's Word transcends culture and time. It has had, presently has, and shall continue to have, meaning for all mankind. By its very nature it has eternal relevance. However, because God spoke through historical individuals, Scripture has a particular historical setting that must be understood.

Each book of the Bible is necessarily conditioned by the language, time, and culture in which it was written.² Even the personality of each author must be considered. Because of this the Bible has a unique dual nature about it. It is God's Word recorded by the human words of various historic individuals.

The Necessity of Interpretation

Interpretation is not a deceptive device employed by unscrupulous intellects bent upon distorting truth. Interpretation is the common and necessary activity of communication. It is a requisite of both the verbal and written language.

Unfortunately, some have the idea that we need not interpret the Bible. To them it seems good enough merely to read it and believe what it says.³ While this logic may sound

² Gordon Fee, and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for all its Worth, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, pp. 15-17.

³ Fee. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

reasonable and even pious, it has a major flaw. God's Word is divine while our minds are human; thereby corrupt with bias and ignorance. It is largely the tension between these two natures (the divine and the human) that requires interpretation on our part.⁴ Or more precisely, it is the corrupt, biased and ignorant nature of man that requires interpretation on our part.

Because of our corrupt nature the act of interpretation necessarily takes place with all communication—whether it is from God to man or man to man, or whether it is the spoken or written word. To press this point just a little further I might add that it is our corrupt nature that even compromises our communication with the animal world. For a short time Adam walk with the animal but sin changed all of that. Now animals are afraid of us or we of them; even domestic animals have trouble knowing the exact will of their master.

Man's sinful nature clouds his ability to communicate or receive communication clearly. There is simply no escaping the requirement of interpretation on the part of hearers or readers whose nature is tainted with bias and ignorance.

There is a great distance between simply reading and believing. To merely leap from one to the other is to bypass understanding. To believe what we read, we must first understand it. But to understand what we read, we must interpret it; and we must interpret it correctly. False interpretation leads to incorrect knowledge, which leads to incorrect thinking and thus incorrect conclusions and, finally, to incorrect actions.

Understanding simply does not take place without interpretation. Indeed, this is true of any literature, especially ancient literature.

The clear objective of interpretation is to arrive at the plain meaning of the speaker or author. What did the speaker or

⁴ Fee. pp. 18-19.

author mean by the words that were spoken or written? Although this is the simple premise, there are certain difficulties inherent to the interpretation process.

Our problems arise from the fact that what may seem to be the obvious meaning, may not be so obvious at all. Due to cultural, language and geographical differences, historical distance and the self-imposed limitations of our personal background—that is, our biases, what may seem to be the plain meaning of a text, may actually be a gross misunderstanding on our part. A misunderstanding often imposed by our ignorance of the author's context.

When Paul said, "Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14). Most in our culture might assume that flesh refers to physical body. Therefore, they assume he is speaking of the bodily appetites. However, Paul seldom used this particular term to refer to the physical body. He generally used it as a reference to sinful nature.⁵ Reader's will interpret the passage as either physical flesh or sinful nature. Wittingly or unwittingly, correctly or incorrectly, but either way, by necessity the reader will interpret the passage.

Does this mean that only theologians should do biblical interpretation, or that only biblical scholars should even read Scripture? Of course not. But it does mean that all readers who intend to formulate a belief system from their reading must take interpretation very seriously. As with all communication, there are certain grammatical and contextual rules that must be followed. One prominent theologian gave this encouraging comment for non-theologians,⁶

Strict grammatical analysis, and the rigid observance

⁵ Fee. *Ibid.*, p. 16-17.

⁶ Joseph Angus, and Samuel Green, The Bible Hand-Book: An Introduction to the Study of Sacred Scripture, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, no date, p. 176.

of exegetical rules, lead to the same views of truth as are entertained by theologians, who bring to the study of the Bible strong sense and devout piety.

Without strict adherence the rules of context and grammar, meaningful communication cannot take place. Without these rules we have nothing more than meaningless existential babble. If readers can take literature to mean anything they desire, they might as well be staring at cloud formations and letting their imaginations run wild.

Words have meaning. Words within a certain context have a specific meaning. Words from a certain historical setting will be expressed in a specific vernacular; but always, we must assume the author spoke in simple language attempting to convey a simple message. We must always ask, what is the author's meaning?

The Process is Called Hermeneutics

This process of biblical interpretation, called hermeneutics, is a transliteration of the Greek word hermeneia, which means "to interpret" or "to explain."⁷ In English, we define hermeneutics as the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system. It is an art because the application of the rules is accomplished by skill, not rote or mechanical imitation.⁸

The goal of hermeneutics is to bridge the gap between our minds and the mind of the author.⁹ We all agree that God has spoken; but what has He said? It is the task of hermeneutics to answer this question. To do this properly requires study and research on our part. We must learn something about history, geography, language, culture, literature and logic. It is not easy; but it is rewarding and necessary if we expect to truly

⁷ Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956, p. 10.

⁸ Ramm. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹ Ramm. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

know what God has said.

Because it is difficult, time consuming, exhausting and technical, it is rare. Many, if not most would be Bible interpreters neglect to engage a good hermeneutical procedure. No doubt such lazy interpretation is at the root of many erroneous doctrines.

Is it not a pitiful enigma? The Christian values the Bible so highly yet in reality does so very little to seek its meaning. Locke observed that,

Man can weary himself in any secular affair, but diligently to search the Scripture is to him tedious and burdensome. Few covet to be mighty in the Scripture; though convinced their great concern is enveloped in them.¹⁰

What a telling and pitiful expose.

Study Questions

1. In what way is the Bible culturally bound?
2. In what way is the Bible eternally relevant?
3. How does one distinguish between the two?
4. Discuss the tension that makes interpretation necessary on our part.
5. What is wrong with the statement, "You don't have to interpret the Bible, just read it and believe what it says"?
6. Is it possible to read something and understand the word but not the meaning? Explain.
7. Is it possible to read for understanding without interpreting what you read? Explain.
8. What is the goal of interpretation?
9. Discuss hermeneutics as an art and science.
10. What does a proper hermeneutical procedure require?
11. Why do so many who hold the Bible in such high regard

¹⁰ Angus and Green, p. 176.

neglect to study and interpret it properly?

Lesson 3

INTERPRETING GOD'S WORD

It is Possible to be Correct

What then is the correct hermeneutical procedure? The answer to this question is the subject of this chapter. While it is true that a thorough exegesis (another fancy word for interpretation and critical explanation) of certain difficult passages requires an advanced knowledge of biblical languages (something the average reader of this book is not expected to have), much of Scripture can be correctly interpreted with a good translation. Indeed, as English readers we have at our disposal all the tools necessary to arrive at reliable interpretations of most passages.

Do Not Negate the Languages

Does this mean that we need not study the original languages? Well, yes and no. Certainly such study is beyond the needs of the average reader, but it behooves the serious Bible student, the preacher and even the Sunday school teacher to learn (at least in a rudimentary scholastic manner) to function in these languages. It is not the ominous task that some might suppose. We are spoiled by our American culture. Because English prevails we feel no need to learn another language. Is it not convicting that the average European can function in several languages? Are they of greater intellect than we? Or is it not, rather, our lack of interest, our busy schedules, our priorities? No doubt the latter. In which case,

the study of biblical languages is simply not deemed important enough to the average Bible teacher to invest the necessary time and discipline.

This is both sad and confusing. Believers defend and adhere to the orthodox doctrines of a literal interpretation of the inspired, inerrant Word of God. But curiously, many are content—even belligerently committed—to adhering to the Bible in an amended form, a translation.

How is it that we are content to focus our whole life upon something that is, by its very nature, out of focus. I mean no disrespect for our versions. But it was the original writings that were inspired, not our translations. Even though the extant manuscripts are not the autographs, they are duplicates. They convey the author's mind with precision, within his own context. Before we construct any doctrine, they simply demand our attention.

Certain thoughts, idioms and intents are inevitably lost in translation. No translation can project the crisp picture of the original language. Not because the biblical language is better or more precise than English. Quite the opposite is true. Our present English is likely the most precise language in history. The issue is translation. Linguistic, cultural and historical distance necessarily makes certain expressions in the receptor tongue inferior to its counterpart in the mother tongue. If God had chosen to communicate in Mandarin Chinese, the issue would be the same, and we would study Mandarin rather than Greek and Hebrew.

Be Cautious

The purpose of this section is to teach a sound hermeneutical process. Although much of this process can be done in English, we must recognize that certain textual and grammatical issues are necessarily answered in the original languages. Therefore, I caution less experienced interpreters to tread lightly when the ice is thin. Don't expect to be forming

new doctrines or finding new meanings that have never been understood. The chances are more than overwhelming that you will be in error.

Theologians and would be Bible teachers must acquire a certain proficiency in the original languages, the historical setting, theological concepts, and they must master a sound hermeneutic. Again, this is not to suggest that only formally trained theologians are worthy of offering doctrinal opinions; but it is to suggest, even argue, that no one untrained in the languages and theology should seriously expect to uncover or formulate doctrinal issues. Let us keep in mind that the purpose of personal Bible study is for application and obedience, not to construct new theological formulas.

The Process of Literal Interpretation

One of the primary features to set fundamental Christianity aside from liberal Christendom is the adherence to a literal-historical-grammatical-contextual hermeneutic. What does this mean?

Literal

We use the term literal to mean that every passage has a plain meaning. The author or speaker had a singular understanding in mind when he wrote or spoke. We refer to this as a meaning with a single sense. It is therefore, the interpreter's goal to understand the author's plain, singular meaning.

It is the nature of language, both written and verbal, for writers and speakers to express themselves in various ways. The authors of Scripture were no different. People have favorite words and idiom they may use frequently. They may have a certain style of expression, such as short choppy sentences or long drawn out sentences connecting one parenthetical idea to another. But always, if the speaker is coherent, there is a plain singular meaning in mind.

Words, then as now, have both figurative and metaphorical

uses, as well as concrete. Each usage is considered literal. One is figurative-literal, the other is concrete-literal. Therefore, literal simply refers to the author's contextual meaning for the term. This is true in both the figurative or concrete sense.

When we use the idiom, "It's raining cats and dogs," everyone understands this to be a euphemism for "It's raining hard." And when we say, "It's raining hard," everyone understands that we are using "hard" in the figurative sense. The concrete-literal meaning of hard is, "not easily penetrated, firm, solid."¹¹ This concept does not fit our context. There is nothing solid about rain drops. But there are several figurative meanings for hard. In this phrase "hard" is a reference to the inclement weather. This is the speaker's obvious meaning and to understand it as such is to understand it literally. It is a legitimate, figurative-literal use of the term.

Likewise, when James said, "*the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity...*," (Jm. 3:6), he did not mean fire in a concrete-literal sense, as Luke meant it when he said Paul "shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm" (Act 28:5). Nor did James mean "world" in the concrete-literal sense. His use for both terms is plainly in the figurative-literal sense. Thus, "the tongue is destructive, the sum total of iniquity." But we must take it still another step to arrive at the literal-meaning. Even James' use of the generally concrete term "tongue" is a euphemism for the thoughts and intents of the mind, which control the tongue. This is the plain meaning of James' figurative speech. This is literal interpretation.

Historical

Aside from the aforementioned dual nature of Scripture and the inevitable dual nature of literal speech, there is also a determined historical aspect of hermeneutics. These

¹¹ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Co., Publishers, 1961.

documents were written by and to men in history. Correct interpretation on our part demands that we understand the historical setting in which they were written and received.

Learning this historical background is more than knowing the date and the author of a particular writing. It requires careful consideration of the author's background, the recipients background, the circumstances in which the author wrote and the recipients who received it.¹² Sometimes it even requires knowledge of the geography, and it always requires an understanding of the historic meaning for the terms the author uses.

Grammatical

Language is our basic means of communication. For a language to have meaning its users must agree upon a recognized structure and a common meaning for each term. Every language functions on this basis. It is this common agreement in our English language that enables you to understand the words I have written and which you are now reading.

We monitor and modify the structure of a language by rules of grammar. In English we generally construct a sentence in the order of its subject, verb, and object. Thus, Mary (the subject) picked (the verb) apples (the object). This is grammar. And as you might recall from your school days, the rules seem endless. We obey most of them without realizing it. With proper instruction, as children we learn to speak correctly long before we actually study grammar. But this does not negate the need for the rules or our need to understand them. When studying a foreign language this is especially important. Grammar is our rule book, our guide; the structure in which we communicate.

¹² Walter C. Jr. Kaiser, Toward an Exegetical Theology, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981, p. 88.

Our grammatical rules are based upon past usage; but because language is fluid—ever changing, to some degree so too are the rules of grammar. They change to reflect common usage. But these changes are slow, generally taking place over decades or even hundreds of years.

The grammatical considerations in the hermeneutical process require great detail. We must consider the meaning of a given term and the function of that term in the phrase, the clause, or the sentence. Then we consider the function of a phrase in a sentence and the purpose of a sentence in the paragraph, the relationship of one sentence to another, and one paragraph to another.

It is this step of the hermeneutical process that often requires technical skills that many have not perfected or perhaps have allowed to get rusty. But don't dismay, there are several study tools designed to help such students with important grammatical issue. These tools will be discussed later.

Contextual

The context in which a passage is written is also of extreme importance. In some ways contextual considerations are akin to grammatical considerations. We might even think of them as an extension of grammatical issues. The grammatical study is concerned with everything from the meaning of a word to the connection of one sentence to another. Contextual considerations transcend the immediate grammatical issues, to deal with the general argument, logic, story, or flow of thought. What is the author's point? How has he substantiated it? What led him to this point? What conclusion does he draw from it? Or for instance, in the case of historical drama: What is the situation? The background? Who are the characters?, etc.

Furthermore, contextual issues must consider the main theme of the book, the rest of the author's works, the rest of the

Old or New Testament, and finally the rest of the Bible. Thus, the question is, how does this passage fit into the immediate and broad context?

Without such considerations we are liable, and likely, to interpret a passage out of context. That is, we could make it seem to say something entirely different than the author had intended.

Study Questions

1. To what degree are we able follow the hermeneutical process in the English language alone?
2. Why is there such a lack of concern for the biblical languages on the part of many English speaking (would be) exegetes.
3. Why is it important for certain passages to have a working knowledge of the original languages?
4. What is meant by the term literal?
5. What is meant by the term historical?
6. What is meant by the term grammatical?
7. What is meant by the term contextual?

Lesson 4

ILLUMINATING GOD'S WORD

Hermeneutics, Logic and Illumination

While hermeneutics is a sound process easily achieved by any informed and logical mind, the illumination of the Word of God to the mind of man by the Holy Spirit is something to which only the believer is privileged. To understand the meaning of Scripture in its cognitive sense takes only intellect. To understand it in its experiential sense requires the Holy Spirit.

Anyone with even limited intelligence can understand, in the syntactical sense, the propositional logic of Paul's argument on justification up through chapter 4, in the book of Romans. Justification *"is by faith... it is apart from ordinances... it is apart from the law."* Therefore he concludes, *"having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exalt in hope of the glory of God"* (Romans 5:1-2).

As with his argument, the logic of his conclusion is simple to follow. Justification is accessed through faith. Justification has brought peace with God. This justification and subsequent peace is established through the Lord Jesus Christ. The introduction into grace is obtained by faith. Access to this grace is through Jesus Christ. Paul, and his readers, stood

before God by grace. Paul and his readers rejoiced in hope. Their hope was in the glory of God.

This is such an excellent example of logic and argument that I am told in years gone by law professors would assign it as required reading. Understanding this in the cognitive sense is something anyone can do; but to understand this in the experiential sense of having received this peace with God, and rejoicing in the hope, is something to which only the believer is privy. This is illumination.

Illumination

The difference between the most intelligent unregenerate mind and the most simplistic regenerate mind is that the unregenerate mind has not experienced the truths of which Paul speaks. To him they are merely remote abstract thoughts. Nothing more than philosophy. To ponder them is nothing more than an exercise in mental gymnastics. He has no empirical knowledge of them. In reality, to him such thoughts are virtually meaningless.

Paul's conclusions in Romans 5:1-2, means no more to the unbeliever than $E = MC^2$ means to the mail man. The mail man may be able to understand—in a theoretical sense—the concept of potential energy being equal to the mass of an object multiplied by the speed of light in a vacuum to the second power; but unlike the research scientist, he is unable to apply this concept to any concrete application in life.

Likewise, an intellectual unbeliever may fully understand the logic of Paul's argument, but he can find no practical use for it, no application. The terms have no concrete meaning to him. They are merely theoretical, abstract concepts. But to the believer these words are life. They are concepts of which he has first hand experience, personal knowledge. He knows them in a way that is only made possible by experience.

The concept of love is perhaps an even better comparison. Until you fall in love yourself you can not fully understand the

experience. You may have a very clear understanding of the logic and the concept, but it is nothing like the experience of the real thing.

A similar illustration is parenthood. Before becoming a father I understood—at least cognitively—what it meant to be a father. I understood the responsibilities, the concerns, and the difficulties involved. However, when I became a father I really understood. I suddenly had a first hand knowledge, an experiential knowledge, an application that made the abstract suddenly concrete.

I remember the morning my first child was born as the most dramatic day of my life. At once, as if a light had been turned on, I was struck with the reality of the awesome responsibility of parenting. It was not the overwhelming pressure to provide material needs; that seems insignificant in comparison. But it was the reality of my responsibility to raise this child in godliness. To provide a spiritual heritage that created a love for and a trust in God. The challenge frightened me. Parental responsibility is a knowledge that a non-parent can easily understand; but the knowledge is necessarily different when parenthood arrives. Only then is it understood with an air of intimacy, with genuine experiential reality.

So it is with the truths of God's Word. Jesus Christ is life and the life is the light of men. When we are born anew by the Spirit of God we receive this life, God's life, eternal life. This new life is lived in light. We refer to this as illumination. Therefore, an important distinction must be made. The illumination of God's Word by the Holy Spirit is not light shed upon the Word of God, but from the Word.¹³

Revelation is the fact of divine communication. Inspiration is the means of divine communication.

¹³ Unpublished classroom lecture by Randy Roberts, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1987.

Illumination is the gift of understanding that divine communication.¹⁴ The unbeliever does not have this gift. He is in darkness. The believer is in light, the light radiating from God and from His Word. Here is where divine communication takes place.

A prime example of this is the world's hatred for Israel and fundamental Christianity. Although they hate both with equal vehemence they do not fully know why. Several perceived immediate reasons are conjured up but there is never a sound logic behind them. Even the non-believers who are sympathetic to Israel and Christianity don't clearly understand it. But to the believer, the reason is simple and crystal clear. Israel is the chosen people of God. God has a covenant with them and Satan hates it. Consequently, those under his influence hate it as well. Likewise, the doctrines of fundamental Christian shine light on those living in darkness. Darkness does not like the light and runs from it.

So show the difference between cognitive knowledge and illumination, even when you inform the non-believers as to why they hate us so, still they do not understand; still they cannot see it.

Application

It is through the illumination of the Holy Spirit that the believer's mind and life are opened to a new realm of reality, a dimension where an intimate, personal relationship with God takes place. It is a spirituality reality. Here, the application of Scripture carries a whole new meaning. The unbeliever can know none of this. He has not the facility. He has no relationship with God. Therefore, his spirit gropes in darkness and he finds no meaningful application for the truths of Scripture. Any study of Scripture on his part is merely

¹⁴ Norman Geisler, and William Nix. A General Introduction to the Bible, Chicago: Moody Press 1968, p. 30.

academic. He can realize nothing more than trivial intellectual accuracy. His study necessarily stops at this level.

But for the believer this is only the first step. Academic accuracy is necessary. That is why we do hermeneutics, but it is merely part of the process. Intellectual accuracy, in itself, is not the objective of study. Nor is it the objective of God's Word to simply provide the facts for such accuracy. Intellectual accuracy is a step, a necessary step, in the process. The objective of God's Word is to change lives and the objective of Bible study is personal application. Lives are changed as the Word of God is understood and applied accurately.

This distinction is easily seen in a passage we referenced earlier, Romans 5:1-2. Paul concluded that, *"having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exalt in hope of the glory of God."* Only the believer has the wherewithal to apply this passage, to truly exalt in the hope of the glory of God.

Scripture is filled with truths that only the believer can access. In today's world everyone is familiar with passwords. We need them to access bank cards, the Internet, e-mail, restricted rooms at work, etc. In a sense, illumination is the believer's password to spiritual truth and application.

Study Questions

1. Who is capable to do sound hermeneutics?
2. Define the difference between intellect and illumination.
3. Does every one experience illumination?
4. In what sense is illumination important to the exegete?
5. Can there be proper application of God's Word to life without the illumination of the Holy Spirit?
6. What is the objective of God's Word?

7. What is the objective of Bible study?

PART 2

THE HERMENEUTICAL PROCEDURE

Lesson 5

THE HISTORICAL, CULTURAL CONTEXT

Later, we will walk through the hermeneutical procedure using the letter of 3 John as our text. But first, we must understand each step of the procedure and the resources we will reference. This is the focus of the next two chapters.

The Historical Setting

The initial consideration of a text must be its historical setting. What were the circumstances behind the writing? When was it written? Where was it written? By whom and to whom was it written? What are the problems addressed by the author? These and other such questions must be answered. Much of this information is found within the text itself. We call this inductive study. Other questions will be answered by dictionaries, encyclopedias, and works such as New or Old Testament surveys. More will be said about these tools in the following chapter.

The importance of knowing the historical background cannot be over stated. Generally, if not always to some degree, it is essential for a clear understanding of the text. A good example of this is Paul's admonition to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:12). A few historical details are needed to fully appreciate

Paul's charge to'

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather... show yourself an example... give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you... Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them,... persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you....

Paul was writing to Timothy, his prize pupil whom he had personally disciplined. He had sent Timothy to Ephesus to straighten out a few issues. There were false teachers in the church, who seemingly were prominent individuals. Timothy was probably about thirty years old, which in that culture was quite young for leadership. No doubt he was intimidated by these false teachers who were likely his senior. He was under fire and Paul charged him to stick with it, stay in the battle; stay on the front line and fight. In so doing he would save himself and them that hear him.

It is obvious from the background that Paul's plain meaning was that by his faithful proclamation of the truth and his rebuke of non-truth, Timothy would save himself and the others from theological shipwreck, and ultimately spiritual defeat. We might expand Paul's thought as: Hold the fort! Do not succumb to the attack. For if you give in, you and those with you will be harmed. You will suffer great loss. Fight the enemy back and save yourself the certain pain and injury of defeat.

But without knowledge of the background, the reader might be lead to any number of false conclusions. Several things might be taken out of context. For instance, we might conclude that youth need not respect its elders. We might conclude that everyone ought to read Scripture publicly, or exhort, or teach. We might conclude that everyone ought to be

a scholar devoted to a life of research, or that personal salvation comes through study. Or worse, we might conclude that a teacher's study will bring individual regeneration to his pupils.

The historical background is the context in which the words were written. It is foundational to proper exegesis. To begin a study without the historical background is, necessarily, to begin out of focus. There is little value in viewing evidence under a microscope that you have not bothered to focus. Such a futile investigation would be foolish. So to, is any biblical study without having the historical background in focus.

Geographical Setting

Although it is often less pressing than the historical background, there are times when the geographical setting is a very real issue. The account of David and Goliath is one. The two armies had been in a stalemate for 40 days yet no battles had been waged. Each day Goliath would stand before Saul's army taunting and defying the armies of the living God.

Have you never wondered why this went on for 40 days? The answer is the geographical topography. The confrontation took place in the valley of Elah; a horseshoe shaped valley with mountain slopes on the north, south and east. Each army had positioned itself on strategic high ground on either side of the valley and neither was willing to relinquish its position. In hand to hand combat, the high ground is crucial. Too often the geographical setting is treated simply as ornamental; but, as we see, at times it is integral to the full understanding of a passage.

Local Customs

As with the geological setting, so too we must have knowledge of the local customs of the day. To fully understand the battle with the Philistines, this is paramount. It was the custom of local armies, in such stalemate situations, to allow a warrior from each army to fight. The army of the losing warrior would retreat in defeat, believing the gods were

against them. Here, understanding their customs (the way battles were fought and the belief system behind them) gives insight into the nature of Goliath's challenge to Israel, the ultimate battle between David and Goliath and the uncontested Philistine retreat.

The Bible speaks to life situations. It makes reference to shepherds, sheep, farming, markets, cities and hundreds of other real life settings. Each has great cultural significance. Each must be understood in its historical and cultural background. Why was the Samaritan woman drawing water from a well so far from town? Why was Jesus crucified instead of stoned? Why is the story of the Good Samaritan especially damning to the Israelites? What did it mean to be a Roman citizen? These and countless other cultural questions must be addressed. Not only does this provide the color, the backdrop, the setting, the context; often knowledge of particular customs provides necessary insight for truly understanding a passage.

Study Questions

1. Discuss the importance of the initial consideration of a historical setting.
2. Give a few examples of biblical passages in which a clear understanding of the historical background is crucial. Discuss why knowing this background is crucial.
3. What types of questions would you ask to discover the necessary historical setting?
4. What types of study tool will help us understand the historical setting?
5. Discuss two biblical situations in which knowing the geographical setting is crucial. Tell why it is crucial.
6. Discuss two biblical situations in which knowing the cultural setting is crucial. Tell why it is crucial.
7. What erroneous assumptions might we make if we were not aware of the historical, geographical, or cultural settings you just discussed?

Lesson 6

THE LITERARY GENRE

Literature is the written record of linguistic expression. It comes in many styles, which we call genres or literary forms. Each genre has a specific purpose. One presents an argument, while another provokes emotion or introspection. Another gives an historical account, while yet another illustrates a point.

The Bible is the inspired, infallible Word of God, communicating to man in the form of written literature. As literature, it necessarily has literary form. Indeed, it has many literary forms. Each “performs the same function in relation to biblical writings as it does to non-biblical writings; it is the means of communication and consequently the means of interpretation.”¹⁵

Different genres require different considerations. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the various literary forms and to understand their purposes, their qualities and their applications. Is the passage prose, poetic, prophetic or parabolic? Is it an epistle, an Old Testament narrative, a gospel or an historical account? Understanding this will determine the limits of a passage, the internal structures, the audiences or even the effects and responses that were desired by the original author.^{16 2}

¹⁵ Robert A. Traina, Methodical Bible Study, Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985 reprint, p. 10.

¹⁶ Walter C. Jr. Kaiser, Toward an Exegetical Theology,

Without this important consideration, passages are frequently taken out of context and made to say something quite different from the author's original intent. This is a common ploy of the unbelieving scoffer, who argues that Scripture contradicts itself.

For instance, we can hardly treat a descriptive poetic proverb such as, "*Many will entreat the favor of a generous man, and every man is a friend to him who gives gifts*" (Prov. 19:6), with the same urgency that we treat Paul's prescriptive imperative to Timothy, the Ephesian elder, when he writes, "*instruct those who are rich in this present world... to be generous and ready to share*" (1 Tim. 6:17-18). Here, the genre is most important. We have a problem when we attempt to give these passages equal application. One is a poem expressing a generalized observation about mankind. It is a warning to the rich to, "Beware, they only want your money." The other is a directive from the apostle; a command to the rich to, "Share your money with them."

Prose

Prose compositions are the basic model of biblical communication. The word prose comes from the Latin adjective prosus, meaning "direct" or "straight." The term describes plain speech such as used without reference to the rules of verse. Prose is divided into various subcategories:

- ✓ Descriptive prose is a narrative, speaking plainly about people, places, things, or actions.
- ✓ Explanatory or expository prose addresses matters such as law, science, philosophy, theology, and politics.
- ✓ Emotive prose is primarily designed to induce feelings rather than linear thought.
- ✓ Polemical prose is the trade of fiction writers,

journalists, critics, and orators.¹⁷

- ✓ Historical narrative is also a category of prose, but due to the specific problems it presents we will handle it separately.

Discourse and Logic Literature

The literary genre of discourse and logic appeals primarily to the intellect. Arguments and ideas are placed in this category. So too are extended discourses and writings of explanation. This book is in this category. The epistles, some of the prophetic sermons and the longer discourses of Jesus are placed in this genre.

Because this type of literature appeals primarily to the intellect it is important to recognize it as such. This awareness leads to a careful observation of its logical development. Only then, when special attention is given to its rationale can valid interpretation take place.¹⁸

There are a of couple things to keep in mind while interpreting this type of literature. Things that help use arrive at the author's original meaning.

- ✓ Trace the argument sentence by sentence; paragraph by paragraph. Follow the train of thought. Ask: what is the point of each paragraph? How do the paragraphs relate to each other?
- ✓ Consider the historic significance. Be aware of what is culturally relative and what transcends the original setting.

Epistolary

Some refer to epistolary literature as occasional documents because they come out of, and are intended for, a specific occasion. True, they were inspired by the Holy Spirit and belong to all time; still they were written from the context of

¹⁷ Kaiser, p. 91.

¹⁸ Traina, pp. 68-69.

the author to the context of the original recipients.¹⁹ This point cannot be overlooked. Other scholars place epistolary literature under the grouping of discourse and logic because it appeals primarily to the intellect.^{20,21} This is a fair assessment and it is important to recognize this aspect of the epistles. Such an awareness yields a careful consideration of their logical progression; however, above all else, the occasional nature of the epistles must be taken seriously.²² Since it was an occasion—either on the author's part or the recipient's part—that evoked the epistle, the occasion must be recognized.

For instance, when Paul wrote, "*Unto the church of God which is at Corinth,...*" he was not simply addressing a solitary auspicious group gathered under his apostolic stamp of approval. He was speaking to the many small in-house assemblies throughout the city. Collectively, these small gatherings were the local church at Corinth.

This concept has been misunderstood by certain groups today who like to think of themselves as the supposed modern local chosen assembly. They have failed to take the genre of the epistles into account and have therefore, failed to arrive at a correct interpretation of the passage. This, in turn has led to an out of context application, which they have consequently developed into a false doctrine.

Inevitably, the occasional nature of these documents is the very thing that makes them difficult to understand. We were not present for the occasion and we generally get only half the conversation. A good example is 2 Thessalonians. Having discussed the coming of the Lord Jesus, the coming apostasy,

¹⁹ Gordon Fee, and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for all its Worth, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, p. 45.

²⁰ Traina, *Ibid.*, p. 68

²¹ Traina. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²² Fee and Stuart, p. 45.

and man of lawlessness, Paul writes, “*Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?*” (2:5). Then, seemingly speaking of the lawless one, he says, “*And you know what restrains him now...*” (v. 6). Our problem at this point is no small issue. The original readers knew precisely what Paul was speaking of—indeed, he was reminding them of what he had previously taught them; but we do not. Neither do we definitely know what he meant by the term *apostasia* in verse 3; nor exactly what he had in mind when he spoke of the restraining power in verse 6. We can, and do, speculate but the immediate text simply does not reveal that information.

Like others, based upon corroborating theological data I have drawn inference as to the correct understanding of these passages. But in the end—also like the others, I am merely making inference without final confirmation as to accuracy. The problem is an unknown historical occasion, and an unknown historical occasion is not an issue for divine inspiration; it is an issue for historical research. Simply, the Thessalonians knew what Paul was speaking of but, because I was not present and because he did not elaborate further, I cannot know with certainty; I can only make inference. Fortunately most passages are not so obscure.

But even the apparently obscure and come to light by various other historical documents that help us reconstruct the context—the occasional nature of the writing. Once the context is understood, the primary concern when interpreting epistolary and discourse literature is to follow the argument, the flow of thought. But remember the context, remember the occasion; as with all literature, these passages must not be taken out of context.

Historic Narrative

For analytical purposes historic narrative is prose literature and basically follows the rules for prose. But similar to the

occasional documents, the key difficulty with relating historical truth and theological teaching is to bridge the gap between the historic event and the present day.²³ And we must keep that the primary purpose of historical narrative is to present theological history not merely to record impersonal historical facts.

Historical narrative recounts personal histories in the form of stories and biographical sketches. It appeals primarily to the imagination and the emotions. With this in mind, Traina concludes that attempting, “to interpret it without the liberal use of the imagination in its legitimate sense is to guarantee either partial or faulty interpretation.”²⁴

It is for this reason that we must be careful not to unduly press every detail of the historical narrative for some exegetical point. We must remember that much of the detail is simply ornamental, meant to set the background. This does not mean that it is false information, or that it is not relevant. Quite the opposite is true. It is both historically correct and very relevant, especially to the complete understanding of the passage. However, the relevance is generally to reconstruct the occasion in the mind of the reader, rather than to lend support to some controversial doctrine.

For example, Luke tells us of Paul's incident with the viper on the isle of Melita (Acts 28); but it was not his intention that his readers would later devise a snake handling practice to prove their faith. Yet sadly, because of their failure to adhere to the basic principles of interpreting historic narrative, in their devout ignorance, some actually practice this ostensible display of faith.

Poetry

Poetry is another important literary form used with

²³ Kaiser, p. 92.

²⁴ Traina, p. 69.

frequency throughout the Bible. It accounts for about one third of the Old Testament. Easton's Bible Dictionary defines poetry as "the measured language of emotion." Biblical poetry deals almost exclusively with the great question of man's relation to God: guilt, condemnation, punishment, pardon, redemption and repentance are the common themes of this heaven-born poetry.²⁵

Three distinct kinds of poetry are found throughout the Old Testament: the dramatic poetry of Job and the Song of Solomon; the lyrical poetry of the Psalms; and the didactic and sententious poetry of Ecclesiastes. But unlike western poetry, which is rich in meter and rhyme, Hebrew poetry has neither. Its genius lies in parallelism—a certain interaction between clauses, phases and sentences. Some have called it thought-rhyme.²⁶

Basically, parallelism consists of two or more lines of verse that express thoughts in various relationships. Some are synonymous ideas, using equivalent but different words. Others are antithetic ideas, using some type of contrast. Although there are numerous styles of parallelism, it can be divided into the three primary categories: semantic, grammatical, and synthetic parallelism.

Semantic Parallelism

Semantic parallelism deals with meaning—two ways of saying the same thing, as in Proverbs 20:13.

Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty;

Open your eyes, and you shall be satisfied with bread.

Here, the second clause is different than the first but centers on the same theme of laziness and expresses the same idea of industrialism. The writer is speaking in semantics, two ways of saying the same thing.

Some consider synonymous or cognate parallelism to be a

²⁵ Easton's Bible Dictionary.

²⁶ Easton's Bible Dictionary.

subcategory of semantic parallelism. These are various types of expressions that differ yet remain within the primary semantic style of thought-rhyme. For example, in Proverbs 6:2 the same idea is repeated in the same words,

*You are snared with the words of your mouth,
You are taken with the words of your mouth.*

Proverbs 6:26 makes a statement in the positive and then the negative.

*For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a
piece of bread,
And the adulteress will hunt for the precious life.*

Psalms 40:15, states an idea in triplicate.

*Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say
unto me, Aha, aha.*

*Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee.
Let such as love thy salvation say continually. The Lord be
magnified.*

An example of double parallelism is found in Isaiah 9:1. Here the third and fourth clauses correspond to the first and second clauses.

*Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her
vexation,
When at the first he lightly afflicted the land of
Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
And afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way
of the sea,
Beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.*

Grammatical Parallelism

Grammatical parallelism pertains to the form. An example of grammatical parallelism is seen in Proverbs 21:4.

*A high look,
And a proud heart,
And the plowing of the wicked
Are sin.*

Here the writer uses the progression of grammatical clauses to construct the verse. Each clause builds upon the last until the abrupt climax ties them together.

Another example of grammatical parallelism is often referred to as introverted parallelism. In a four clause verse such as Psalms 135:15-18, the fourth clause answers to the first and the third answers to the second.

The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not;

They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths.

They that make them are like unto them, so is every one that trusts in them.

Synthetic Parallelism

In synthetic parallelism the second line adds further information to the first. This style is also referred to as constructive or compound parallelism. A good example of synthetic parallelism is Proverbs 20:4.

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold;

Therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.

Earlier we looked at verse 13 from the same chapter. A passage expressed in Semantic parallelism, in which the second clause restates the first. In this example of synthetic verse the second clause provides further information to the first clause. This example even expressed a cause and effect expressed.

Antithetic parallelism is another form of synthetic parallelism. Here the statement of the second clause is contrary to that of the first, as seen in Psalms 37:9 and again in 20:8.

For evildoers shall be cut off;

But those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.

They are brought down and fallen;

But we are risen, and stand upright.

Other forms of poetic odes exist as well; in both the books of Hebrew poetry and the historical books.²⁷ Sometimes, as in the famous axiom of a virtuous woman in Proverbs 31, an alphabetical arrangement is used to connect the thoughts. Repetition is often used for emphasis and at times there is simply a progression of thought from one verse to another.

When dealing with poetry, it is imperative to remember that it frequently uses figurative and flexible language. And we must keep in mind that it usually expresses feelings and emotions rather than linear logical argument.²⁸ Here again, the context must be considered with extreme caution to avoid leaping to unfounded conclusions.

Parables

The term parable is from the Greek term *parabole* meaning “a placing beside.” It signifies the placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison. Parables have been used as a means of instruction throughout recorded history. They comprise a large portion of Jesus’ public teachings, concerning which he explains, “*I speak to them in parables because seeing, they see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand*” (Matt. 13:13).

These short narratives, drawn from nature or human circumstance, convey a spiritual lesson by employing the principle of analogy. However, although analogous they deal with real, earthly things and must be differentiated from fables, which attribute to things that which does not belong to them in nature.²⁹

Parables are designed to illustrate truth. A parable has two parts: the spiritual truth being illustrated, and the brief, but

²⁷ Kaiser, p. 92.

²⁸ Traina. p. 70.

²⁹ Vine’s Greek Dictionary.

expressive, narrative of an earthly life circumstance. These are placed side by side for the purpose of clarification—tangible to clarify the intangible.³⁰ But the parable is designed only to illustrate one truth. Consequently, two dangers must be avoided when interpreting a parable. The first error is to ignore the important features of the parable. As with historic narrative, much of the detail may simply be ornamental, but each parable has important physical detail that must be understood if one is to understand the spiritual meaning. The second error is the attempts to make each detail in the parable have a spiritual meaning.³¹ We must be careful not to unduly press every detail for some hidden spiritual meaning. Again, the parable is designed to convey one spiritual lesson, not three or four, or even two.

Wisdom Writings

Kaiser observes that Wisdom literature has two basic types.³² The first is a reflective or a philosophical kind of wisdom that generally presents lengthy debate or argument. It often deals with the more basic questions of life. It is generally polemical in nature—such as the book of Ecclesiastes; or it may have an exhortative style much like a teacher with his pupil. Proverbs, chapters 1 through 9, is such an example.

The second type of wisdom writings are prudential, consisting of smaller units of seemingly disconnected thought that is often isolated contextually. Psalms 37, 49 and 112 are good examples of this style, as are Proverbs 10-31, and the book of James.

Although Job, Song of Solomon, and the Sermon on the Mount are generally considered wisdom writings, they are difficult to classify definitively, and some have made the case

³⁰ Vine's Greek Dictionary.

³¹ Vine's Greek Dictionary

³² Kaiser pp. 92-93.

that they should be included in the reflective or philosophical genre.

Prophetic Literature

The genre of prophetic literature presents a certain difficulty particular to itself. While some prophecies told of more immediate events that loomed in the near horizon—that is, near to the historic period in which they were given—others fit into the long-range eschatological view of human history; speaking of events that would take place in the distant future. To this day, thousands of years after these prophecies, many are yet to be fulfilled. The distinction between these two types of prophecies is the concern when interpreting prophetic literature.

What makes this distinction of prophecies complex is that prophecies for the near future are often set against the background of the overall eschatological future with which they sometimes seemed to blend. Scripture regularly portrays God's acts in temporal history in the light of His overall scheme for the entirety of human history.³³ Therefore, great care must be taken on our part to distinguish that which was temporal for the prophet and Israel, and that which is part of the greater eschatological picture.

Furthermore, prophetic literature is often metaphorical. Apocalyptic literature characteristically employs the use of rich symbolism involving animals, men and the spirit world. It often consists of the formal introduction of a vision or dream. There are frequent conversations between the prophet and the heavenly being who is relating the vision. We hear of the cosmic catastrophes, the radical transformation of nature and nations, the imminent end of the age and the establishment of the eternal kingdom. As for vocabulary, Kaiser reminds us that the prophet:

³³ Fee and Stuart, p. 164.

Often projects the future in terms gleaned from the actions of God in past history. Also the art forms and cultural vehicles of past civilization are readily employed to vivify the otherwise prosaic format of the material. Thus... there will be a need to rely heavily on the informing or antecedent theology. Once the symbols and antecedent theology are accounted for in the exegesis, the material may be treated as straightforward and direct prose.³⁴

Study Questions

1. Discuss the meaning and importance of literature and communication.
2. What is another term for literary form?
3. What are some of the terms used to categorize various styles of literature?
4. Discuss the importance of realizing and understanding each of these literary categories in biblical literature.
5. Define, prose and cite two examples from Scripture.
6. Discuss the difference between western and Hebrew poetry.
7. How is a parable different from a fable.
8. What are the key things to keep in mind when interpreting a parable?

³⁴ Kaiser, pp. 93-94.

Lesson 7

SYNTACTICAL CONTEXT

It is imperative that the interpretation of any biblical passage stays within the context in which it was written. Indeed, this is true of all literature. The context to which I refer is inclusive of the historical context, the cultural context, the geographical context and most certainly the syntactical context. Taking a passage out of context is not only unscholarly, it is pernicious. At the very least it is careless. And to do so knowingly, as many do, is nothing less than corrupt, unethical falsification.

The Overall Theme

Once the genre is identified and the historical and cultural/background understood we turn our attention to the overall theme of the book. The author's theme must always be on our mind. Think of it as the plumb line running straight through the document. The author's logic, arguments and doctrinal issues will not stray far from his theme.

The letter to the Hebrews is a good example. The letter has five warning passages commonly misunderstood by ill-prepared exegetes. These popular misinterpretations tell us the interpreter obviously neglected the overall theme of Hebrews, which is the sufficiency of Christ's priesthood and his steadfast

relationship to the believer. Keeping this theme in mind would negate the erroneous interpretation that assumes these warning passages are addressing unbelievers. Providing such warnings to unbelievers does not fall in line with the overall theme and purpose of the letter. Some try to teach from these passages that a believer can lose his salvation; but this too does not coincide with the theme of the letter; nor does it agree with the theology found in Ephesians and Colossians.

Clearly these warnings are written to believers warning them of the danger of losing their rewards, not their salvation. Understanding the theme helps us to stay on track with the author's logic, which in turn leads us to a correct understanding of the author's meaning.

Synthetic Outline

Before we consider the meaning of a passage we must perform a grammatical and syntactical analysis. This is best accomplished by constructing a synthetic outline of the whole book or letter. Structuring the outline requires a thorough understanding of the various parts of speech. (An example of a synthetic outline is provided in Lesson 10.) It reveals the structure of the book. It paints the broad picture by highlighting the author's major points, the flow of logic, the argument.

From this outline we easily depict the author's theme and primary purpose for the document. The synthetic outline also shows us how our passage fits into the overall scheme of the book. Thus, the outline is very important, even when dealing with large books; indeed, especially when dealing with large books.

Syntactical/Grammatical Exegesis

Grammatical considerations deal with the syntax of the immediate passage. What did a certain term mean at the time of the writing? How does that term relate to the phrase in which it is found? How does it relate to the clause, the

sentence? How does the clause relate to the sentence? How does the sentence relate to the paragraph? And how does the paragraph relate to the paragraphs before and after it, and to the theme of the book? To understand these relationships requires a thorough understanding of the various parts of speech.

The Sentence

A sentence is a group of words that express a complete idea. A simple sentence consists of two parts: the subject and the predicate. The subject of the sentence is that part about which something is being said. The predicate is the part that says something about the subject. There are simple sentences and compound sentences. A compound sentence has two or more subjects joined by a conjunction that share the same verb; or it may have two or more verbs joined by a conjunction that share the same subject.

The Clause

A clause is that part of a sentence that has a subject and a verb. There are three types of clauses.

- ✓ The independent clause expresses the main idea and is able to stand on its own.
- ✓ The coordinating clause is that part of a compound sentence that expresses the main thought. It is frequently introduced by such connectives as: and, or, for, but, neither, nor, either, or, both, not only, but also, except, yea, certainly, in fact, therefore, then, wherefore, so, and moreover.
- ✓ The dependent or subordinate clause does not express a complete idea and cannot stand on its own. It is frequently introduced by such connectives as: when, because, if, since, although, that, where, who, whose, whom, which, and that.

A clause is classified by its grammatical function. A noun-clause is any clause that functions like a noun. A relative-clause modifies the noun. An adverbial-clause modifies or

qualifies the verb, adjective, adverb, or prepositional phrase. A miscellaneous-clause (which is generally limited to Hebrew texts) is adversative, equational or existential, and is less important than the previous types.

The Phrase

A phrase is a group of words without a subject and predicate. Phrases have three basic functions.

- ✓ The prepositional-phrase such as “from time to time,” lacks a verb and is introduced by a preposition.
- ✓ The participial-phrase such as “belligerently,” acts as an adjective and is introduced by a participle.
- ✓ The infinitive-phrase such as “to laugh openly,” is introduced by an infinitive and may be adverbial, adjectival, or nominal.³⁵

Although it may sound trivial, knowing how and where the parts of speech fit into the text is quite important.

Paragraph

A paragraph is the framework for expressing and developing a single idea or a unifying theme. Sometimes the paragraph is indicated by the repetition of a term or concept. Sometimes it is introduced by a rhetorical question or a vocative address. On the other hand, a sudden change in the mood, tense or the voice of the verb, the location, the topic or the use of an introductory connective such as a conjunction, a preposition or a relative pronoun, may indicate a new paragraph. Often, what appears near the end of one paragraph will be addressed and developed more fully in the next.³⁶

Because a thought process can be so complex and often intertwined with other complex ideas, the expression of these ideas is necessarily given a certain degree of flexibility. That is, there are no hard and fast rules for connecting thoughts and

³⁵ Walter C. Jr. Kaiser, Toward an Exegetical Theology, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981, p. 95-96.

³⁶ Kaiser, *Ibid.*, pp. 96-99.

building paragraphs, only general guidelines to which we try to adhere. Here are a few tips for analyzing a paragraph.

- ✓ Identify the proposition, the theme of the paragraph.
- ✓ Identify the natural divisions in the paragraph. These are often suggested by Hebrew accents, Greek particles, and overall punctuation.
- ✓ Identify each connector, such as relative pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and transitional adverbs.
- ✓ Identify the antecedents for each subordinated or coordinated word, phrase, clause or sentence.³⁷

Although our English versions of the Bible have already divided the text into paragraphs, these divisions are often somewhat arbitrary and not always reliable. The serious exegete would do well to provide his own divisions.

Diagramming

While it is most beneficial to diagram any difficult sentence, a thorough exegesis of any passage requires the diagram of every sentence in the text. As we diagram we ask such questions as: Where is the action of the verb? What is the subject, the direct object, the indirect object? Are there any appositional words or phrases? Are there participial or infinitive clauses? Where do the relative pronouns and connective words adjoin? Answering these questions is the backbone of hermeneutics. They cannot be overlooked. An example of diagramming technique is provided in a following chapter.

Mechanical Layout

Now we are ready to construct a mechanical layout for the passage. This detailed consideration of grammar and syntax provides very important information. Again, here is where we understand the author's theme and intention. Like the diagramming technique, an example of the mechanical outline

³⁷ Kaiser, *Ibid.*, p. 99.

is found in chapter eleven.

Although a thorough mechanical outline requires knowledge of the original language, do not despair, much can be done using the English translation, an interlinear and a good commentary. A good exegetical commentary will identify the difficult syntactical and grammatical matters, which you can then investigate further; but a grammatical commentary is invaluable for this purpose.

The Use of Grammatical Commentaries

Although the most comprehensive commentaries require a basic knowledge of the original language—that is, if we are to use them effectively—there are several less scholarly yet critical, commentaries designed specifically for the English reader.

Some syntactical relationships are not easily resolved. Even the scholars struggle with them. As a result, you may find differing opinions among certain commentators. One of the foremost scholars of our day has confessed that the syntactical analysis of each clause and phrase, and their relationship to the context is the hardest task the exegete faces.³⁸

Because it is difficult, many would be Bible students simply by-pass the process. But this is not an option. To side-step this process is to scrap the whole interpretive procedure. As an interpreter, you must be aware of the syntactical difficulties and the reasons for each exegete's position before you can afford to arrive at your own conclusion. Anything less is bias ignorance.

Remember, the commentator is the grammatical and theological expert. You are the novice in his field. If you are going to take odds with him, the better part of wisdom demands that you do it with understanding, not with ignorance.

³⁸ Kaiser, *Ibid.*, p. 96.

You must understand the problems, the various solutions, and the reasons behind each solution before you are ready to raise a disagreement, much less to form an opinion.

Commentaries serve another vital function beyond the difficult syntactical issues. They are written by scholars with years of study in the field of hermeneutics. Here too they are the experts. The novice would do well to consider their observations. Often interspersed with their critical notes are interpretive comments. It is foolish to merely seek their critical comments concerning the grammar and syntactical issues when they also offer valuable information concerning historical insights and interpretations.

Analytical Outline

From the mechanical outline we produce an analytical outline. Again, an example is provided in chapter eleven. Similar to a lawyer's brief, it provides a working outline from which we eventually construct the homiletical outline, from which we teach and preach. But first we must consider the context.

The Context

Once the analytical outline is complete we are ready to examine the passage in context. Now we ask more questions of the context, both before and after the passage. What is the argument? How does the passage connect to the previous point, the previous argument? How does it connect to the following point, the following argument? What is the point of the passage? What is author's intent, the simple meaning that he meant to say? How does it connect to the theme, to the conclusion? Is it the conclusion? Then we apply this line of questioning to the rest of the author's writings and to the rest of Scripture.

Study Questions

1. Discuss the importance of knowing the author's theme.
2. What is syntax and why is it important to understand it?

3. Define the terms: clause, phrase, sentence, paragraph.
4. Why is it important to have a basic understanding of the original language?
5. What value do commentaries provide?
6. What value does text outline provide?
7. What are some questions you might ask to determine context?

Lesson 8

COMPARISONS AND INTERPRETIVE CONCLUSIONS

Word Meanings

The final area of the syntactical-grammatical study is the word study. I have placed it in this chapter because it is the link to the next area of investigation, comparison. The word study seeks many things. Here we look for etymology, the frequency of use, the range of meaning, the range of use by the author in question, and for synonyms and antonyms—on some of which, we will do even further word studies. Thus, by its very nature, the word study leads us into comparison—comparing possible different uses of the word, other contexts in which the word is used, synonyms, antonyms, etc.

When doing a word study we must keep certain factors in mind. Foremost is that context determines meaning. With this in mind, certain questions must be addressed. How is the term used? What is the author's obvious meaning for the term?

Word studies are an important step in the hermeneutical process, but the word study encompasses more than mere etymology and lexical meaning. Indeed, in the order of importance, these take a tertiary concern to usage and context.

Usage and context must always take precedent over dictionary definitions. Language is precise to be sure, but

conversely, it is too fluid, too dynamic to be captured or defined by its use centuries before or after the historical context. This however does not preclude our understanding of ancient literature; but it does necessitate research to determine the author's obvious meaning.

Etymology and Use

Etymology refers to the origin and development of a word's use through the history. The meaning of a word often changes with time and use. Our objective is to discover the meaning of a term during the period in which the author used it. Therefore, the primary purpose of a word study is to establish common and accepted usage during a specific period. It is not, necessarily, to ascertain origin. Although word origin often plays an important role, the objective is to discover the scope of common use at the time of the writing. How would the author have used the term?

Often there are several meanings for a given term. This does not mean we are free to pick and choose the meaning we like best. The lexicon is merely noting the range of possible meanings throughout the etymology of the term. I emphasize possible. They are possible because context determines usage. This cannot be over stated. The lexicon sets the boundaries for possible meanings, but the context determines the correct meaning for each particular use.

The term *gune*, may mean woman in one passage (whether single or married), and wife in another. The same is true with *aner*, for either "man" or husband. The author might use a word metaphorically, figuratively, or hyperbolically. Always,... always, context will determine meaning.

Another example is the Greek preposition. The lexicon will list several possible meanings for each of them. But the correct meaning for each preposition is determined by context and its grammatical relationship to the object and the author's obvious meaning. Does the author use *dia* to signify the means

by which something is accomplished; as in Roman 11:36, “from Him and *through* Him and to Him, are all things...” Or does he use it to denote the cause of the accomplishment; as in Romans 8:20, “*but because of Him who subjected it...*”

For each preposition there is a range of possible meaning. The exact meaning of each is determined by its usage within the context.

Textual Variation

Another consideration that must be dealt with from time to time is textual variation. Both Greek and Hebrew manuscripts were hand copied by scribes; many copies were made and through the years many more copies of the copies of the copies were made. Sometimes inadvertent spelling errors, duplication errors, omissions and other mistakes common to such work were made. The texts from which our versions are translated were compiled by ancient scholars who had an assortment of manuscripts from which to choose. Even these were reduplications of texts copied long before their time. With so many texts to choose from, naturally, scholars copied different manuscripts. If unable to make a decision about a certain passage, the scribe might take a reading from more than one manuscript. As a result we have several Greek texts with minor differences. We call these different readings, variants.

Yet even with this human element the total variants are amazingly minimal. Indeed, it could be argued to be nothing short of miraculous, how God has preserved His Word. Consider this. If each variant throughout the entire Bible is simply ignored, not one critical doctrine of Judaism or Christendom is affected. Thus, although the variants exist, they are hardly worth the attention they get or the arguments that ensue.

Be aware of these variants but don't be distracted by them. Also, don't expect or attempt to be a textual critic; at least not at this level of study. The textual critic must be a scholar of the

original language, an historian of the time period, and a theologian who has mastered the author's works. That's about twelve years of academic study, which leads to the distinction of doctor.

Be satisfied to know that for the most part, these variants will have very little influence on your conclusions. When they are an issue, do three things. Refrain from using them to support doctrine, put them to rest by relying on the judgment of the scholars, and move along to more important matters, such as the application of undisputed passages.

The Extended Use of a Term

Once the lexical meaning is confirmed and the possible contextual meaning considered, search for its use elsewhere in Scripture. How else did the author use it, both in the particular work and in his other writing? How did other authors use it? If working with the N.T., how was the term used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew O.T.). Some words are used with great frequency by certain authors; other words are primarily used by one writer, while some appear only once in the entire Bible. We call them hopoxlogomina.

The Extended Use of a Phrase

Similar to the extended use of a term, sometimes we must consider the extended use of the phrase. Does the author use the phrase elsewhere? If so, how? Is it peculiar to the author, or do other's use it as well? If so, in what context? Does the phrase stem from an O.T. passage? Is it an idiom of the culture? If so, which culture? Is it a Hebrew idiom? A Greek idiom? Or perhaps an idiom of Christian theology? If it is an idiom, what was its meaning in the historical context?

Considerations of Biblical Theology

The comparative search also involves theological considerations. We must not resist theology. It is not a dirty word. It is something with which every Christian is concerned whether he or she realizes it or not. In this respect it is much

like interpretation, in that we do it even if we are not aware of it.

Our theology is our personal belief system concerning God and His relationship with man. Although certain foundational truths remain forever solidified in our belief system (e.g. the trinity, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, Christ's sacrificial death and victorious resurrection), others are not so consistent. As we grow and mature some beliefs are modified and sometimes change entirely as new truths are learned. Dynamic as it may be in some respects, our theology, our belief system, is the immediate representation of what we accept to be truth and what we reject for being false. Therefore, when we change our belief about a certain issue, such as the gift of tongues or the election of the saints, we change our theology.

Ideally, our theology is based on Scripture; but Scripture must be understood. To be understood, it must be interpreted. Interpretation requires knowledge of the author's circumstances, the occasion, and the context in which the author wrote. This of course is why we study history. It is also why we must study biblical theology.

It is imperative that we first know Paul's theological understanding of election before we form our own understanding of it. But in order to know Paul's understanding of election we must consider the understanding of other biblical authors. How did they view the subject? How did Jesus view it? An informed belief system can settle for nothing less.

The ruling principle is that "*no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation*" (2 Pet. 1:20). God's Word is a perfect, cohesive, revelation. There is no discord, no internal error, no contradiction. Any confusion or seeming contradiction is in our own minds—born in ignorance or disbelief. God is not confused, neither were the chosen authors of Scripture. Their writings are consistent within themselves

and with each other. It is our task to seek their plain meaning.

Considerations of Systematic Theology

Likewise, considering the thoughts and conclusions of the Church's greatest theologians is more than a mere suggestion. They raise questions we may overlook. And just as important, they generally have answers. These men were scholars who spent their lives devoted to the investigation and understanding of Scripture. Aside from keen intellects and more time studying a single passage than most spend studying the entire bible, they were gifted by God to perform the task of teacher.

But these experts of the infallible Scriptures are themselves, not infallible. They are gifted men of great intellect and education, but they are also men of passion and preference, susceptible to blind spots, misunderstandings, and erroneous conclusions. Therefore, on occasion they have differing opinions. Still, we do well to hear them. We do well to think twice before arguing against them. And we do well to make any determined disagreement a minor issue.

The Historical Meaning

Now we are ready to form an opinion as to what the passage meant in its historical setting. That is, by now we should know the plain meaning of the text. What the author was attempting to say. What the recipients would have understood by his words.

We must arrive at this historical meaning before we attempt any contemporary application. Otherwise, we strip the text of anything meaningful. If historical meaning is not crucial, then Scripture is not crucial. If God only inspires meaning as we read, then we might as well be reading a newspaper or an encyclopedia. Surely He could inspire meaning there as well.

But this is not how literature operates. This is not how God operates. He chose certain individuals whom He inspired to record His message to man. They wrote in, and to, a

historical context. Some of their writings are culturally significant and others transcend culture and time; but always their words have historical meaning. Even in the case of prophetic literature where the meaning might bridge two worlds—the future world being described in terms of the immediate historical context. Regardless, the historical meaning must be understood before we can find contemporary application.

Contemporary Relevance

Having ascertained the historical meaning, we are now ready to make present day application. To begin with this final step, as so many do in their personal Bible study, is nothing less than biblical existentialism. It is this common error that gives rise to the aforementioned snake-handlers who believe that spiritual individuals can handle poisonous snakes without harm. It is this error that leads whole communities to live without modern technology; or woman not wearing pants; or not eating meat; or whole assemblies of ecstatic worshipers ostensibly speaking in tongues. It is this common error that fuels a number of other, even more popular misapplications.

Only after the previous steps are taken can we finally arrive at personal application. We call this contemporary relevance. Here we ask such questions as: How do I apply this teaching, this truth, in my life? Is it an imperative to be obeyed? Is it prescriptive, descriptive, cultural, trans-cultural? Is there a timeless principle to consider?

If the passage is clearly cultural in content, it might have little direct meaning for us; but at the same time it might express a principle that has considerable application to our lives. An example of this might be Paul's admonishment concerning meat offered to idols and the ceremonial keeping of certain holy days (Rom. 14:1-23).

Few in our culture can find direct application for this passage. Meats and holy days are simply not issues to most of

us. However, we can extend the spirit of this admonishment to issues for which we do have concern in our culture. Paul himself based his counsel on certain timeless principles. In a similar way, we too can apply those principles to our lives. We could draw a number of principles from this passage.

- ✓ We are not to judge the practice of others in respect to doubtful things.
- ✓ We are to do what can be done only without self condemnation.
- ✓ We are personally accountable to God for our actions.
- ✓ We are not to do anything that will put a stumbling block before others.
- ✓ We have a certain liberty regarding what they do.
- ✓ We are to do what will edify other.
- ✓ We should, for the sake of weaker individuals, voluntarily abstain from certain practices.
- ✓ We are to follow the example of Christ, who did not live to please himself.³⁹

On the other hand, a non-cultural and prescriptive passage will always have direct meaning and application for everyone within the classification it addresses (i.e. Jews, Christians, unsaved). Such are Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "*Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (Jn. 3:3). This passage has direct application for all men.

Similarly, if a passage is merely descriptive it will have no direct application for us, who are historically removed from the occasion. Furthermore, neither can we draw principles from it. For the event may or may not involve correct actions. We can, however, examine such events in the light of other principles and descriptive passages, and thereby evaluate its ethic. Then we can reference these events, such as the book of Ruth, as

³⁹ ¹ Scofield Study Bible, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.

examples, or for encouragements, or for caution.

Study Questions

1. Discuss etymology and its importance.
2. What type of information will you find in a lexicon?
3. Discuss a word's range of meaning and how this relates to contextual meaning.
4. When trying to determine a word's meaning, what is the most crucial consideration?
5. What is the extended use of a term? a phrase?
6. Discuss how one's theology might or might not change?
7. To what degree should we consider the comments of theologians?
8. What is the problem with reading a text and jumping to interpretation without consideration of the historical context?

PART 3

THE HERMENEUTICAL PRACTICE

Lesson 9
A STEP BY STEP INTERPRETATION OF 3 JOHN 8

Historical Context

In this section we put it all together, employing the entire hermeneutical process using the passage of 3 John 8, “We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth.”

The Historical Setting

We begin by setting the historical background. Who wrote it? To whom was it written? Why was it written? What problems were addressed? Where were the readers located? etc. During this process we will make several notes on topics that may require further investigation. The following study will be done in the NASB version.

The Biblical Data

A critical reading of the letter reveals several pertinent historical details. We observe that:

- ✓ The letter is anonymous, as are the other two epistles of 2, and 3 John.
- ✓ There is no mention of persecution.
- ✓ It is a pastoral setting.
- ✓ Gaius was a beloved friend of the Elder (v. 1).
- ✓ Gaius was probably an elder of the church. At the

very least he was a leading layman in the church who evidently carried some influence.

- ✓ It is possible that Gaius had a physical illness (v. 2).
- ✓ The writer had been informed as to Gaius' walk in truth (v. 3).
- ✓ The church was probably founded by the elder writing the letter (v. 4).
- ✓ The church had established itself in good works both toward those within the body and those without (vv. 5, 6).
- ✓ Certain men who seemingly were traveling evangelists had stayed at the church for a short time (vv. 6-8).
- ✓ These men did not accept anything from the gentiles probably for fear of appearing to be selling the gospel (v. 7).
- ✓ It was the duty of the church to support these traveling evangelists (v. 8).
- ✓ The supporters of such evangelists are considered fellow workers (v. 8).
- ✓ The elder had written to the church before this (v. 9).
- ✓ A man named Diotrephes was puffed up and rejected the elder's letter (v. 9).
- ✓ Diotrephes was seemingly the chief elder in the church (v. 10).
- ✓ Diotrephes had made unfounded claims against the elder and his helpers (v. 10).
- ✓ Diotrephes himself refused to receive traveling teachers and forbade others to do so as well (v. 10).
- ✓ Diotrephes would excommunicate anyone who showed hospitality to these traveling teachers (v. 10).
- ✓ The elder is planning to visit the church in a short time (v. 10, 14).
- ✓ The elder views himself as being in authority over the

church and its puffed up leader (v. 10).

- ✓ The elder introduces Demetrius. He is probably the carrier of the letter (v. 12).
- ✓ The elder knew several of the church members by name, indicating a close relationship with them (v. 14).

Notes for Further Study

While reading the text several questions come to mind. Some may be answered by an extended historical research; others will be answered during various segments of our study. And some may go unanswered all together.

- ✓ Who was the elder?
- ✓ What is meant by the term elder?
- ✓ Who was Gaius?
- ✓ What was Gaius' position in the church?
- ✓ Where was the church located?
- ✓ When was the letter written?
- ✓ What is meant by the term strangers (v. 5)?
- ✓ What is meant by the term gentiles (v. 7)? Does he mean non-Jews or does he mean unbelievers?
- ✓ What was the other letter the elder wrote to the church (v. 9)?
- ✓ Who was Diotrephes?
- ✓ What position did he have in the church?
- ✓ What is meant by the term imitate (v. 11)?
- ✓ Is verse 11, an absolute statement? Why? Why not?
- ✓ What does he mean by "doing good" and "doing evil"?
- ✓ Who was Demetrius?
- ✓ How did Gaius know the elder's witness was true (v. 12)?
- ✓ Why was the elder not willing to write the things he wanted to say to them (v. 13)?

The Biblical Encyclopedia/Dictionary

To continue the historical research we turn to a good

Biblical Encyclopedia. I have chosen the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Under the listing "JOHN, THE EPISTLES OF," we discover a wealth of information.⁴⁰

- ✓ Although there are arguments against it, the three letters of 1, 2, and 3 John have been traditionally ascribed to John, the son of Zebedee. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (A.D. 185- 202), quoted from the 1st and 2nd epistles and ascribed them to John.
- ✓ Tradition points to Ephesus as the residence of John, and thus it is supposed that all three letters were written from there.
- ✓ The location of the church is uncertain. Probably somewhere within the radius of the Ephesian influence.
- ✓ The date of the writings is deduced from several factors. {a} The reference to the Gnostic teaching in I John would suggest a later date than Colossians or the pastoral epistles. {b} The absence of any reference to persecution probably indicates a time prior to the emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-117), and probably even prior to the last years of the emperor Domitian, who reigned until A.D. 96. {c} They were probably written after the gospel. {d} John was still able to travel and work. Thus, a date of around A.D. 87 to A.D. 92 seems likely.
- ✓ The church was struggling with early Gnostic tendencies. The article explains that:
 - ✓ Although Gnosticism was not actually identifiable historically until the 2nd century A.D.; nevertheless it was in the background of several N.T. books.

⁴⁰ Merrill C. Tenny, The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 3, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1975, pp. 648-651.

- ✓ The most advanced stage of Gnosticism that appeared in the background of the N.T. was reflected in the writings of 1 John.
- ✓ Gnosticism was a popular form of Graeco-Roman philosophy which had pervaded the thought of the Roman Empire by 150 A.D. It had produced serious conflict and confusion within the church.
- ✓ Gnosticism was the philosophical result of the blending of the cosmogony of Greek thought with the theology of oriental religions, especially Judaism.
- ✓ Certain characteristics of Gnosticism were:
 - ✓ Its Dualism—holding that all matter was essentially evil and spirit was essentially good. Thus the human body and spirit had no effective contact with each other. Therefore, the redeemed soul in a sinful body was not responsible for the deeds of the body. This teaching led to antinomianism.
 - ✓ Its Illumination—holding that salvation came from knowing theories rather than from faith in a Savior. Only the initiated who knew the Gnostic secrets were in the light.
 - ✓ Its rejection of the incarnation—holding that either Christ was not really a divine person in human flesh, but was merely a phantom playing a human role; or the human Jesus was an ordinary man upon whom the Logos of God came at his baptism, departing from him before the crucifixion.
- ✓ Gaius was a common name in the 1st century. There can be no positive identification of this Gaius with one of those mentioned elsewhere in

the N.T., (i.e. Rom. 16:23; Acts 19:29, 20:29).⁴¹

The Introduction of a Commentary

Another good source for background information is the introductory section of a commentary. For our study, I have chosen *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein. Again, there are several commentaries that would suit this purpose. The introduction to the three Johannine epistles makes some interesting observations.⁴²

- ✓ Establishing the background for these epistles is at best speculative.
- ✓ Nevertheless, traditions relating to these epistles did develop in the church, and we have no alternative but to accept them.
- ✓ Due to the situation being decidedly worse in 3 John than it was in 2 John, it is possible that 3 John was written a year or more later.

A Bible Handbook

Another tool, though not as complete as the encyclopedia, is a Bible Handbook such as Unger's Bible Handbook. Unger points out that:⁴³

- ✓ Several early church fathers ascribe 3 John to the apostle John.
- ✓ According to Eusebius, John returned from the Patmos exile to Ephesus after the death of Domitian (A.D. 96), and spent his closing years visiting the Asiatic churches, ordaining elders and ministering. Therefore 2 and 3 John were written after the Apocalypse.

An Introduction to the NT

⁴¹ Tenny. *Ibid.*, p. 657.

⁴² Frank E. Gaebelein, (ed.). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, pp. 293-295, 301.

⁴³ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1966, p. 832.

Another indispensable tool for researching historical background is the N.T. Survey or Introduction (or O.T. if so indicated). For our study I have chosen Tenney's N.T. Survey.⁴⁴ Here, we find that:

- ✓ The vocabulary and style indicate that the three epistles have the same author.
- ✓ By the time of the writings the separation between the church and the synagogue was complete.
- ✓ The controversy over justification by faith verses works had largely died out, and the influx of Gentiles into the church with their heritage of philosophical thought was beginning to affect doctrinal teaching.
- ✓ 3 John affords interesting insight into the church life in this early period. Apparently much of the ministry was carried on by itinerant preachers who made periodic rounds, staying a little while with each group and holding "protracted meetings" in private homes. Such a procedure was easily susceptible of abuse by religious racketeers, who would use their privileges to obtain a free living from the people.
- ✓ John's protest and his promise to test the power of Diotrephes shows that there was governmental difficulties even within the church of the 1st century.
- ✓ 3 John, unlike the other two epistles, is concerned more with administrative matters than doctrinal matters.

In fairness to the various tools, it should be noted that I did not include duplicate information found in previous works.

A Bible Atlas

A tool that often supplies a different sort of historical information is a Bible Atlas. It is different in that its primary focus is geography. Accordingly, it deals with the geographical particulars that would have played a role in a

⁴⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, The New Testament: A Survey, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955, pp. 375-378, 380.

given passage. Often an Atlas can yield important information.

Although we can only speculate as to the location of Gaius and his church, it seems probable from the study thus far that it was in Asia-Minor; probably within the vicinity of Ephesus. Reading about Ephesus in the atlas, we find that:⁴⁵

- ✓ Except for the two Jewish rebellions, the lands were at peace.
 - ✓ Commerce flourished as merchant ships sailed the Mediterranean free of pirates, and caravans traveled a vast network of well patrolled roads, some 60,000 miles in all. With the traders and their caravans went the Christian faith.
 - ✓ The general level of prosperity encouraged the contributions needed to support the traveling evangelist.
 - ✓ Jewish synagogues were present in virtually every major population center. This had been a great factor for the rapid spread of Christianity through the region.
 - ✓ After the several centuries of the diaspora, there were probably more Jews living outside of Palestine than in it.
 - ✓ The Greek language had become the dominate language, and had effectively done away with the language barrier. This also helped to unite the growing network of churches.
 - ✓ It is estimated that by the year A.D. 100, there were already nearly 300,000 believers throughout the empire, and of these some 80,000 were concentrated in Asia-Minor. In A.D. 112, Pliny wrote to the emperor Trajan, "this contagious superstition has spread through the province, leaving the ancient temples almost deserted."
- Other helpful tools at this juncture (depending on the

⁴⁵ Joseph Gardner, (ed.), Atlas of the Bible, Pleasantville, New York: Reader's Digest Association Inc., 1971, pp. 204-205.

passage) could be archaeology textbooks, Bible dictionaries, texts on manners and customs, etc.

Study Questions

1. Summarize the biblical data.
2. What are some of the notes that might require further investigation?
3. Summarize the information from the biblical encyclopedia.
4. Summarize the information from the biblical handbook.
5. Summarize the information from the N.T. Introduction.
6. Summarize the information from the Bible Atlas.
7. What are the most significant things these tools have revealed? Why?

Lesson 10
A STEP BY STEP INTERPRETATION OF 3 JOHN 8

Checking the Syntactical Context

The Genre

The genre of 3 John is epistolary, which appeals primarily to the intellect.⁴⁶ It is important to recognize this because the awareness leads to a careful observation of its logical development and its occasional nature. Because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it belongs to all time. But it was written from the historical context of the author to the historical context of the original recipients. This occasional nature must be given the utmost recognition.⁴⁷ We must know the circumstances, follow the flow of thought, follow the argument and consider the theme of the letter.

The Immediate Context

Concern for the immediate context may hardly seem appropriate in this already short context. It is easy to assume such concerns only apply to passages within larger texts; but that is not the case. Context must always be considered.

⁴⁶ ¹ Robert A. Traina, Methodical Bible Study, Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985 reprint, p. 69.

⁴⁷ Gordon Fee, and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for all its Worth, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, p. 45.

Let's suppose we are primarily concerned with 3 John 8, as it relates to missionary support. Before we can attempt to apply the passage we must understand how it fits into the immediate context. What precedes it? What comes after it? What is the primary argument? What is the logic? For this information we must outline the text. Each of our various different outlines will provide needed information.

A Synthetic Outline of 3 John

- I. The Opening Greetings (v. 1).
- II. The Influence of Gaius (vv. 2-8).
 - A. Gaius' Godly Life (vv. 2-4).
 - B. Gaius' Generous Treatment of Traveling Ministers (vv. 5-8).
- III. The Indictment of Diotrephes (vv. 9-11).
 - A. Diotrephes' Selfish Ambition (v. 9).
 - B. Diotrephes' Selfish Activities (vv. 10-11).
- IV. The Introduction of Demetrius (v. 12).
- V. The Concluding Remarks and Benediction (vv. 13-14).

From our reading of the text and this synthetical outline we might deduce that the theme of the letter is, "Walking in the Truth." Furthermore, it is apparent that the occasion for the letter was that a certain leader of the local church was not walking in the truth.

The Syntax and Grammar

The next interpretive step considers the grammar and syntax. As mentioned before, a thorough consideration requires knowledge of the original language. Assuming the average reader lacks this knowledge we will employ the help of two critical commentaries: Alford's N.T. for English Readers, and Stott's Tyndale N.T. Commentary. Recognizing these men as hermeneutical experts, I have included several of their interpretive and critical remarks in the following quotations.

Alford on Verses 6 through 8

Of the idiom, "*bring forward on their journey after a*

godly sort” (v. 6), Alford comments,⁴⁸

forward on their way worthily of God (in a manner worthy of Him whose messengers they are and whose servant thou art).

Concerning verses 7 and 8, he writes,

taking nothing (receiving nothing by way of benefaction or hire: even as St. Paul in Achaia, 1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 11:7 ff., 12:16 ff.; 1 Thess. 2:9ff.: against Huther, who denies the applicability of the comparison, seeing that in St. Paul’s case they were Christian churches: but so must these have been, before they would contribute to the support of their missionaries. The peculiar word used for **nothing** implies that it was their own deliberate purpose; refusing to take anything) **from the heathens. We therefore,** (contrast to the heathens: **therefore,** because they take nothing from the heathens) **ought to support** (the word does not seem to signify “receive hospitality,” as some have explained it)....

Stott on Verses 5 through 8

In the Tyndale N.T. Commentary,⁴⁹ Stott observes several points of interest in verse 5 and 6a. Concerning Gaius’ hospitality, he addresses minor grammatical and syntactical issues and finally arrives at a very important truth; namely, that godly work is the result of faith.

In each of these verses the Greek word in either the noun philoxenia or the adjective philoxenos, which indicate literally a love for strangers... Gaius’... ministry had been to the brethren, and (RSV, ‘especially’) to strangers (xenos). This does not mean

⁴⁸ Henry Alford, NT for English Reader, vol. 4, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, p. 1766.

⁴⁹ John R. W. Stott, Understanding the Bible, Glendale, California: Regal Books, 1972, pp. 220-224.

that there were two separate groups to whom Gaius showed hospitality. 'The brethren and the strangers are not two classes, but one and the same' (Plummer). His philadelphia (love of the brethren) and philoxenia (love of strangers) were combined. Cf. Heb. 13:1, 2 where these words occur together... His service... was being done faithfully... 'He could still be counted on' (Dodd); cf. RSV, 'it is a loyal thing you do' and NEB, 'you show a fine loyalty'... But it is noteworthy that what Gaius is said to do faithfully is his 'work' ergase. His work was the outcome of faith; it was 'a faithful work' (RV). The adverbs seem to link together the truth and the love of Gaius. His practical ministry to strangers was true to his profession. His love was consistent with the truth which he believed...

Concerning the testimony of the traveling strangers he makes another grammatical observation.

The verb 'have borne witness' is an aorist emarturesan and refers to some definite occasion when before the assembled congregation, of which John was leader, the returned travelers spoke appreciatively of the love Gaius had shown them, and of his truth (3)...

In verse 6b, Stott points out the syntactical progression in John's logic. He provides a few interpretive comments as to the duty of the local believers to traveling teachers.

The Elder now turns from the past to the future, from what 'thou doest' (5) to what thou shalt do (6)... So he urges him to continue to entertain traveling teachers. The implication of extending hospitality to itinerant missionaries is now clear. They are not just to be received when they arrive, but to be so refreshed and provided for (no doubt with supplies of food and money) as to be sent forward on the next stage of their journey after a godly sort, 'as befits God's service

(RSV). Literally ‘worthily of God’ (RV; axios tou theou; cf. Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12)... Such thoughtful sending forth of missionaries on their journey is not only ‘a loyal thing’ (5, RSV), but a ‘beautiful’ thing (kalos poieseis, thou shalt do well).

Stott then makes reference to Dodd’s comments about John’s use of the term *propempas*.

C.H. Dodd suggests that the verb translated ‘bring forward on their journey’ propempas was ‘something like a technical term of early Christian missions,’ implying ‘the assumption of financial responsibility for the journey’ of departing missionaries. This is probably the case for... in other places, as here, it indicates to receive and entertain someone in preparation for the next stage of his journey (Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:6, 11; 2 Cor. 1:16) and possibly to supply him with money or provisions as well when he leaves (as in Tit. 3:13 and possibly Acts 15:3). Cf. verse 8 here.

He continues to follow the flow of logic into verse 7, where he observes the reasons for hospitality. Here he makes grammatical, interpretive and historical observations.

The reasons for such hospitality are now given... The verb exelthan is the same as that used for the false teachers (1 Jn. 2:19, 4:1; 2 Jn. 7). It depicts a deliberate setting out on a mission... Their motive is described as being ‘for his name’s sake.’ The possessive adjective should be omitted and the phrase rendered ‘for the sake of the Names’ (RV). The Name is the Names of Jesus Christ, that is, the revelation of His divine-human Person and saving work... “The Gentiles’ hoi ethnikai refers here not to non-Jews, but to ‘the heathen’ (RSV) or ‘pagans’ (NEB), in contrast to Christian believers. The phrase

'taking nothing' need not be pressed into meaning that these Christian missionaries would refuse to accept gifts voluntarily offered to them by the unconverted. There is no prohibition here of taking money from non-Christians... Jesus Himself asked for and accepted a glass of water from the sinful Samaritan woman. What is here said is that these itinerant evangelists would not (as a matter of policy) seek their support from the heathen and did not (as a matter of fact) receive their support from them... C.H. Dodd writes: 'Devotees of various religions tramped the roads, extolling the virtues of the deity of their choice, and collecting subscriptions from the public. Thus, a "slave" of the Syrian Goddess has put on record... how he traveled in the service of his "Lady", and "at each journey brought back seventy bags".' Jesus told the Twelve and the Seventy to take with them 'no script... and Paul condemned those who were 'peddlers of God's word' (2 Cor. 2:17, RSV).

In verse 8, he makes a few more syntactical, grammatical, interpretive, and even text critical points.

This verse is in direct contrast to verse 7. It is because the itinerant evangelists were not supported by the heathen that "we therefore ought to receive such." "We" is strongly emphatic in the Greek sentence. There is also a pun in that we ought to receive, or better 'support' (RSV, NEB, rendering hupolambanein rather than apolambanein), those who refuse to receive lambanontes anything from the heathen. If the first reason for entertaining traveling missionaries is that they are brethren whom we should honor for setting out for the sake of the Name, the second is the much more practical one that they have no other means of support... An important principle

lies buried here, namely that Christians should finance Christian enterprises which the world will not, or should not be asked to, support. Indeed, Christians have an obligation (ought) to do so... The third reason for receiving and providing for traveling missionaries is that by so doing we become “fellow helpers to the truth...” the truth itself being personified and regarded as the one with whom we collaborate....

Textual Variations

Most of the better commentators will make mention of major variant textual considerations. Otherwise, variant readings may be found by reading a Greek text with a critical apparatus.⁵⁰

- ✓ In verse 3, some manuscripts omit the word *gar* “for” and others substitute *oun* “therefore.”
- ✓ In verse 4, some manuscripts read *charin*, “for the sake of,” in stead of *charan*, “joy.”
- ✓ In verse 8, many of the manuscripts read *upolambanein*, instead of *apolambanein*. But the meanings “to entertain” are virtually the same.
- ✓ In verse 9, the word *egrapsa*, “I wrote,” appear in some manuscripts as *egrapsa*, “I would have written.”

Although these variants are slight, still they should be considered.

Study Questions

1. What genre is this epistle? Why is that significant?
2. From the synthetic outline, what seems to be the theme of the letter?
3. Discuss a couple of grammatical issues.

⁵⁰ The Greek New Testament, 3rd edition, New York: United Bible Societies, 1983, p. 830.

4. Discuss three of the more significant issues pointed out by the commentators.

Lesson 11
A STEP BY STEP INTERPRETATION OF 3 JOHN 8

Outlining the Syntactical Context

A Mechanical Layout

Having completed the above observations we are ready to construct a mechanical outline. The design of this outline is to identify the syntactical structure and relationship between the various words, clauses, phrases, sentences and paragraphs divisions. Knowing the syntactical structure of any passage is key to having a clear understanding of the passage.

Setting aside the customary greeting, prayer of thanksgiving and final farewell of epistolary literature, verses 5 through 11, formulate the body of the letter in which the main point is made.

(v. 5) Beloved,
 you are acting faithfully
 |
 |in whatever you
 | accomplish
 |
 | for the brethren,

|does not accept what we say.
|
(v.10) |For this reason,
|(if I come),
|I will call attention to his deeds which he
|does,
|
|unjustly accusing us with wicked words;
|and not satisfied
|with this,
|neither does himself receive the brethren,
|and he forbids those who desire to do so,
|and puts them out of the church.

(v.11) Beloved,
|
|Do not imitate what is evil,
|
|but... what is good.
|
|The one who does good is of God;
|
|the one who does evil has not seen God.

An Analytical Outline

The mechanical layout reveals three paragraphs: verse 5-8, verses 9-10, and verse 11. From this we construct an analytical outline. The analytical outline is a more traditional outline that becomes an excellent tool from which to construct a homiletical outline for teaching or preaching.

- I. The recognition of Gaius' faithfulness (vv. 5-8).
 - A. Gaius' is faithful in all things he does for the brethren (vv. 5-6a).
 1. Gaius is especially faithful in his actions toward brothers who are strangers (v. 5b).
 2. The traveling evangelist recognized Gaius' love (v. 6a).
 - B. Gaius is reminded of the importance of such hospitality (vv. 6b-8).
 1. Gaius will do well to support the evangelists (v. 6b).
 - a. Because they went out for the Lord's sake (v. 7a).
 - b. Because they have accepted nothing from the Gentiles (v. 7b).
 2. Therefore, we ought to support them, in order that we may be fellow workers with them in the truth (v. 8).
- II. The rebuke of Diotrephes (vv. 9-10).
 - A. John wrote a letter to the church (v. 9a).
 - B. Diotrephes rejected the letter to the church (v. 9b)
 - a. Diotrephes loves to be first among them (v. 9b).
 - b. Diotrephes did not accept the letter (v. 9c).
 - C. Therefore, John will call attention to Diotrephes' evil deeds (v. 10).
 1. Diotrephes unjustly accuses us with wicked words (v. 10b).
 2. Diotrephes does not receive the brethren (v. 10c).
 3. Diotrephes forbids others to receive the brethren (v. 10c).

- 10d).
 - 4. Diotrephes excommunicates those who do receive the brethren (v. 10e).
- III. The charge to Gaius to do good (v. 11).
- 1. Do not imitate what is evil (v. 11a).
 - 2. Do imitate what is good (v. 11b).
 - 3. The one who does good is of God (v. 11c).
 - 4. The one who does evil has not seen God (v. 11d).
- A. John's recognition of Gaius' faithfulness (v. 5).
- 1. Gaius is faithful in all things he does for the brethren (v. 5a).
 - 2. Gaius is especially faithful in his actions toward brothers who are strangers (v. 5b).
- B. The traveling evangelist's recognition of Gaius' love (v. 6a).
- C. John reminds Gaius of the importance of such hospitality (vv. 6b-8).
- 1. Gaius will do well to support the evangelists (v. 6b).
 - a. Because they went out for the Lord's sake (v. 7a).
 - b. Because they have accepted nothing from the Gentiles (v. 7b).
 - 2. Therefore, we ought to support them, in order that we may be fellow worker with them in the truth (v. 8).
- D. John had written to the church (v. 9a).
- 1. But Diotrephes loves to be first among them and did not accept it (v. 9b).
 - 2. Therefore, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds (v. 10a).
 - a. He unjustly accuses us with wicked words (v. 10b).
 - b. He does not receive the brethren (v. 10c).
 - c. He forbids others to receive the brethren (v. 10d).
 - d. He excommunicates those who do receive the brethren (v. 10e).

- E. Gaius must not imitate this evil, but imitate what is good (v. 11a).
1. The one who does good is of God (v. 11b).
 2. The one who does evil has not seen God (v. 11c).

Observations Deduced from the Outlines

Form these outlines we determine the subject matter of verse 8 is John's praise of Gaius' warm reception of, and support for, the itinerant evangelists and teachers who were taking the gospel throughout Asia-Minor. John champions this support and concludes that such monetary participation on the Christian's part makes him a fellow worker with the evangelist.

The relationship of verse 8 to the overall theme of the book is the real life illustration of Gaius' "*walk in truth.*"

John then condemns Diotrephes for his failure to receive John himself and for his failure to receive and support the traveling teachers. In so many words, John implies that Diotrephes' actions reveal that he is an evil man. He implies that these evil deeds likely spring from a life that has not had a personal confrontation with the Holy God.

Study Questions

1. Describe a mechanical layout.
2. Discuss the significance of the mechanical layout.
3. Describe an analytical outline.
4. Discuss the significance of the analytical outline.

Lesson 12
A STEP BY STEP INTERPRETATION OF 3 JOHN 8

Word Studies and Comparisons

Word Meanings

Although tedious at times, word studies are a necessary part of doing proper interpretation. Because the focus of this exercise is to understand the meaning of verse 8, and its relationship to missionary support, the terms we are especially concerned with are:

- ✓ strangers (v. 5),
- ✓ support (v. 8),
- ✓ receive (v. 10),
- ✓ the idiom “send them on their way in a manner worthy of God” (v. 6).

An investigation of these terms in the original language may, or may not, yield a greater understanding of the issue. But we must investigate to find out.

Various tools are available to provide the meaning of these terms. Some are more helpful than others. To be used effectively, the advanced works require at least a basic knowledge of the original language. For our purposes I have chosen resources that require little skill in the original language. However, they necessarily have limited information

and thereby tend to be somewhat overly generalized. We will use: Strong's Concordance, Vine's Dictionary of N.T. Words, the Englishman's Greek concordance of the N.T., and Berry's Interlinear Greek N.T.

The Term "Stranger"

Because the Strong's Concordance is keyed to the KJV, we need to know the KJV translation for the NASB term "strangers" (v. 5). We see that is the same as the NASB. Therefore, we look up "strangers" in the concordance. The passage, 3 John 5, is listed on page 980. In the far right column is the number 3581. This reference is keyed to the Greek word in the dictionary at the back of the book. Turning there we find the word *xenos*. Following the entry is a short definition, apparently a primary word; foreign (literally alien, or figuratively, novel); by implication a guest or (vice-versa) entertainer: - host, strange(-r).

Under the English term "strangers," Vine's Dictionary of N.T. Words shows that it translates three different Greek adjectives used as nouns, one verb and one noun. The term *xenos*, which we learned from Strong's Concordance, is the term we are after. It is the first listing in Vine's. The term denotes a stranger, or a foreigner. Several N.T. verses are listed and we are instructed to look at the first word in the previous listing for further explanation. Here, we find the same Greek term *xenos*, used as an adjective (i.e. strange). It is the first in a list of four terms translated "strange." Vine's defines it as "(a) foreign, alien;... (b) unusual..."

We find *xenos*, on page 521 in the Englishman's Greek Concordance. The entry is easy to find because each entry is keyed to the dictionary number in Strong's Concordance. Thus *xenos*, is listed as entry 3581. The Englishman's Greek Concordance lists all 14 uses of the term in the Greek text. It makes reference to foreigners, strange doctrine, strange gods, and strange things that were happening. In the KJV, it is

translated “strange” or “stranger” in every passage but one. There it is one of the (vise-versa) uses mentioned in Strong’s, and is translated “host.”

From this we conclude that *xenos* appears to be a general term making reference to someone who is not from the area or something to which certain folks are not accustomed. The English translation “stranger,” seems to express the meaning adequately.

The Term “Support” or “Receive”

Our next term is the NASB “support” (v. 8). The KJV translation is “receive.” We looking up “receive” in Strong’s Concordance and find the Greek term used in verse 8 is keyed to number 618; however, the Greek term for “receive” in verses 9, and 10, is keyed to the number 1926. Turning to 618 in the dictionary at the back of the book, we read,

apolambano; from 575 (*apo*) and 2983 (*lambano*); to receive (specifically in full, or as a host); also to take aside:-receive, take.

A Word of Caution

Please note that we are in an area of study in which one who is not a student of the Greek language can easily get off track if he is not very careful. Several Greek words are combinations of two or more words. However, the meaning of these combined terms seldom expresses the full concepts of the individual terms used to construct the word. The term referred to under number 575 is the preposition *apo*. But Greek prepositions are very versatile. The definition offered by Strong’s Concordance is vague and quite inadequate. For the untrained reader it may do more harm than good; in that, some might attempt to derive meanings from the preposition that were never, and grammatically could never, be intended. Be very careful at this point not to read into the word something other than it actually means in the context.

Vine’s records 19 Greek verbs and 4 nouns translated by

our English “receive.” The fourth entry is *apolambano*. A number of biblical references are cited, and he then defines the term as,

Signifies to receive from another, (a) to receive as one's due...; (b) without the indication of what is due...; (c) to receive back.

For “receive,” in verses 9, and 10, Strong's Concordance refers to number 1926. Here he writes,

epidechomai, from 1909 (*epi*) and 1209 (*dechomai*); to admit (as a guest or [figuratively] teacher):- receive.

Vine's Dictionary of N.T. Words says of *epidochomai*,

Literally, to accept besides (*epi*, upon), to accept (found in the papyri, of accepting the terms of a lease), is used on the sense of accepting in 3 John 9; in verse 10, in the sense of receiving with hospitality, in each verse said negatively concerning Diotrephes.

The term for support in Acts 20:35, is keyed to number 482 in Strong's Concordance. We read,

antilambanomai, from 473 (*anti*), and the middle voice of 2983 (*lambano*); to take hold of in turn, i.e. to succor; also to participate:- help, partaker, support.

Vine's Dictionary has *antilambano*, listed under “help.” He says of it,

Literally, to take instead of, or in turn, is used in the middle voice, and rendered ‘he hath holpen’ in Lk. 1:54; to help, to support; its other meaning, to take part of, is used of partaking of things...

The Idiom “A Manner Worthy Of”

We find that the idiom, “a manner worthy of,” in the NASB is translated “a godly sort,” in the KJV. Using Berry's Interlinear Greek N.T., we see the Greek term is *axios* and Berry translates it, “worthily.” Under the English word “worthy,” Vine's Dictionary lists the Greek adverb *axios*. He defines it as,

Worthily, so translated in the R.V. [with one exception, see (c)], for A.V., “worthy” and other renderings, (a) “worthily of God,” 1 Thess. 2:12, of the Christian walk as it should be; 3 John 6, R.V., of assisting servants of God in a way which reflects God’s character and thoughts; (b) “worthily of the Lord,” Col. 1:10; of the calling of believers, Eph, 4:1, in regard to their “walk” or manner of life; (c) “worthy of the gospel of Christ,” Phil. 1:27, of a manner of life in accordance with what the gospel declares; (d) “worthily of the saints,” R.V., of receiving a fellow-believer, Rom. 16:2, in such a manner as befits those who bear the name of “saints.” Deissmann (*Bible Studies*, pp. 248 ff) shows from various inscriptions that the phrase “worthily of god” was very popular at Pergamum.

Comparison and Extended Context

Now that we have examined the immediate context we are ready to check for correlating passages. Here we seek to answer such questions as: Where else do we read of support for such missionaries, traveling teachers and evangelist? For Christian workers? For Christian brethren in general? To answer these questions we rely on three things: our personal familiarity with Scripture; a topical index; and a Bible concordance. I have chosen the *New Topical Textbook* and *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

We will make three lists of possible correlating passages.

- ✓ Those with direct application to our concern of support for missionaries and traveling evangelist.
- ✓ Those that address the support of the teachers and leaders of the church.
- ✓ Those that address the issue of supporting the brethren in general.

Before turning to the concordance and the topical index, we make a list of words and topics under which we might

expect to find information. In the topical index we might look up such things as: giving, money, missionary, teachers, etc. But when we look them up, we find the listings under giving, money, and teachers have nothing of concern. However, the term missionary provides several passages. Now we look up the terms receive and support in the Concordance.

Direct Application

Passages that seem to have direct application are:

- ✓ Mark 6:7-13, and Luke 10:1-11; Jesus sends his disciples out to preach. He instructs them not to take provisions, but to live on what is given to them by those who receive them. For, he says, “the laborer is worthy of his wages.”
- ✓ Matthew 10:14; 41, and Luke 9:5; Jesus is instructing his disciples how to respond to those who do not receive them.
- ✓ Acts 18:27; Apollos is given a letter of introduction from the Ephesians to the Achaians, asking them to receive him and his ministry.
- ✓ Romans 16:1-2; Paul instructs those at Rome to receive Phoebe in a manner worthy of the saints, and to help her in whatever matter she may have need.
- ✓ 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; Paul sets forth the Macedonian believers as an example of giving, telling of how they “begged for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.”
- ✓ 2 Corinthians 11:9; Paul speaks of how the brothers of Macedonia had “fully supplied” his need while he was teaching among the Corinthians.
- ✓ Galatians 4:14-15; Paul reminds and commends the Galatians for their former treatment of him when they received him as an angel of God, even as the Christ himself. It was a time when they would have given him anything he needed.

- ✓ Philippians 4:14-19; Paul commends them for the faithful support of his missionary work. They alone had been faithful. He concludes that the importance of their gift was not so much the gift itself, but the “profit which increases to (their) account.”
- ✓ 2 John 10; the lady and her children are warned not to receive a traveling teacher who brings false teaching.
- ✓ Of course 3 John 5-8, is the passage with which we began our study. It would concur with the tenor of Paul’s comments above.

Supporting the Leadership

- ✓ 1 Timothy 5:17-18; may be considered as a correlating passage that deals with the indirect issue of supporting local church leaders.

Supporting Brethren in General

Other passages, though even more remote from the issue, deal with meeting the needs of the brethren in general.

- ✓ Acts 11:29-30; the church at Antioch determines to send relief to the church in Jerusalem.
- ✓ Acts 20:35; Paul says that he had worked hard with his own hands and had met his needs and the needs of those with him. He concludes that in like manner the Ephesians were to “support” the weak and remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive.
- ✓ 2 Corinthians 8:14-15; Paul reminds them that their present abundance is to be a supply for the needs of others.
- ✓ 2 Corinthians 9:1-15; everyone is to give cheerfully, according to the purpose in his heart. One who sows bountifully will reap bountifully.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:28; they are told to work with their hands and to labor that they may have something to give to those who have need.
- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Paul admonishes to, “encourage

the faint hearted, help (support) the weak, be patient with all men.”

- ✓ 1 Timothy 6:17-19; the rich are to share with the poor.

Old Testament Correlations

Although they may not have a direct application, there seem to be correlating principles in certain O.T. as well.

- ✓ As those who were to minister to the spiritual needs of Israel, the Levites had no inheritance in the land. There-fore, Israel was to be benevolent toward the Levites (Deut. 12:12, 18-19, 14:29), and to support them with tithes (Num. 18:21, 24).
- ✓ At Jericho, Rahab received the messengers of Israel into her house. Twice she is commended in the N.T. (Heb. 11:31, Jm. 2:25).
- ✓ Paul makes reference to the feed and care of a working ox (Duet. 25:4). He applies the principle to Christian workers he concludes that “*a laborer is worthy of his wages*” (1 Tim. 5:18).

Study Questions

1. Discuss the various tools for doing word studies. What benefits, limitations does each have?
2. What precautions should we take when doing word studies?
3. Discuss the difference between the KJV and NASB translations of the Greek term *apolambano*, which they translated “support and receive.”
4. What is the significance of considering other similar passages?
5. What is an idiom?
6. What are some modern day idioms that we use in our culture?
7. Discuss the passages of direct application.

Lesson 13
A STEP BY STEP INTERPRETATION OF 3 JOHN 8
Conclusion and Application

The Historical Meaning

Before arriving at personal application we must not overlook the historical meaning. What was the author's intention? What was his meaning, his purpose, in the passage? How did those to whom it was written understand it? It is imperative that the author's intended meaning and the recipients' understanding be our understanding as well. This historical meaning is the primary objective of hermeneutics.

With this in mind let us draw some conclusions from what we have learned. The following conclusions are not meant to exhaust the possible applications of the book, but they are the primary conclusions we might draw from a specific focused on the significance of verse 8's relationship to missionary support.

The Setting

- ✓ Early Church writings and Church tradition teaches that the apostle John wrote this letter. Furthermore, several scholars believe the writing is consistent with John's style and vocabulary. And since there is little evidence for any other author, we will assume this position.
- ✓ The above assumption as well as assumptions made for

them text leads us to believe the letter was written near the end of the first century.

- ✓ We know it was written to Gaius, who was probably a elder in a church somewhere in Asia-Minor; not too far from Ephesus, John's residence.

The Word Meanings

- ✓ Both contextual and historical evidence indicates that the idiom "*send them on their way in a manner worthy of God*" (v. 6), is a clear admonition for Gaius to assist these men with physical and financial support.
- ✓ The study of *xenos* (v. 5), did not tell us much more than the translation. Therefore, our main source for arriving at the identity of the strangers is the immediate context. The term itself tells us they were not local yokels.
- ✓ We ascertain from the context that they were traveling Christian teachers of some sort. In verses 5 and 10, John called them brethren. In verse 6, he mentioned their journey. In verse 7, he said they went out for "*the sake of the Name.*"
- ✓ In verse 8, John said they should be supported. And in verse 10, he condemns Diotrephes for rejecting them.
- ✓ We may conclude from our study of the terms for "receive," that what John had in mind with *apolambano* in verse 8, and *epidechomai* in verses 9 and 10, was hospitality.

The Context

- ✓ He seems to use *apolambano* in verse 8, and *epidechomai* in verses 9 and 10, as synonyms. However, we might observe a slight difference between the two terms. It could be that by using *apolambanein* in verse 8 (or as many manuscripts read *hupolambanein*), he is indicating a more intensive reception (i.e. "support," as translated by the

NASB), which goes beyond mere hospitality. Whereas, his use of *epidechomai* in verses 9 and 10, might refer to a less aggressive hospitality. If this is the case, we could interpret this change in terms to be magnifying his charge against Diotrephes. In effect saying, that “while local believers ought even to be supplying for the needs of these traveling ministers, Diotrephes will not even be hospitable to them.”

- ✓ John’s words to Gaius imply that it is his Christian duty to supply for the needs of these men. And furthermore, that when he does so, he is joining in their work.
- ✓ Diotrephes is condemned for his lack of hospitality. Indeed, John implies he is evidently not even a true believer.

Practical Theological Considerations

Thinking through the theological implications of our findings will ultimately lead to certain practical applications for life. Granted this passage is not one of great controversy, nor is it packed with deep theological thought, but, as seen in the corresponding passages, it does touch upon certain fundamental, practical theological considerations from which we can derive personal applications.

Missiology

As it relates to the work of evangelism and discipleship:

- ✓ The worker is deserving of support (Mat. 10:14, 41; 2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 4:14-19; Rom. 16:1-2).
- ✓ The supporter is a fellow worker of the truth (Phil. 4:17).
- ✓ Such missionary work, so as to spread the truth, fulfills the great commission (Mat. 28:19-20).

Sanctification and Rewards

As it relates to one’s spiritual life:

- ✓ A willingness to support evangelists and teachers has a

relationship to one's walk with God (Gal. 4:14-15; Phil. 4:14-19).

- ✓ A desire to support such workers is an evidence of spiritual growth, for it is an expected result of one set aside for God and His purposes (2 Cor. 8:1-5).
- ✓ Such faithful obedience will be rewarded (Mat. 10:40-41).

Ecclesiology

As it relates to the brotherhood:

- ✓ The support of the leaders is expected (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:9).
- ✓ The support of needy brethren is expected (1 Tim. 6:17-19; 2 Cor. 8:14-15; 1 Thess. 5:14).
- ✓ The support of the underprivileged brethren is expected (1 Tim. 5:16, 6:17-19; Jm. 1:27).

Contemporary Relevance and Personal Application

Direct Application

The passage is prescriptive and trans-cultural. Therefore, we derive direct application.

- ✓ We are to support those who have devoted themselves to evangelizing and teaching God's Word. It is our Christian duty to do so.
- ✓ When we support such workers, we become partakers with them in the work of spreading the truth.
- ✓ In this way we fulfill the great commission and rewards are accredited to our account.

Principles to Apply

From those passages spoken directly to or about both the righteous Gaius and the evil Diotrophes, we may detect several timeless principles that we can apply to our lives today.

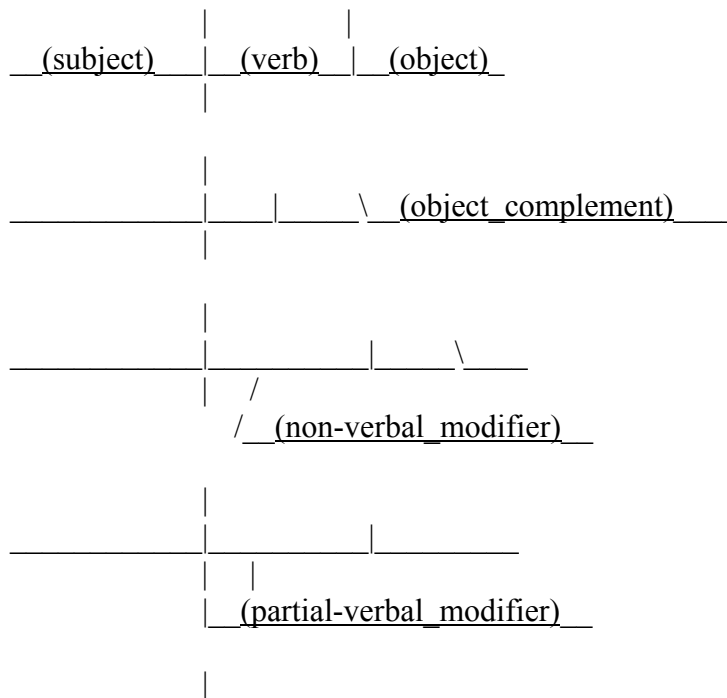
- ✓ One's conduct displays or betrays his spiritual life.
- ✓ Genuine hospitality is the characteristic of a godly and loving heart.
- ✓ Pride can destroy Christian fellowship.

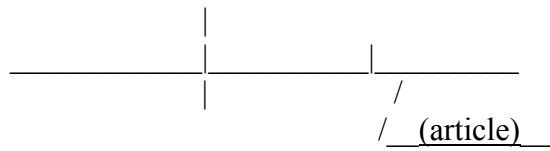
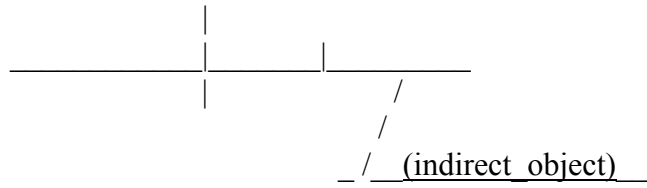
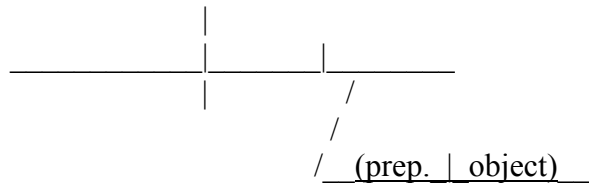
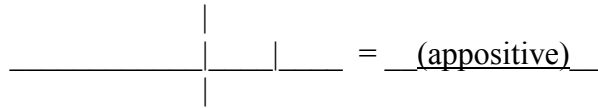
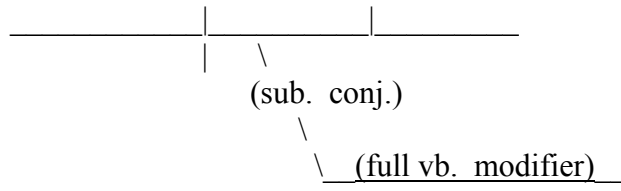
✓ One man's pride can cause many to grieve.

Study Questions

1. Discuss the historical meaning. Why is this so significant?
2. What was the historical setting?
3. How important was the word study for this text? Why? Why not?
4. Discuss the application of the text to Missiology.
5. Discuss the application of the text to Ecclesiology.
6. What are some of the direct applications we might derive from this passage?

Lesson 14
SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING





PART 4

SOME BASIC TOOLS FOR BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

The following study helps are by no means exhaustive. Several other books in each category could have been selected just as easily. I have selected these works primarily for one reason: they will be easy for the reader to use.

Tools for Biblical Content

English Bibles

Because translation is both an art and a science, textual criticism and translations will differ from one another. Therefore, it is advisable to reference many versions. This often proves to be a very rewarding step in the interpretation process. I would suggest the following.

The New American Standard Bible. Lockman Foundation. LaHambra, California: The Foundation Press, 1971.

The objective of the NASB is to review and increase interest in the American Standard Version. The attempt has been made to render the grammar and terminology of the

ASV in contemporary English. It is a literal translation based upon Rudolph Kittel's Biblia Hebraica, and the 23rd edition of the Nestle Greek New Testament. Although its style is a bit wooden, it is a very reliable rendition of the Hebrew and Greek.

The King New James Bible. Thomas Nelson Inc., Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1979.

This is an attempt to closely follow the original KJV. The vocabulary has been up dated, making it more readable. It is a literal translation and the NT, Textus Receptus.

The New International Version. 1973.

Although it is not meant to be a literal word for word translation, it is, nevertheless, a fairly accurate rendition of the thoughts and theological concepts involved. It is translated by a process called dynamic equivalence and therefore should be read as a commentary.

Today's English Version of the New Testament. trans. The American bible Society. New York: Macmillian, 1966.

This too, like the NIV, is translated by the method of dynamic equivalence. It is easy to read and makes a fine commentary.

Tools for Historical Background

Bible Dictionaries

Douglas, J. D. (ed.). The New Bible Dictionary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962.

This is one of the better new dictionaries. It has a conservative approach, with helps in the areas of chronology, archaeology and backgrounds.

Unger, Merrill F. Unger's Bible Dictionary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1957.

Unger stresses the doctrinal content of many key words. Its doctrinal treatment is its strength.

Ewell, Walter A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.

Here is an excellent treatment of theological terms and concepts. It is comprehensive, current, authoritative and understandable. More than 1,250 articles from several of today's best scholars.

Bible Encyclopedias

Orr, James (ed.) and Malvin Grove Kyle (revising ed.). The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. 5 vol. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939.

Perhaps the most versatile set for the conservative. There are excellent articles on any number of topics, with extensive book outlines and introductions.

Tenny, Merrill C. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press.

Another excellent resource. Very similar to I.S.B.I. Either one will suffice.

Bible Handbooks

Unger, Merrill F. Unger's Bible Handbook. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966.

Here is an abbreviated but a concise resource of historical, geographical, chronological, and archaeological background, book outlines, short introductions, and other topics of interest.

Halley, Henry H. Bible Handbook, Chicago: Printed author, 1955.

An abbreviated Bible commentary. A general overview of the Bible with historical, chronological, and archaeological data. There is a synopsis of Church history, notes on obscure passages, suggested Bible readings and more.

Bible Atlases

Aharoni, Yohanan and Michael Avi-Yonah. The Macmillan Bible Atlas. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

This fine atlas contains 262 maps with an integrated text that illustrates every biblical event that conceivably lends itself to cartographic interpretation.

Day, John, ed. Oxford Bible Atlas. (3rd ed.) New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Concise atlas newly revised to bring into account recent archeological findings.

Grollenberg, L. H. (ed.). Grollenberg's Atlas of the Bible. trans. of 2nd Dutch ed. trans. and ed. by J. M. H. Reid and H. H. Rowby. London: Nelson and Sons, 1957.

This is a scholarly work with many illustrations and a text summarizing Biblical history. It has fine maps.

Pheiffer, Charles F. Baker's Bible Atlas. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973.

An excellent atlas complete with maps, both general and detailed and a chronological text of the Bible times.

Wright, G. E. and F. V. Filson (eds.). The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1945.

This is the standard of Bible atlases. It outlines ancient history with the biblical events are well related to secular history.

Introductions to the N.T.

Tenney, Merrill. The New Testament: A Survey. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955.

The bibliography alone is worth price of the book. The historical background is very good.

Guthrie, Donald. Introduction to the NT. 3 vols. London: Tyndale, 1964.

Outstanding and absolutely necessary. A model for handling the difficult problems attendant to special introduction.

Introductions to the O.T.

Archer, Gleason L., Jr. A Survey of O.T. Introduction. Chicago: Moody Press, 1964.

This is perhaps the best conservative O.T. introduction available today.

Unger, Merrill F. Introduction Guide to the O.T. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1951.

Unger's has long been a standard textbook in seminaries and Bible Colleges. It is still a fine treatment of O.T. issues from a conservative viewpoint.

Literary Genre

Fee, Gordon D. and Stuart, Douglas. How to Read the Bible for all its Worth. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

Excellent! Here is an illustrative treatment of the interpretive rules concerning each genre. Well worth the price.

Critical Commentaries

Alford, Henry. NT for English Reader. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983.

Alford was possibly the leading commentator of his day. An Evangelical Anglican with an excellent grasp of the Greek text. Premillennial.

Bruce, F. F. (ed.) The New International Commentary on the NT. 18 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984 (reprint).

Best overall contemporary series. Conservative, Reformed. Some volumes, such as Romans, are outstanding. It is based on the Greek text but written in a way that those without Greek may benefit.

Gaebelein, Frank E. (ed.). The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.

Fine commentary set written by various conservative scholars. Although some of the books are better than others, it is a worthy set.

Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown. A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

A concise conservative commentary by three British scholars (Presbyterian & Anglican) of the 19th Century. Jamieson & Brown are Postmillennial, Fausset is

premillennial. Reliable historical and grammatical exposition.

Lange, John P. Commentary on the Holy Scripture. 12 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960 (reprint).

A most exhaustive exegesis and exposition of the whole Bible by a group of German scholars of the past century. Consistently conservative, mainly amillennial. There are thorough exegetical, historical, theological, and homiletical treatments.

Tasker, R. V. G. (ed). The Tyndale NT Commentaries. 21 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981.

Well organized, outlined, and with excellent introductions. Especially useful for zeroing in on the principle point of a passage. It is written by solid scholars from a conservative viewpoint, though mostly an amillennial orientation.

Tyndale O.T. Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Excellent. Even better than the NT.

Wuest, Kenneth S. Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek NT. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966.

Here are helpful studies from the Greek, especially for English readers on various NT books and topical areas. It is conservative, pre-millennial, and dispensational.

English Concordances

Strong, James. The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. New York: Abingdon Press, 1955.

A good general concordance. Hebrew and Greek words are not noted in the main body of the concordance but are indicated in special appendages.

Young, Robert. Analytical Concordance to the Bible. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1910.

An excellent tool. Probably the best English concordance available. A supplement on archaeological data by William Foxwell Albright is decidedly a plus in this concordance.

Greek & Hebrew Texts

Green, Jay, P. The Interlinear Bible. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, revised, 1983.

O.T. and N.T. interlinears. Small print. Greek is the TR.
Marshall, Alfred. The NIV Interlinear Greek-English NT. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.

Greek is based on the Nestle text.

Greek and Hebrew Concordances

New Englishman's Greek Concordance of the NT. Wilmington, Delaware: Associated Publishers & Authors, 1972.

Each word (listed in Greek and its English transliteration) is followed by English citations. A section in the back lists the English words with their Greek translations keyed to the page on which they are found.

The Englishman's Hebrew & Chaldee Concordance of the O.T. 5th ed. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1890.

For the student who does have a limited use of Hebrew, this dictionary should be of more help than Young's English concordance. Occurrences of words are listed by the Hebrew words rather than their English translations. All citations are in English, with the word in question given in italics.

Greek and Hebrew Lexicons

Wilson, William. O.T. Word Study. McLean, Va.: MacDonald Publishing Co., no date.

Very useful for those with limited Hebrew. Each word is listed in English with its Hebrew translations and their meanings below.

Davidson. Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the O.T. Mac Dill AFB, Florida: Mac Donald Publishing Co., no date.

Parses verbs, declines nouns, and defines words. Requires a basic Hebrew background.

Vine, W. E. An Expository Dictionary of NT Words. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, no date.

Limited in scope and depth, but it is helpful, especially for those limited in Greek.

Moulton, Harold K. Moulton. Analytical Greek Lexicon. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977.

A thorough and concise dictionary of each Greek word in the NT. Each verb is parsed and each noun is declined. Very useful for those with a limited Greek.

Basic Greek & Hebrew Grammars

Goodrick, Edward W. Do it Yourself Hebrew and Greek. Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1980.

Designed to give a basic introduction to the languages. Its best feature is explaining how to use various Bible study tools which require a little knowledge of the Biblical languages.

Yates, Kyle M. The Essentials of Biblical Hebrew. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938.

Well written. May serve as an introductory grammar as well as an intermediate book on syntax.

Goetchius, Eugene Van Ness. The Language of the NT. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.

An excellent beginners Grammar.

Dana, H. E. and Julius R. Mantey. A Manual Grammar of the Greek NT. New York: Macmillan, 1963.

This is the best organized, hence the handiest of all the grammars. It suffers from poor illustrations in places.

Theologies

Chafer, Lewis S. Major Bible Themes. Chicago: Moody Press, 1926.

Helpful on an elementary level. A concise treatment of the basic doctrines and possible objections to them.

Chafer, Lewis S. Systematic Theology. 8 vols. London: James Clarke & Co., 1953.

Premillennial, dispensational. Good overall. Excellent on soteriology. It is a classic in the field of systematic theology. Everyone will always want to know what Chafer says.

Hodge, A. A. Outlines of Theology. New York: Nelson and Sons, 1879.

Organized in relation to a catechetical approach. Not as full as Hodge's Systematic Theology but very useful, clear and concise.

Hodge, Charles Systematic Theology. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986 (reprint).

Probably the leading Presbyterian theology. It is without question a classic in the field of theology. Post-millennial.

Thiessen, Henry C. Lectures in Systematic Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949.

A comprehensive introduction to systematic theology. It has been a classroom textbook for more than 30 years. Pre-millennial, dispensational.

Erickson, Millard J. Christian Theology. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.

A Fine work. Easy to read. He holds to a progressive creation theory and post-tribulationalism. Dispensational.

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