

THE EXPOSITOR'S BOOK



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Prepared for:
LIVINGHOPE
BIBLE CHURCH
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The Expositor's Book

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1

THE PRIMACY OF EXPOSITORY TEACHING AND PREACHING



“We are on the wrong track if we think expository preaching merely as a preaching style chosen from a list (topical, devotional, evangelistic, textual, apologetic, prophetic, expository)... As John Stott says, 'All true Christian preaching is expository preaching.'”

ALISTAIR BEGG



We live in an “instant age.” One of my favorite inventions is microwave popcorn. Have you ever tried to make popcorn outside of the microwave (your answer may show your age)? Microwave popcorn is great because you stick a little bag in the oven and three minutes later you have a piping hot perfectly seasoned snack.

Spiritual progress, however, cannot be microwaved. You will not go through this course and become an “Instant Teacher or Preacher.” In the same way, if God has not called and gifted you for the ministry of the Word, this course won't change that fact. If you are unsure about your calling, you will, however, have an opportunity to test your gifts. The good news is that God has gifted every believer for some important area of ministry (1 Cor.12:7 1 Pet. 4: 10). Don't be disappointed if your gift is not in the area of proclamation, for God still has great work for you to do.

While only men are called to be elders and officers in the church, and preachers over God's congregation in the local church, there are many women in the church whom God has gifted with shepherding gifts in order to encourage and shepherd other women. Mature women in the church need to know how to exposit God's Word to other women as well as exposit it to themselves and their children. In a healthy marriage, a godly husband will always be sure to listen and consult with his dear wife.

So while this class can benefit any Christian, it is primarily geared toward men who are wanting to stir up the teaching and preaching gifts they may have. The second part of this class, the “Preaching Practicums” section is for men only.

What I hope to do with this class is to provide tools and a methodology which you can use, develop, and improve over a lifetime. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:14-16, "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

Why Should You Preach?

We live in a day in which all authority is challenged. The very word "Preach" or "Preachy" has negative connotations in a relativistic age in which the only absolute truth is that there is not absolute truth. Barna research group reports: *While 74% of Americans strongly agree that there is only one true God who is holy and perfect and who created the world and rules it today; 64% agree with the assertion that "there is no such thing as absolute truth." We are truly living in a post-modern age of ethical and moral relativism. Every one is entitled to their own personal version of truth.*

Pilate asked, "What is truth?" This is the question that is needing to be asked in every generation. Let us not mistake the answer. Truth is "God's reality." It is God's worldview. It is what is right from God's perspective.

To people in our day with a relativistic worldview, our preaching may appear as foolishness. In addition to the anti-authoritarian mood of our culture, preachers face greater competition from the entertainment media. We live in the age of the "Sound Byte," in which people's attention spans are low and their expectations of being constantly

entertained are high. Even the regular members of our congregations are not accustomed to being forced to think deeply for 30 or 40 minutes at a time (see *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, by Neil Postman).

Today's preacher, in addition to facing "competition" from the secular media, also faces competition from Christian media. Why should people get out of bed on Sunday morning to hear men of ordinary gifts preach when at home they can hear Swindoll and MacArthur on the radio, watch videotapes by Sproul, and read books of Spurgeon's sermons? The Bible gives the answer to this question. Live proclamation of the Word of God is the Lord's appointed means of building up His church. Romans 10:14 states How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

Ready in Season and Out of Season

Timothy is told in 2 Tim. 4:2, "Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

God commands His people to gather in local churches for worship, fellowship, and the preaching of the Word (Acts 2:42 Heb. 10:25). There is a personal dynamic of accountability and confrontation in a live preaching situation which pre-recorded preaching through the media cannot duplicate. We are not only called to "preach the word" but to "watch our lives" and to live it out. What we believe is not mainly stated in our systematic theology (those tools are helpful and necessary). What we believe is displayed in how we live.

Living What We Preach

Paul writes to the Roman believers in Rom. 1:15 that he is eager to come to preach the gospel to them. This is particularly striking because it is in the introduction to what is probably the greatest exposition of the gospel ever written. What could Paul possibly add by preaching to them “live”? In terms of content, perhaps very little; however, Paul will not be satisfied that he has fully ministered to the Romans until he does so through personal proclamation. As useful as tapes, radio, television and books may be; there is no substitute for preaching! I like to read sermons.

One thing which has impressed me is how the sermons of many great preachers appear very ordinary in print. The power in their preaching came as the truths of Scripture were expressed through the personalities of these godly men. In our shallow plastic world, there is a great need in our day for a powerful, accurate, and authoritative proclamation of God's infallible truth! Such is our only hope for seeing revival.

John Broadus (professor of New Testament interpretation and homiletics at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859) said,

“There has been no great religious movement, no restoration of Scriptural truth, and not reanimation of genuine piety, without new power in preaching.”

The Maturity of the Messenger

The Bible specifically speaks about the qualifications for those who will lead a congregation of people. These qualifications have been the same for almost 2,000 years. Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of these qualifications as the

Chief Shepherd of the Church. The list below is descriptive not just of elders, but of a mature Christian in general. All believers should strive for these qualities.

Why start here? 1 Tim. 4:15-16, “Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

“No eloquence or charm of manner, no homiletic artistry can atone for a lack of a vital inward experience of spiritual reality. The preacher should be the channel of a communication, not the source of it.” (McComb)

Above Reproach (Titus 1:6, 7; 1 Tim 3:2)

This is the overarching, summarizing characteristic. You will find similar (but not identical) lists in First Timothy and Titus. Living a life above reproach is the first requirement in both lists and Titus repeats it. The other items on the list explain what “above reproach” means. If we peruse the two lists, as well as 1 Peter, we find 17 qualifications of an elder who is above reproach.

1. A leader must be devoted to his wife; one-woman man (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 3:2). The pastor’s marriage illustrates Christ’s love for His church—His bride (Eph. 5:22 ff.). A Pastor must love his wife exclusively with his mind, will and emotions and not just his body.

2. If a leader has children, they must be in submission while living in the home, though not perfect (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 3:4-5). If a man does not know how to manage his own

family, he will not know how to take care of God's church. The first flock for a pastor is his own family as Pastor Dad. A Pastor's qualification for the church starts in his home management as he leads them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

3. A leader is a faithful steward or manager in carrying out his responsibilities (Titus 1:7). Here the term used is overseer (Greek episkopos). It is not another office, but a functional title of the elder. It is what he does. He is a steward, a manager of God's resources and Jesus' flock. He takes responsibility, but not ownership.

4. A leader must be humble - not arrogant (Titus 1:7). A pastor must constantly demonstrate the gospel by admitting when he is wrong and assuming responsibility and restoring relationships.

5. A leader must be gentle - not quick-tempered (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3). No man will be of any use in the kingdom that is quick-tempered. The difference between how Jesus demonstrated anger is that He was angry at the abuse of others in the name of religion and the dishonoring of God. We get angry at how it affects us.

6. A leader must be sober - not a drunkard (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3). This is not just overindulgence in alcohol but is idiomatic for any behavior that fuels addictive responses.

7. A leader must be peaceful - not violent (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3). A pastor is prone to inflict violence through his words. He is to be a peacemaker.

8. A leader must have financial integrity - not greedy for gain (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3; 1 Peter 5:3). A pastor is to be upright in his financial dealings and not accused of pursuing money over the kingdom of God.

9. A leader must be hospitable (Titus 1:8; 1 Tim 3:2). A leader's home is to be open for others to enjoy. A leader's home is not a heaven on earth, but rather a place of ministry.

10. A leader must be a lover of good (Titus 1:8). A pastor genuinely loves what is good. He does not just think he should love it.

11. A leader must be self-controlled (Titus 1:8; 1 Tim 3:2). Self-control is a characterization of every area of a pastor's life: diet, time, mouth, exercise, relationships, sex, and money.

12. A leader must be upright (Titus 1:8). He has integrity in his relationships and in how he treats others.

13. A leader must be holy (Titus 1:8). His life is devoted wholeheartedly to Jesus externally and internally.

14. A leader must be able to teach (Titus 1:9; 1 Tim 3:2). All of the other qualifications are character qualities. This is the only ability-based requirement. He is to be able to teach

sound doctrine, not just be able to communicate in an excellent manner. His teaching can be to one or two, to twenty, to a hundred or to a thousand. Most of the churches in Crete were house churches. The elders were to defend the faith once delivered to the saints against the numerous false teachers that arose.

15. A leader must be spiritually mature (1 Tim 3:6). Positions of authority without spiritual maturity lead to the trap of pride. When pride grows in a man, sin abounds.

16. A leader must be respectable (1 Tim 3:7). That does not mean that everyone must like him or even appreciate him. It means that there is no credible witness to an ongoing sinful behavior.

17. A leader must be an example to the flock (1 Peter 5:3). Leaders, and especially pastors and elders are to be examples of Biblical expressions of chastity, marriage and sexuality, time management, parenting, worship, relationships and every other way. A pastor should be someone your sons could pattern their life after and the kind of man your daughter should marry.

Maturity

Remember that these qualifications are not just for leaders, but they are descriptive of all mature Christians everywhere.

What is Expository Preaching?

According to Mark Dever of 9 Marks ministries an expositional sermon or teaching is:

“a teaching which takes the point of the text as the point of the sermon... an exposition of Scripture simply seeks to uncover, explain, and apply the divinely intended meaning of the text.”

“...expositional preachers and teachers are modern day prophets, serving merely as conduits through which the Word of God may flow into the people of God in order to do the work of God in them.”

“Pastoral authority is directly related to Authorial intent. The preacher only has authority from God to speak as His ambassador as long as he remains faithful to convey the Divine Author’s intentions. This means that the further the preacher strays from preaching the intention of the text, the further his divine blessing and God-given authority are eroded in the pulpit.”

Allistair Begg says, “We are on the wrong track if we think expository preaching merely as a preaching style chosen from a list (topical, devotional, evangelistic, textual, apologetic, prophetic, expository)... As John Stott says, ‘All true Christian preaching and teaching is expository in nature.’”

All expository preaching is like mail delivery. We are not here to edit the mail. As God's heralds, we are here to deliver and proclaim the mail that God has given to His people.

1. Expository Preaching is Exegetical

What is expository preaching? First of all, expository preaching is **exegetical**. To exegete something is to dig it

out. We are not bringing our own ideas to the text, but we are digging out what God has already written.

We must exegete our message from God's Word since only Scripture can give your message authority. We must never use **eisegesis** - reading one's own ideas into the text.

We must beware of two kinds of errors: (1) Teaching what is not in the Bible, and (2) Teaching what is true, but from a text in which that truth is not taught. This is the danger or eisegesis.

According to Bryan Chappell, "An expository sermon may be defined as a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text. The expository sermon uses the features of the text and its context to explain what that portion of the Bible means."¹

2. Expository Preaching brings Transformation

The goal of expository preaching is not merely to impart information but to provide the means of transformation ordained by a sovereign God that will affect the lives and destinies of eternal souls committed to a preacher's spiritual care.² The goal for every Christian is to be "growing and changing" into the image of Jesus Christ.

God's Word is authoritative over the lives of our hearers and He has ordained preaching as a means to transform

¹ Chapell, Bryan (2005-03-01). Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon (Kindle Locations 401-404). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

² Ibid.

people. Expository preaching is able to transform because it emphasizes God's mind and presses it upon the hearts of those He has created.

Preaching addresses the perpetual human quest for authority and meaning. Though we live in an age hostile to authority, everyday struggles for significance, security, and acceptance force every individual to ask, "Who has the right to tell me what to do?" This question, typically posed as a challenge, is really a plea for help. Without an ultimate authority for truth, all human striving has no ultimate value, and life itself becomes futile. Modern trends in preaching that deny the authority of the Word³ in the name of intellectual sophistication lead to a despairing subjectivism in which people do what is right in their own eyes— a state whose futility Scripture has clearly articulated (Judg. 21: 25).

3. Expository Preaching is Focused

The purpose in teaching a text must be the same as God's purpose in revealing it. Use a rifle, not a shotgun. Say what the text is saying. Emphasize and illustrate what is there. Emphasize the point of the text or passage - there should be a "big idea" in the text. Discover that and use the logical outflow to bring that one "big idea" to the minds of the hearers.

Mark Dever asks: "Does a commitment to expositional preaching mean that I should never preach other kinds of sermons? No. Topical and biographical sermons still have value. It is sometimes helpful to address a certain topic by culling and presenting Biblical information. And it is

³ David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 408.

sometimes instructive to study the life of a Biblical character and draw practical implications for today. The point is that, as a consistent diet, expositional preaching is most healthy for both the preacher and the congregation.”

So while often the most common expression of expository teaching and preaching is continuously expounding of a book of the Bible, that is not the only expression of expository teaching.

Dever goes on to say, “There are more ways to preach expositionally than plodding through one phrase or sentence at a time. The length of the text is immaterial to the question of whether or not the sermon is an exposition. As long as the point of the passage is used as the point of the message, a sermon qualifies as expositional—length notwithstanding.”

“The point of any Biblical text is to accomplish God’s purposes in the hearts and minds of God’s people. So if the sermon amounts to no more than a wordy commentary devoid of application, it has missed the bull’s eye at which true exposition always takes aim.”

“We may legitimately preach a single expositional sermon on the whole Bible, a whole testament, a whole book, a whole narrative or parable, one paragraph, one phrase, or a single word—as long as we are preaching the intended point of the selected meaning unit.”

We can be assured that we are being faithful expositors of the text of holy Scripture as long as the point of the sermon is the point of the text we are teaching.

4. Expository Preaching is Relevant

Your message must speak not merely to the “long ago and far away,” but to the here and now. God’s Word is relevant. 2

Tim. 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Expository preaching relates the need the passage was originally written to address to the current needs of modern day hearers.

Bryan Chappell asks: Why would a message organized around the following statements probably not go in the annals of preaching's greatest sermons? 1. The walls of Babylon were as much as 350 feet high and 80 feet wide. 2. The Gnostic heresy at Colosse contained elements of extreme hedonism and asceticism. 3. The Greek word for the "emptying" concept of Philippians 2:7 is *kenosis*.

The statements are clear, true, and biblical. Why do they not form a sermon?

First, the statements lack unity. No obvious thread holds these statements together. Without a unifying theme, listeners have no means of grasping a sermon's many thoughts.

Second, the statements seem to have no purpose. They are simply disparate facts pried from the biblical moorings that communicate their cause and import. Without a clear purpose in view, listeners have no apparent reason to listen to a sermon.

Finally, the statements beacon no application. They have no apparent relevance to the lives of those addressed. Without application, a sermon offers people no incentive to heed a message. Most will reasonably question why they should waste time giving attention to something that even the preacher does not seem to be able to relate to their lives.

Statements of truth, even biblical truth, do not automatically make a message for the pulpit. Well-constructed sermons require unity, purpose, and application.

5. Expository Preaching is Powerful

What is the difference between lecturing and preaching? Your goal is to equip your hearers to honor and serve the Lord. According to Eph. 4:12-13 pastors and teachers of the Word are "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The fact that the power for spiritual change resides in God's Word argues the case for expository preaching. Expository preaching attempts to present and apply the truths of a specific biblical passage.⁴

Consecutive Expository Preaching (Lectio Continuo)

Consecutive expository preaching is teaching through a book or section of Scripture. It is sometimes referred to as *Lectio Continuo* (continued reading or lecture, *Latin*). There are several advantages with consecutive expository preaching.

⁴ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 21. See further the definition below and in chap. 6.

Advantages with Consecutive Expository Preaching

Jim Newheiser gives six advantages for teaching through a passage or book of the Bible in an expository manner.

1. You and your hearers grasp the message of a book as a whole.
2. You will understand passages in their context.
3. Your preaching will have balance - covering the whole counsel of God.
4. You will be helped in avoiding hobby horses.
5. You can address delicate subjects more naturally.
6. You will teach your hearers how to handle the text for themselves.

Dangers with Consecutive Expository Preaching

Jim also give seven dangers in expository preaching:

1. Some expository preaching is monotonous - How should Leviticus be taught?
2. Consecutive preaching is not necessarily expository.
3. Expository preaching can lack balance.
4. Your messages could degenerate into a lecture or a running commentary.

5. It is still possible to ride hobby horses even if one is teaching consecutively through a book of the Bible.
6. Each sermon must be a complete unit, able to stand on its own.
7. Expository preachers can become rigid. The teacher/preacher must feel free to interrupt a series if there is a need.

Preaching with a Purpose

The Bible as a whole has a purpose. 2 Tim. 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Each book of the Bible has a purpose. See John 20:30-31, 1 John 5:13, Jude 3.

Even sections within books of the Bible have purposes, as do passages within sections.

There are different types of purposes. Some might be (1) to inform, (2) to persuade or convince, or (3) to motivate. A given text may have one or several purposes, but all teaching and preaching is meant to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-30).

A Unified Purpose

You will know you have a message from God's Word that is ready to deliver when:

- You can state your purpose in one clear sentence.
- Your purpose is derived from the purpose of the text.

- Every point (and subpoint) in your sermon contributes to your purpose.

Conculsion

Consciousness of God's enablement should encourage all preachers (including beginning preachers) to throw themselves wholeheartedly into their calling. Although the degree of homiletical skill will vary, God promises to perform his purposes through all who faithfully proclaim his truth. Even if your words barely crawl over the edge of the pulpit, love of God's Word and his people ensures an effective spiritual ministry. You may never hear the applause of the world or pastor a church of thousands, but a life of godliness combined with clear explanations of Scripture's saving and sanctifying grace will engage the power of the Spirit for the glory of God. If your goal is Christ's honor, you can be a great preacher through faithfulness to him and his message.

A Closing Promise

Paul offers this same encouragement to Timothy with promises that yet apply to you:

"Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching...¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4: 12– 13, 15– 16).

2

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS



“Interpreting the Bible is one of the most important issues facing Christians today. It lies behind what we believe, how we live, how we get on together, and what we have to offer to the world.”

JOHN BALCHIN



John Balchin rightly said, “Interpreting the Bible is one of the most important issues facing Christians today. It lies behind what we believe, how we live, how we get on together, and what we have to offer to the world.”⁵

Basic Rules of Interpretation

1. **Plain reading:** This is also called the grammatical historical method. The idea is to read the Bible in its plain sense. “If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense”.
2. **Christ-centered focus:** We also need to always keep in mind that the central theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ and all Scripture ultimately points to Him and speaks of Him – His person and His work.
3. **Illumination:** The interpreter needs to rely on the Holy Spirit for illumination. Therefore the interpreter must be born again before he can rightly interpret the Scripture.
4. **Context:** Interpret the Bible in light of itself (context). Understand the context in which a passage is mentioned.
5. **Clear interprets unclear:** Let the clear interpret the unclear passages of Scripture.
6. **New Testament Primary:** Let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament.
7. **Jesus is the Final Interpreter:** Remember all apostles get their teaching from Jesus and Jesus is greater than all the prophets of the OT. Being God and the author of Scripture, his teachings and

⁵ John Balchin. *Understanding Scripture* (Carol Stream, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981).

interpretations should be given ultimate pre-eminence in interpretation.

1. The Grammatical - Historical Method (Plain Reading of Scripture)

We could say, "if the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense." Inasmuch as God gave the Word of God as a revelation to men, it would be expected that His revelation would be given in such exact and specific terms that His thoughts would be accurately conveyed and understood when interpreted according to the laws of grammar and speech. Such presumptive evidence favors the literal or plain interpretation as opposed to an allegorical interpretation.

Allegory vs. Allegorical Interpretation

To understand what is meant by allegorical interpretation, we need to draw a clear distinction between that and plain allegory. Allegory is a figurative or symbolic representation referring to a meaning other than the literal one. Certain passages of Scripture contain allegory, as well as other figures of speech, which can be understood using the normal rules of interpretation. For example, Paul uses an allegory based on Hagar and Sarah (Galatians 4:21–31) to illustrate why the Galatians should not listen to the Judaizers.

Allegorical interpretation, on the other hand, involves looking for a symbolic or figurative meaning *beyond or instead of* the literal/historical one. One extreme example comes from Philo, where he interprets allegorically the cherubim guarding the entrance to Eden (Genesis 3:24) as

representing the two hemispheres of heaven (*On the Cherubim* 7–8).

Ordinary Common Usage

The plain method of interpretation is that method that gives to each word the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking.²⁵ It is called the grammatical-historical method to emphasize the fact that the meaning is to be determined by both grammatical and historical considerations.

Ramm defines the method thus: The customary, socially-acknowledged designation of a word is the literal meaning of that word. The "literal" meaning of a word is the basic, customary, social designation of that word. The spiritual, or mystical meaning of a word or expression is one that arises after the literal designation and is dependent upon it for its existence. To interpret literally means nothing more or less than to interpret in terms of normal, usual, designation. When the manuscript alters its designation the interpreter immediately shifts his method of interpreting.⁶

Evidence for the Literal or Plain Method

Strong evidence can be presented to support the literal or plain method of interpretation. Ramm gives a comprehensive summary. In defense of the literal approach it may be argued:

That the literal meaning of sentences is the normal approach in all languages.

⁶ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 64

That all secondary meanings of documents, parables, types, allegories and symbols, depend for their very existence on the previous literal meaning of the terms.

That the greater part of the Bible makes adequate sense when interpreted literally.

That the literalistic approach does not blindly rule out figures of speech, symbols, allegories and types; but if the nature of the sentence so demands, it readily yields to the second sense.

That this method is the only sane and safe check on the imaginations of man.

That this method is the only one consonant with the nature of inspiration. The plenary inspiration of the bible teaches that the Holy Spirit guided men into truth and away from error. In this process the Spirit of God used language and the units of language (as meaning, not as sound) are words and thoughts. The thought is the thread that strings the words together. Therefore, our very exegesis must commence with a study of words and grammar, the two fundamentals of all meaningful speech.⁷

Figures of Speech

We must be careful to also recognize that there are many figures of speech.

A **simile** is the likening of one thing to another (usually translated using the English words “like” or “as.” For instance Solomon praises his bride with lofty words of simile: “How beautiful you are, my darling, How beautiful you are! Your eyes are *like* doves behind your veil; Your hair is like a flock of goats that have descended from Mount

⁷ Ramm, Op. Cit., 54ff.

Gilead. 2 Your teeth are like a flock of *newly* shorn ewes which have come up from" (Song of Sol. 4:1-2). This is poetic language.

Or another example is from Jesus to the Pharisees: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean" (Mt. 23:27).

A **metaphor** is an implied comparison between two objects without the use of "like" or "as". It compares two items and gives the point of similarity, but differs from a simile in that the comparison is not made explicit (formal) by the use of words such as "like" or "as". Rather, the comparison is left inexplicit (direct). The two items being compared are apparently equated.

For example David says to YHWH, "But you are a should around me, O Lord; you bestow your glory on me and lift up my head (Psalm 3:3). Or Jesus says to His followers, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? (Mt. 5:13).

There are idioms of overstatement such as **hyperbole**. A hyperbole is an exaggeration to make or reinforce a point or a calculated overstatement. Exaggeration is deliberately used for effect.

Perhaps the most famous (and most misunderstood) hyperbole is found in Matt. 19:24 (Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25): "...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Another equally controversial is Jesus' words to His followers: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.

It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Mt. 5:29).

Matthew 19:12 is another, "For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

Origen of Alexandria, an early leader in Christian theology (most would call him heretical) took these words literally and had himself castrated. Understanding that our Lord was using a figure of speech would have spared Origen from bodily harm and historical embarrassment.

Euphemism is another important form figure of speech. A euphemism is the substitution of a cultured or less offensive term for a harsh one. The Bible contains many similar expressions, particularly in subjects concerning death, bodily functions and reproduction.

One example is **intercourse**. "Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain" (Gen. 4:1).

Another example is **death**. "After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." (John 11:11)

A **synecdoche** a figure of speech in which the part stands for the whole or the whole for the part.

David gives us an example in Psalm 24: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false" (Psa. 24:4). "Clean hands and a pure heart" stands for the whole person. Or here is

another: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father in heaven. (Matt 16:17). Flesh and blood are a part of all human beings, standing for a whole person.

Anthropomorphism is a figure of speech in which God describes himself as a man or even an animal in order to convey a truth about himself. He says in Psalms 17:8, "Keep me as the apple of the eye; Hide me in the shadow of Your wings." God doesn't have wings or feathers, but He does protect His people like a mother bird.

Job 36:32, "He covers His hands with the lightning, and commands it to strike the mark." God doesn't have physical hands ("God is a Spirit..."), yet he does have total sovereignty over the lightening.

Anthropopathism is used to refer to God's emotions. And even though God never changes and is not contingent, He is painted poetically as having emotions like mankind. God is a jealous God (Exod 20:5) who hates (Am 5:21) and becomes angry (Jer 7:20), but he also loves (Exod 20:6) and is pleased (Deu 28:63).

John Calvin said that "God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children" (*Institutes*, 1.13.1).

Seek the Plain Sense

So while there are many figures of speech, we should always seek the plain sense of the Bible, but not always the literal sense if it is a figure of speech. Yet, there are many

clues in the Bible (as in all literature) as to what is a mere figure of speech and what is not.

Remember to Respect Mystery

Remember there is mystery in the Bible. Often we may think certain concepts are contradictory, such as:

- Man's Responsibility vs. Election / Predestination
- The Bible's Divine and Human Authorship
- The Union of Christ's Two Natures
- The Trinity
- Etc.

Someone once said that looking at the truth of God's Word is like a gnat looking at a Mercedes Benz engine!

2. Christ is the Focal Point of Scripture

We must recognize the Christocentric focus of the Bible. The New Testament writers primarily viewed the Old Testament as Christological documents. In other words, they understood the Hebrew Scriptures as ultimately pointing to the person of Christ and the redemptive-historical fulfillment that He would bring.

As Martin Luther once said, “If you will interpret well and securely, take Christ with you, for He is the man whom everything concerns.”

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy

The Chicago Statement on this:

WE AFFIRM that the Person and work of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible.

WE DENY that any method of interpretation which rejects or obscures the Christ-centeredness of Scripture is correct.

This affirmation follows the teaching of Christ that He is the central theme of Scripture (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Heb. 10:7). This is to say that focus on the person and work of Christ runs throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. To be sure there are other and tangential topics, but the person and work of Jesus Christ are central.

Scripture Points to a Christocentric Hermeneutic

The following verses bring the necessity of seeing Christ in all of Scripture:

- “And He took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished’” (Luke 18:31).
- “And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27).
- “Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’” (Luke 24:44).
- “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’” (John 1:45).
- “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me” (John 5:46).

- “And so, because he [David] was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay” (Acts 2:30-31).
- “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18).
- “Of Him all the prophets bear witness . . .” (Acts 10:43).
- “And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ”” (Acts 17:2-3).
- “And all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4).
- “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (1 Peter 1:10-11).

The Larger Story of the Bible

This doesn't mean that every text of Scripture in the Old Testament speaks directly or explicitly of Him; rather, that every text of Scripture within the Hebrew Bible is part of the one story which has its ultimate focus in Him.

As the late New Testament scholar, F.F. Bruce, has written: "In Jesus the promise is confirmed, the covenant is renewed, the prophecies are fulfilled, the law is vindicated, salvation is brought near, sacred history has reached its climax, the perfect sacrifice has been offered and accepted, the great High Priest over the household of God has taken His seat at God's right hand, the Prophet like Moses has been raised up, the Son of David reigns, the kingdom of God has been inaugurated, the Son of Man has received dominion from the Ancient of Days, the Servant of the Lord, having been smitten to death for His people's transgression and borne the sin of many, has accomplished the divine purpose, has seen light after the travail of His soul and is now exalted and extolled and made very high."⁸

Typology in the Bible

Typology is a method of biblical interpretation whereby an element found in the Old Testament is seen to prefigure one found in the New Testament. The initial one is called the *type* and the fulfillment is designated the *antitype*. Either type or antitype may be a person, thing, or event, but often the type is messianic and frequently related to the idea of salvation.

⁸ F.F. Bruce. *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes*, p.21.

There are various kinds of types presented in the Old Testament. Chief among these are the historical type, the legal type and the prophetic type.

Historical types

People in the Old Testament frequently are seen to be types of Christ. For instance, Moses, who led God's people out of slavery in Egypt and into the rest of the Promised Land, is clearly a type for God's Messiah, who leads his people out of slavery to sin and into the rest of the New Earth. A host of Old Testament characters can be seen, in this manner, to act as types of Christ, such as:

- Adam, whose sin brought death to all (see Jesus in Romans 5 as the second Adam)
- David, God's anointed yet unrecognised King (Acts 2)
- Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews, foreshadowing Christ
- The church is called the "temple" of living stones who are to offer "spiritual sacrifices"
- etc.

We may also include in this category some of the non-human 'characters' of Biblical history: for example, the rock struck by Moses in sin yet bringing forth streams of life-giving water (Numbers 20:1-13), or the Temple in Jerusalem.

Legal types

Within the Law of Moses, many sacrifices, offerings and rituals were prescribed by God as the worship to be given by Israel. These sacrifices pointed forward, in different ways, to the one Sacrifice to be offered on the Cross for the sins of all God's people.

Prophetic types

Imagery occurs frequently in the prophets and other prophecies contained in Scripture. For instance, the promise of Genesis 3:15 is cast in terms of the struggle between men and serpents, and yet it contains the Gospel, as the Seed of the woman crushes the head of the Serpent once and for all on the Cross; it is for this reason that this verse is called the Protevangelium.

3. The Need for the Holy Spirit in Interpretation

No one can fully comprehend the meaning of the Bible unless he/she is regenerated (born again). The unsaved person is spiritually blind (2 Cor. 4:4) and dead (Eph 2:2, 1 Cor 2:14).

"In order to appreciate and use the Bible, the reader of it must himself have the the same spirit which enabled its writers to understand their revelation of God and to record it. The Bible is a record, but it is not a dead record of dead persons and events, but a record inspired by the living Spirit who uses it to speak to men now... It is the medium through which the living God now makes himself known. But to find in it the Spirit of God the reader must himself have that Spirit."⁹

"The first spiritual qualification of the interpreter is that he is born again."¹⁰

Angus and Green state, "This first principle of Bible interpretation is taken from the Bible itself. It occupies the

⁹ Marcus Dods, *The Nature and Origin of the Bible*, 102.

¹⁰ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 13.

same place, too, in the teaching of our Lord, who, in the first recorded discourse, assured Nicodemus that ‘except a man be born again, he cannot see’—can neither understand the nature nor share the blessedness—of the kingdom of God.”¹¹

Reliance Upon the Holy Spirit

The interpreter's role does not mean that one's interpretations are infallible. Inerrancy and infallibility are characteristics of the Bible's original manuscripts, but not of the Bible's interpreters.

The work of the Holy Spirit in interpretation does not mean that He gives some interpreters a “hidden” meaning divergent from the norm, literal meaning of the passage.

A Christian who is living in sin is susceptible to making inaccurate Bible interpretations because his heart and mind are not in harmony with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit guides into all truth (John 16:13). The word “guide” means “to lead the way or guide along the way or road.”

The place of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Bible means that He does not normally give sudden intuitive flashes of insight into the meaning of scripture. Many passages are readily understood, but the meaning of others may come to light only gradually as the result of careful study.

The Spirit's role in interpretation means that the Bible was given to be understood by all believers. Its interpretation is not in the hands of an elite few scholars.

Milton Terry gives some further insight: “The expounder of the Holy Scriptures needs to have living fellowship and

¹¹ Cyclopedic Handbook, 179.

communion with the Holy Spirit. Inasmuch as “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), and the sacred writers spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21), the interpreter of Scripture must be a partaker of the same Holy Spirit.

He must, by a profound experience of the soul, attain the saving knowledge of Christ, and in proportion to the depth and fullness of that experience he will know the life and peace of the “mind of the Spirit” (Rom. 6:6). “We speak God's wisdom in a mystery,” says Paul (1 Cor. 2:7-11), the hidden spiritual wisdom of a divinely illuminated heart...”

“He, then, who would know and explain to others “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11) must enter into blessed communion and fellowship with the Holy One. He should never cease to pray (Eph. 1:17, 18) “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give him the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the full knowledge [exegesis] of him, the eyes of his heart being enlightened for the purpose of knowing what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe.”¹²

4. Always Interpret in Context

We must interpret the Bible in light of itself (**context**). The interpreter must understand the context in which a passage is mentioned. Someone once said, “A text without a context is always a pretext.” A pretext is simply something you add to the text that is not there already. We all know

¹² Milton S Terry. *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testament* (London: Wipf & Stock Publications, 1999).

people who add their own ideas to the Bible. We must avoid this practice of eisegesis.

The Analogy of Faith

In other words, the Bible is the best commentary on the Bible. The Bible interprets itself. This is also referred to by theologians as the "analogy of faith." The Bible is analogical – different texts speak to the same issues, thus modifying and reinforcing each other as they present a unified message.

What God means to teach us in a specific passage cannot be understood apart from everything else the author teaches us. And what God teaches us in a specific passage may not be disconnected from all that God says in the whole of Scripture.

Dangers of the Analogy of Faith

It is good to interpret Scripture with Scripture, but we must be careful we do not equate the analogy of faith with our own particular theological system.

This conclusion is confirmed by what Matthaeus Flacius (a Lutheran) said about the analogy of faith in his *Key to the Scriptures* (first published in 1567), the first hermeneutics book to emerge from the Reformation. According to Flacius,

“Every understanding and exposition of Scripture is to be in agreement with the faith. Such [agreement] is, so to speak, the norm or limit of a sound faith, that we may not be thrust over the fence into the abyss by anything, either by a storm from without or by an attack from within (Rom. 12:6). For everything that is said concerning Scripture, or on the

basis of Scripture, must be in agreement with all that the catechism declares or that is taught by the articles of faith."¹³

The Seeming Contradiction of Paul and James

For example Paul and James seem to have contradictory teaching on faith and works. Yet if the passages are used to complement each other, we find that Paul is taking an angle where he warns against legalism - Abraham is brought to salvation by faith alone. James takes another angle where he gives us the balance, that "faith without works is dead." Or as the Reformers used to say, "We are saved by faith alone, but faith that saves is never alone."

Context: "woven together"

The word "context" consists of two parts: *con* means "together" and *textus* means "woven." Context means to be woven together. Kaiser says context is the "connection of thought that runs through a passage, those links that weave it into one piece."¹⁴

To interpret contextually, the student of the Bible sees the Bible (in part or in whole) in its entire setting (literary, historical, cultural, etc.). "In Scripture the context provides the situation behind the text."¹⁵

In every respect, the contextual interpretation includes every other aspect of hermeneutics, seeing that it includes the historical and grammatical setting.

¹³ Quoted by Kemmel, *History of Investigation*, 30

¹⁴ Kaiser, *Towards an Exegetical Theology*, 71.

¹⁵ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 19.

The Context of the Whole Bible

What are the steps to good contextual interpretation? We must see the passage as part of the whole (Bible). The Bible as a whole has a message: the redemptive plan of Jesus Christ to save sinners. We must always remember that the locale or habitat of any passage of Scripture is the total Scripture. We can interpret a specific passage only when we understand the overall message of the whole. "All theological interpretation of Scripture is a rotation or 'spiraling' from the part to the whole, and whole to part."¹⁶

A good tool for understanding the context of the whole Bible on a particular subject is a systematic theology as well as various books that trace a specific subject through the entire Bible or a book of the Bible, i.e. Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*; Lloyd-Jones book on *Spiritual Depression*; *Books on Progressive Sanctification*, etc.

The Context of Each Testament

We must see the passage as part of the Testament it is a part of, whether Old or New. Augustine said, "In the Old Testament the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament the Old Testament is revealed."

According to Bernard Ramm: "Each Testament has unique features of its own...The interpreter comes to the Old Testament or the New Testament with the proper mind set which corresponds to the essence, the composition, the peculiar historical configuration, the place in the progress of divine revelation, of the Testament."¹⁷

¹⁶ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 139.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Thus, progressive revelation must be taken into account—to some degree. **Progressive revelation** is the teaching that God has revealed himself and his will through the Scriptures with an increasing clarity as more and more of the Scriptures were written. In other words, the later the writing the more information is given.

Because of the progressive nature of revelation man sees different aspects of God's plan, but the kernel truth of salvation is present throughout the writings of the Bible. God is a God of salvation desiring that all humankind repent and be saved (Eze 18:32; 1 Tim 2:3, 4).¹⁸

The Context of the Author and Recipients

We must determine the intention of the writer (Paul, Moses, Luke, etc.). We must determine the purpose, outline, and overall theme of the book. For example, one must know the Galatian heresy to interpret the book of Galatians properly

The context of the book must direct the interpreter's mindset when coming to a certain passage. It gives him moorings. We must determine the flow of narrative or argument of major section. That which goes before and after a passage give the parameters and horizon by which one interprets. We must trace the material and argument to and from the text. This is the framework for understanding.

We must determine the relationships of the immediate context—often by diagramming or propositional displays. For instance, the book of 1 John is written as a warning against Gnostic false believers. It is written to give evidence

¹⁸ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (p. 1884). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

as to what a true Christian looks like. Once this is discovered, one can list the evidences listed by John. I have found 11 evidences of the new birth in the book of 1 John, and I would outline the book that way.

We must determine the meaning of the specific passage by word study, grammar and semantic classes (verbs, nouns, adverbs, etc). For instance, John 1:18, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." The phrase "has made Him known" is very important. Here is an expert of a word study from the Logos Bible Software.

Jesus literally exegetes (ἐξηγέομαι *exēgeomai*) the Father. He explains Him; He makes Him known; describes; to shows the way. The Strongs number is **1834. ἐξηγέομαι *exēgeomai***; which means - to declare thoroughly and particularly.

(I) To unfold, reveal, make known, as a teacher (John 1:18 [cf. Matt. 11:27; Sept.: Lev. 14:57]). **(II)** To tell, narrate, account (Luke 24:35; Acts 10:8; 15:12, 14; 21:19; Sept.: Judg. 7:13). From this verb comes the Eng. word "exegesis," the unfolding interpretation through teaching of Scripture.

Syn.: *diasaphéō* (1285), to make clear; *phaneróō* (5319), to manifest. **Ant.:** *krúptō* (2928), to hide.¹⁹

¹⁹ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

5. The Clear Interprets the Unclear

The Clarity of Scripture

Wayne Grudem wisely noted: "The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God's help and being willing follow it."²⁰ This does not mean there are no unclear places in the Bible. It means all the major doctrines in the Bible are clear. Whatever is unclear should be interpreted in light of the clear.

Hebrews 6 Example

For example, in Hebrews 6, the Bible seems to teach that true Christians can lose their salvation. Yet the Bible also teaches that whatever Christ starts in a child of God, He will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6). How do we interpret these two seemingly conflicting statements?

If we look in context we find that the Jewish Christians in the book of Hebrews were well taught as well as living in connection with the Word of God, fellowship, and the power of the Holy Spirit, just like all Christians do. Yet, these people fall away and cannot be renewed to repentance. Paul gives us a hint in Hebrews 6:9, "Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation." In other words, true Christians don't fall away. The rest of the Bible warns us of false Christians with fake fruit (cf. Mt. 7:21-23; 2 Tim. 3:5, "having a form of godliness but denying the power...").

²⁰ Wayne Grudem. Systematic Theology, 108.

All Foundational Doctrines are Clear

A. A. Hodge says: "Protestants do not affirm that that the doctrines revealed in the in the Scriptures are level to man's powers of understanding. Many of them are confessedly beyond all understanding. Nor do they affirm that every part of Scripture can by certainly and perspicuously expounded, many of the prophecies being perfectly enigmatical until explained by the event. But they do affirm that every essential article of faith and rule of practice is clearly revealed in Scripture, or may be certainly deduced from therefrom. This much the least instructed Christian may learn at once; while, on the other hand, it is true, that with advance of historical and critical knowledge, and by the means of controversies, the Christian church is constantly making progress in the accurate interpretation of Scripture, and in the comprehension in its integrity of the system therein taught."²¹

Explicit Scriptural Statements

The clarity of Scripture is assumed by the fact that all Christians are commanded to search the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15, 17; Acts 17:11; John 5:39).

The clarity of Scripture is explicitly asserted in Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." It is also stated in Psalm 119: 130; 2 Cor. 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:18, 19; Hab. 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:15, 17 - "profitable").

It is also assumed by the fact that the Scriptures are addressed either to all men generally or to whole congregation of believers (Deut. 6:4-9; Luke 1:3; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 4:2; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2;

²¹ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 85.

James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 Jn. 2:12, 14; Jude 1; Rev. 1:3, 4; 2:7).

6. The New Testament Interprets the Old

Let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament. As we mentioned, Augustine was famous for saying The New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament.

Jesus said, "For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Mt. 13:17). Jesus in the New Testament revealed what even the prophets and other Old Testament righteous men did not understand.

The church is built on the foundation of the New Testament "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20).

7. Jesus is the Final Interpreter

Remember all apostles get their teaching from Jesus and Jesus is greater than all the prophets of the OT. Being God and the author of Scripture, his teachings and interpretations should be given ultimate pre-eminence in interpretation. Consider Paul's admonition to Timothy: "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing" (1 Tim. 6:3-4).

For example there are many end-times views that differ depending on the text one emphasises. Are there several resurrections or one general resurrection? Jesus teaches that there is one resurrection (Matthew 25). In coming to a text,

it is the author's recommendation that the expositor ought to begin with Jesus, since He taught the apostles, and He is the One all the prophets wrote of.

Never Interpret Scripture Based on Experience

We might add that we should never interpret Scripture based on our own experiences. The point of Bible study is not to shape Scripture to agree with your subjective opinions or your experiences. Feelings lie. Emotions lie. Instead, discover God's timeless truth and let it shape your life. Study the Bible with an open heart and invite God to conform you to his will.

Homework Exercise

Take Home Quiz

For your homework, please use the Appendix and locate the study guide for Quiz 1 (based on chapters 1 and 2). You will be emailed the quiz this week. Please bring the quiz with you and turn it at our next class session.

3

INTRODUCTION TO HOMILETICS



*“Homiletics is a manifestation of the Incarnate Word,
from the Written Word, by the spoken word.”*

BERNARD LORD MANNING



“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). As a result, you can be confident that the Word of God is the sufficient source of wisdom and practical instruction.

What is "Homiletics?"

We have already learned that hermeneutics is the science of Bible interpretation. Homiletics is taking the timeless truth of Scripture (gained through hermeneutical study) and presenting it in practical form to God's people.

Teaching the Scriptures in a practical way is an exciting task! The Word of God will never cease to give up riches to the one who faithfully pursues the knowledge of it, coupled with obedience to it. Should you live a hundred lifetimes, you could not exhaustively plumb its depths.

"Nobody ever outgrows Scripture: the book widens and deepens with our years." - Charles Spurgeon

Ezra's Example

Though the Bible is not intended to be a homiletics textbook, it indicates valid tools for communication that we should consider valuable for preaching. We do not have to guess whether Scripture validates illustrative declaration of God's Word. Today's practice of homiletics is seen in Ezra 8:8. "They read from the Book of the Law of God and [Ezra and others] clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage" (NLT).

Paul says: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was

well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21, NASB).

Homiletics Defined

We derive the word "homiletics" from the Greek word *homileo*, which means "to converse, to talk with, to engage in conversation, to speak."²²

The most common definition of homiletics is "the art of preaching," but some expand this to "the art of preparing and delivering sermons."

G. Campbell Morgan takes a far more dynamic approach and defines preaching as "'the declaration of the grace of God to human need on the authority of the throne of God; and it demands on the part of those who hear that they show obedience to the thing declared."²³

Consider Bernard Manning's definition of homiletics: "a manifestation of the Incarnate Word, from the Written Word, by the spoken word."²⁴

Haddon Robinson develops a more comprehensive definition of homiletics in expository preaching as "the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers."²⁵ Note how Robinson one of the most vi-

²² Chapell, Bryan (2005-03-01). *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Kindle Locations 1773-1774). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

²³ G. Campbell Morgan. *Preaching* (Fleming H. Revell: Grand Rapids, MI, 1974), 12.

²⁴ Bernard Lord Manning. *A Layman in the Ministry* (Independent Press: Summit, NJ, 1942) 138.

²⁵ Haddon W. Robinson. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Baker: Grand Rapids, MI, 2001), 20.

tal element of hermeneutics - that the preacher is merely an instrument of the Holy Spirit. Before stating his definition, he wisely observes that "preaching is a living process involving God, the preacher, and the congregation, and no definition can pretend to [fully] capture that dynamic."²⁶

Pay Careful Attention to Your Life

You have been called to work hard at developing the gifts God has given you to proclaim the Word of God. It takes a lot of watchfulness and hard work.

1 Tim. 4:14-16, "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."

The Word of God is sufficient to guide and train you in your Christian life, and provide you with truth that through the Holy Spirit's unction you can impart with life transforming power to those who hear you.

Remember the words of Paul to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."

²⁶ Ibid., 19.

Before You Start

Before You Begin Crafting Your Message

Remember your preparation is vital. God has given you as a gift to His church that you might build His people up and equip them for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). Your words are powerful. If you teach, your words will either be life and health to some or will be like a disease and a fire (cf. Jas. 3:1-12; Eze. 22:23-28).

Begin with Prayer

In light of who we are and what we are trying to do, we should not pray just because we think it would be good to pray, but rather because it is necessary to pray. This cannot be overlooked or taken for granted. The words we give to God's people will be dead words unless the Spirit of God makes them alive to their ears. Jesus said, "Without Me, you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5).

Consider the prayers of the psalmist in Psalm 119 as a model. "Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes!... I shall keep Your statutes; Do not forsake me utterly!" (vv. 5, 8).

"With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments." (v. 10)

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law" (v. 18; cf. also Eph 1:18-19).

"Teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts.... Remove the false way from me, and graciously grant me Your law" (vv. 26b-27, 29).

Continue praying as you prepare. Pray while you study. At times you will need to put away the books and pray through the passage you are getting ready to teach.

Renew Your Heart in Purity

You cannot ever hope to understand the Word of God unless you deal with and repent from the sin in your life beforehand. You must never live life with unconfessed sin in your heart, and you certainly must never enter the pulpit with a double mind or a conflicted heart.

"Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21).

"Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord" (Psa. 24:3-5, NASB).

Preach Out of the Overflow

As you begin your sermon preparation, remember studying is not an end in itself. There is a purpose for the study. You are not a spiritual a cul de sac. Personally apply the things you learn. You ought to preach out of the overflow of your walk with God. The sermon is not a lecture to be enumerated, but a revelation to be declared, applied, and exulted in. Remember James 1:22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers." Seek to be an encouragement to others with what you learn. You are to teach others what God is teaching you.

Know Your Audience

Preaching, if it is to meet its objective of changing people's lives, must connect with people's lives to be effective. To be effective it must be both well presented and

relevant to the listeners. A common complaint one hears from congregation members is 'the preacher is forever answering questions no one is asking!' This is a fair and relevant complaint. Audience need is a legitimate concern. However, it becomes a problem if we allow audience need to become a prime determinant of sermon content.

Consecutive expository preaching through a book or section of Scripture is the preferred method of preaching, but it does not preclude knowing one's audience. The Word of God was not given us as an instruction manual for life (though it is sufficient to address all of life and instruct us in godliness); instead, the Bible is a revelation of the living God designed to take the holy Word of God, through the Holy Spirit of God and transform people into the holy Son of God. In other words, one of preaching's loftiest goals is to help people to grow and change into the image of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship is Central

With this in mind, it is important to note that preaching is just one aspect of Christ's mandate to "make disciples of all nations." The idea is not just teaching by instructing and "guarding the deposit" given to us, but also keeping watch over our lives and living out and demonstrating the principles of truth we are teaching. This means that normally (unless one is an evangelist) the teacher is going to someone in the church, perhaps a pastor, an elder, a minister, or a Bible teacher that is modeling the truth with his godly conduct. This is the true model of discipleship.

Follow the Biblical Motifs in the Bible

Before you begin crafting your message, keep in mind the overall themes of the Bible. There is one God. The Bible has one Creator. It is one book. It has one plan of grace, recorded from initiation, through execution, to consummation. From predestination to glorification, the Bible is the story of God redeeming His elect people for the praise of His glory.

As God's redemptive purpose and plan unfold in Scripture, five recurring motifs are constantly emphasized:

1. The character of God
2. The judgment for sin and disobedience upon humanity
3. Jesus Christ as Savior and sacrifice for sin
4. The blessing for faith and obedience
5. Christ's present and coming Kingdom and glory

As you pursue a better understanding of the Scriptures, keep these basic motifs in mind. In all your reading, ask yourself what the passage is teaching you about the nature and attributes of God Himself. Watch for consistent themes of judgment for disobedience and blessings for obedience. Apply the truths found in the Word to your life and learn how to obey more consistently. Always remember who effected your salvation, and rejoice in the fact that someday He will return for you.

Have a Good Grasp on Systematic Theology

Another method to know the major themes of the Bible is to study and grasp a healthy systematic theology. There are many exceptional modern systematic theologians such as: Wayne Grudem, John Frame, Robert Reymond as well as

more classical dogmatic theologians such as A. A. Hodge and William Shedd. Of course we must also mention one of the foundational systematic classics of the reformation: John Calvin's Institutes.

Calvin's Institutes are structured around the Apostle's Creed, but more modern systematicians use nine general categories which are extremely helpful for the Expositor when he comes to his text. The nine categories are:

1. Bibliology – Study of the Bible
2. Theology Proper – Study of God
3. Christology – Study of Christ
4. Pneumatology – Study of Holy Spirit
5. Angelology – Study of Angels
6. Anthropology – Study of Mankind
7. Hamartology – Study of Sin
8. Soteriology – Study of Salvation
9. Ecclesiology – Study of the Church
10. Eschatology – Study of End Times

Crafting Your Message

1. Examine the Passage

Read the text. As much as possible, try and understand the author's intent in what he is writing. Familiarize yourself with as much of the surrounding context as possible. With an epistle, this would include the whole book. With a psalm, this would include the whole psalm. With an Old Testament or New Testament narrative, this would include the full section in which your passage is found. Familiarize yourself

as much as possible with the specific text you want to study. John MacArthur has mentioned that for some texts he's read a book of the Bible once a day for thirty days in preparation (he did this before he preached through the book of Matthew). As you read, you will want to note major themes, content and context, truths to remember, questions to research, and possible applications to your own life.

2. Meditate on the Passage

The only way to be effective in a sermon is to soak up the truth of the passage ahead of time. We are not giving a lecture, so it is vital you preach and teach with the enthusiasm that comes from personal experience and first hand testimony. You must meditate "day and night" on the law of the Lord as Psalm 1 commands.

In your study and meditation, when God gives you a thought, or you come across an insight or truth, write it down. Don't just do this during formal study time, but meditate on the passage and go through it in your own mind during spare moments in your day. It might be getting dressed in the morning or drifting to sleep at night. Preach to yourself. But be sure to not lose the thoughts God gives you. I have found it helpful to have my smart phone nearby during these times so that I can jot my thoughts down.

3. Make Observations

Observe the passage, and consider it's plain meaning. Observing the passage in it's plain meaning is to take what is said in the verse or passage at face value. This is important because it establishes two very important aspects of Bible study. Never try to put your preconceived notions into the

text. This will force us to limit our interpretations to what is actually said in the text, avoiding subjective interpretation based on “what this verse says to me.”

Observe the passage comprehensively/connectedly. There is a unity of the passage to the rest of the Bible. Nothing in Scripture is going to operate in a vacuum. No truth or message at one point in the Scriptures will contradict a truth at another point.

For example, whenever a later writer refers to Noah, we know what that entails, and no writer will say that the events did not occur or contradict the passage already revealed and recorded from an earlier time period.

RESEARCH THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Historical Narrative

Know the people involved in your passage. For historical narrative, ask yourself: who is/are the main character(s)? Try to describe each character as fully as possible with the information that is given. For example, we could research the historical context of Luke 10:38-42 in the following way:

There are three main characters in this passage:

1. Jesus Christ

- a. He was travelling with the disciples (v. 38), He entered a certain village (v. 38), and He was welcomed by Martha (v. 38).
- b. He was speaking or teaching (v. 39), and He was sitting (v. 39).
- c. He responded to Martha's question (vv. 41-42).

2. Martha

- a. She welcomed Jesus Christ (v. 38), and the house is said to be hers (v. 38).
 - b. She had a sister named Mary (v. 39).
 - c. She was distracted with all her preparations (v. 40), asked Jesus a question (v. 40), and understood His authority (v. 40).
 - d. She is described as being worried about many things (v. 41).
3. Mary
- a. She was Martha's sister.
 - b. She was listening to the Lord's words, seated at His feet (v. 39).
 - c. She chose the "good part" (v. 42).

The Epistles

Consider the book of Ephesians. Who is the author? Who is/are the recipients of the epistle?

- 1. Author: Paul
 - a. He was an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (1:1).
 - b. He saw himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus (3:1).
 - c. He was a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles (3:7-8).
 - d. He was the very least of all saints (3:8).
- 2. Recipients: Believers in Ephesus
 - a. Called "saints" (1:1).
 - b. Called "faithful" (1:1).
 - c. Described to be "in Ephesus" (1:1).

Geographical Setting

Know the place or geographical setting of the text you are preaching. For example, Paul wrote Ephesians during his 1st imprisonment. Paul wrote 2 Timothy from Rome during his 2nd imprisonment right before his death. David wrote Psalm 63 from the wilderness of Judah.

Know the Chronology

1. First Peter was written around the time of the reign of Nero.
2. The events of Mark 3:13-5:43 all occurred during one day.

Know the Cultural Context

1. Paul's prison in 2 Timothy was a sewage storage tank. When the prison cell was full, the guards would open the sewage inlet and have the cell filled with sewage.
2. Women and children during the time of 1 Peter had no rights of their own. Women were treated as property.

Analyze the Text: Words and Phrases

The passage you are studying will contain clues that aid in your overall understanding of the verse(s). These clues are found in the specific words and phrases of the passage which must be examined in order to gain a solid grasp on the passage as a whole.

There are four key grammatical elements to identify in your passage: key words, synonyms/antonyms, repeated

terms, and key phrases. A key word is a word which, if removed, leaves the passage devoid of meaning. Synonyms are different words that have the same basic meaning (like large and big, sin and transgression). Antonyms are words whose meanings are opposites of one another (like big and small, life and death. Repetition is a signal of possible significance. Key phrases are phrases that appear repeatedly or which are significant. For instance, the phrase "in Christ" is found many times in the book of Ephesians.

Consider Biblical Cross-References

A cross-reference is another passage of Scripture that gives added information about the issue in the passage being studied. Why use cross-references? Because the greatest interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself (the analogy of Scripture). Because it gives a broader understanding of Scripture. No biblical truth is isolated from the rest of Scripture.

John MacArthur said, "People love to see the big picture. They want to know how everything fits together. It is sometimes difficult for them to grasp a truth presented in isolation.... Cross-references help sink truths deeply into your people's consciousness." The parts take on meaning in light of the whole. Donald Grey Barnhouse said, "You very rarely have to go outside of the Bible to explain anything in the Bible." R. C. Sproul rightly said, "No part of Scripture can be interpreted in such a way as to render it in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture." This is where cross-referencing allows the clear to interpret the unclear.

Consult Commentaries

Commentaries can be extremely helpful in interpreting a passage. Understand the benefits of commentaries. The study of commentaries allows us to profit from the in-depth study and scholarship of others. It helps us to come at the text from a different viewpoint. It helps us to check the results of our study. Commentaries also show us areas we have left out in our study.

But also we need to recognize the dangers of commentaries. They can become a crutch for not studying the Scriptures ourselves. Therefore, they should be used as the last step. They are not infallible and thus can have interpretations that are not correct. They sometimes skip over what appear to be crucial issues and questions.

4. Determine the Proposition of Your Message

The proposition is a single statement which expresses the main idea or central theme of your message. Jay Adams said, "Until you can capsuleize the purpose of the sermon in one crisp sentence, you probably do not yet have it clearly fixed enough in your own mind—even if you think you do."

Henry Jowett said, "No sermon is ready until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence. I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written until that sentence has emerged."

The proposition answers the following questions: What is the point of my message? What is the essence of what I plan to communicate? The main idea can sometimes be found in: A single statement, idea, or phrase in the passage

The Proposition Functions as the Central Theme

The proposition should function as the central theme of all that you have to say. For example, if you conclude that the main idea of 1 Peter 1:13-21 is that believers are to live holy lives, everything that you say when you teach this passage (including your introduction, main points, subpoints, illustrations, and conclusion) should be designed to support this central theme in some way.

If the proposition does not function as the central theme of all that you have to say, either your proposition does not properly reflect the text, or your message is straying from the text to some degree.

Proposition Must be Audience Oriented

The propositional statement ought to be directed at your hearers (i.e., audience-oriented). In other words, your proposition should be biblical, but it should also reflect the fact that you are communicating to people in the here and now. For this reason, a distinction can be made between an exegetical outline and a homiletical outline.

Example of Proposition

For example, the proposition of Matthew 14:13-36 is "We need to experience the powerful touch of Jesus." The exegetical outline was:

1. The disciples experienced the touch of Jesus in ministry when Jesus fed the 5000.
2. Peter experienced the touch of Jesus when he was allowed to walk on water with the Lord.
3. Everyone experienced the touch of Jesus when the boat landed at Genessaret and the people touched the hem of Jesus' garment.

The points for the homeletical outline are: "We need to experience the powerful touch of Jesus 1. in ministry, 2. personally, 3. with everyone. The introduction and conclusion supported this premise.

Notice that all the points being made are drawn from the propositional statement.

Homework Exercise

For homework this week, please answer the following questions and be ready to discuss them in our next class.

1. Create a one sentence propositional statement for Ephesians 2:1-10.
2. What is the theme of the book of Ephesians?
3. What is the general structure of the book of Ephesians?
4. How does chapter 2 of Ephesians fit into the message of the book as a whole?
5. How does the theme of the book of Ephesians fit with the entire redemptive theme of the whole Bible?

4

THE HOMILETICAL OUTLINE



"No sermon is ready until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence. I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written until that sentence has emerged."

HENRY JOWETT



“For most people in our culture, the Bible is an opaque book whose truths are hidden in an endless maze of difficult words, unfamiliar history, unpronounceable names, and impenetrable mysticism.”²⁷ This situation and a preacher’s calling obligate every expositor to lead people through this labyrinth so that they confront God’s words for their lives. The best preachers, however, guide in such a way that their listeners discover that the labyrinth is a myth. There are no dark passageways through twisted mazes of logic to biblical truth that require the expertise of the spiritually elite.²⁸

Cutting a Clear Pathway

According to 2 Timothy 2:15, we need to clearly explain the way of Scripture to the congregation. Paul said, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (NASB). The idea of “accurately handling means to “clear the way” or “cut a straight line” like a person who cuts the clear pathway through a dense trail with a machete.

We are to accurately handle God’s Word. It could be translated “rightly laying out the word of truth.” Each passage of Scripture has a message and as a faithful expositor, we are to cut a clear pathway so God’s Word can be distinctly understood. This is why each message that is preached should have a goal or an aim. What is the purpose of the message. A propositional statement for the sermon is absolutely necessary to cut the Word straight.

²⁷ Chapell, *Kindle Locations* 1920-1921.

²⁸ John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. J. B. Weatherspoon (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 157.

The Propositional Statement

Determine the Proposition of Your Message

Jay Adams wisely said, “Until you can capsule the purpose of the sermon in one crisp sentence, you probably do not yet have it clearly fixed enough in your own mind—even if you think you do.”

Henry Jowett said, “No sermon is ready until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence. I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written until that sentence has emerged.”²⁹

The proposition answers the following questions: What is the point of my message? What is the essence of what I plan to communicate?

What is the Propositional Statement?

The proposition is a single statement which expresses the main idea or central theme of your message. The main idea can sometimes be found in a single statement, idea, or phrase in the passage. It can also be found in recurring statements, ideas or phrases in the passage.

The Proposition Might be a Direct Statement

For example, what is the main idea of 1 John 2:15-17, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is

²⁹ Sidney Greidanus. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 286.

from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

What do you think? All that follows “Do not love the world” is an explanation of this command. So the propositional statement can be simply: “Do not love the world.”

The Proposition Might be a Recurring Theme

Or the proposition may be a recurring theme, such as the book of Ecclesiastes. The theme of Ecclesiastes is “Life without God (or Christ) is meaningless.” So each section of the book has a propositional statement that reflects this. It rarely works out this way, but this particular book of the Bible is helpful to demonstrate the point.

Example: Outline of Ecclesiastes

As you browse the outline of Ecclesiastes, notice how each section of Scripture has a propositional statement related to the whole. Remember the theme of the entire book of Ecclesiastes is “Life without God (or Christ) is meaningless. The theme verse is: Eccl. 12:13, “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty [*or purpose*] of all mankind.” We might paraphrase the verse in this way: the whole purpose of man is to have an active faith in the Lord. All else is meaningless. You’ll notice the entire content of Ecclesiastes revolves around this statement. You’ll also notice the first six chapters are generally negative while the last six are generally positive.

I. The Meaningless Life (ch. 1-6)

1. Life without Christ is Meaningless 1:1-8
2. Knowledge without Christ is Meaningless 1:9-18
3. Pleasure without Christ is Meaningless 2:1-10
4. Work without Christ is Meaningless 2:11-26
5. Events without Christ is Meaningless 3:1-15
6. Injustice without Christ is Meaningless 3:16-26
7. Relationships without Christ are Meaningless ch. 4
8. Worship without Christ is Meaningless 5:1-7
9. Wealth without Christ is Meaningless 5:8-20
10. The Meaningless Promises of Money ch 6
11. Legacy without Christ is Meaningless 7:1-6

II. The Meaningful Life (ch. 7-12)

1. Foundations of a Meaningful Life ch. 7
2. A Meaningful Life is Submitted to Authority 8:1-8
3. A Meaningful Life Finds Contentment in Christ 8:9-17
4. How to Live a Meaningful Life 9:1-10
5. Admonition to Meaningful Living 9:11-18
6. Avoiding a Meaningless Life 10:1-11
7. The Waste of the Meaningless Life 10:12-20
8. Meaningful Living for Young and Old 11:1-12:8
9. The Key to a Meaningful Life: Fearing God 12:9-14

Example of Recurring Themes – Isaiah

Another example of a recurring theme in a passage is Isaiah 40:12-31. There is recurring statement:

Verse 18: “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?”

Verse 25: “To whom then will you liken Me that I should be his equal?”

So we see the main idea (or propositional statement) is: ***God is incomparable.***

Example of Recurring Themes – 1 Peter

The same could be said about 1 Peter 1:6-9. The recurring phrase in verses 6 and 8 is: “you greatly rejoice.” The context is the suffering of believers. So the propositional statement would be: “Believers rejoice even in the midst of suffering.”

The Propositional Statement

The proposition should function as the central theme of *all* that you have to say. If you conclude that the main idea of 1 Peter 1:13-21 is that believers are to live holy lives, everything that you say when you teach this passage (including your introduction, main points, subpoints, illustrations, and conclusion) should be designed to support this central theme in some way.

If the proposition does not function as the central theme of all that you have to say, either: your proposition does not properly reflect the text, or your message is straying from the text to some degree.

Exegetical and Homiletical Propositions

The proposition must be grounded in the text (i.e., biblically-driven). First discover the proposition of the original writer (often called the exegetical proposition). Yet you cannot stay here in your sermon preparation. The proposition must also be directed at your hearers (i.e., audience-oriented). Determine the modern-day proposition of your message (often called the homiletical proposition). This re-

minds us that God's word is timeless. Though culture changes, we must present the truth to God's people in a way they can understand.

In other words, your proposition should be biblical, but it should also reflect the fact that you are communicating to people in the here and now. For this reason, a distinction can be made between an exegetical proposition and a homiletical proposition.

For instance, the exegetical proposition for Ephesians 2:1-10 would be: "In Christ, God demonstrated His grace to the Ephesian believers." The homiletical proposition is easy, but it is: "In Christ, God demonstrates His grace to you and me."

Exegetical Proposition vs. Homiletical Proposition

Consider 2 Tim. 3:16-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

<u>Exegetical Proposition</u> (focuses on original readers)	<u>Homiletical Proposition</u> (focuses on contemporary hearers)
Paul reminds Timothy of three characteristics of Scripture so that he might be encouraged to preach the Word as he seeks to combat false teaching among the Ephesians.	Paul provides three characteristics of Scripture that should motivate you to be more devoted to God's Word.

The proposition can most easily be expressed with a plural noun. The plural noun can consist of something along the lines of the following:

- “three foundations”
- “four keys”
- “two responses”
- “six imperatives”

I once heard a sermon entitled “The 13 principles of mantle passing.” That might be a bit overdoing it!

Using Plural Nouns

The plural noun can also include a modifier for appropriate emphasis:

- “three essential elements”
- “four compelling reasons”

The plural noun will help you to narrow the focus of your proposition and lead your hearers into the points of your outline. Notice the difference the plural noun makes in the following four examples taken from above.

For example, in teaching through Hosea 9 recently, my propositional statement was, “Be aware of the consequences of drifting away from God.” I had **five dire consequences** of backsliding:

1. the death of joy (vs. 1-2)
2. the removal of God's protection (vs. 3-6)
3. the loss of spiritual discernment (vs. 7-9)
4. the breakup of the family (vs. 10-14)
5. the removal of God's blessings (vs. 15-17)

Another example of using the plural nouns in the propositional statement is 1 Peter 1:6-9. As we said the homiletical

proposition is: “Believers rejoice even in the midst of suffering.” We might add that Peter provides **five keys** to rejoicing in the midst of suffering.

Six Critical Questions

You might ask, how can I best determine the propositional statement of a given passage? According to Brian Chapell, there are six helpful and indeed critical questions an expositor must ask. Chapell says: “an expositor’s course can be charted by determining what questions need to be answered in preparing a particular message. These questions provide a bird’s-eye view of the path. Ultimately, they determine what path explanation will follow and the steps a pastor should take to lead others along the way. At first glance, the questions may appear so obvious and/ or intuitive as to need no identification. Unfortunately, however, significant questions on this list are often not asked or answered in sermon preparation.

This list is not meant to lock a preacher into a rigid pattern of preparation. The questions are listed in a logical order, but individual preachers may skip and jump along the way so that various questions blend together or change sequence. The greatest concern of the careful expositor is not the order in which the questions are asked but the necessity that all be answered. The first three questions relate to a preacher’s research of a text’s meaning:

1. What does the text mean?
2. How do I know what the text means?
3. What concerns caused the text to be written?

The reasoning for the first question is the most obvious: Preachers need to do enough research to determine what the scope and the particulars of a text mean.

The second question begins to orient preachers to their listeners. In a sense, this question forces preachers to retrace the steps that led them to their conclusions in order to identify significant landmarks that others will be able to follow. It is not at all uncommon for preachers to feel fairly confident about a text's meaning without being able to specify in their own minds what led them to their conclusion. Solid explanations—and the second question—require preachers to identify what establishes a text's meaning.

The third question requires preachers to determine the cause of a text by looking at the context of the passage. This question is related to the first two (and usually is integral to how they are answered), but it is listed separately because its answer is vital to the ultimate development of a sermon and the answers to the remaining questions.

The last three questions determine how a preacher relates a text's meaning:

4. What do we share in common with those to (or about) whom the text was written and/ or the one by whom the text was written?
5. How should people now respond to the truths of the text?
6. What is the most effective way I can communicate the meaning of the text?³⁰

Prior to answering these questions, a preacher has information only about a text, not a sermon. Although many

³⁰ Chapell, *ibid.*

preachers may feel that when they have done enough research to determine a text's meaning they are ready to preach, they are mistaken.

To this point they are only like "the little engine that could," chugging up the expositor's mountain saying, "I think I can preach. I think I can." Answering these remaining questions actually pushes a preacher over the crest of the mountain, converting a textual commentary or an exegetical lecture into a sermon.³¹

In other words, in researching the text, we must always move from the exegetical (seen in the first three questions) to the practical (seen in the last three questions)

The fourth question takes us back to the principles of what Chapell calls a "Fallen Condition Focus" (FCF). By identifying what we share with the people of Scripture, we bring the truths of the text into immediate contact with the lives of people today. Not to do so simply steals from Scripture the impact God intends. It's not enough to frame a propositional statement this way: "The Judaizers believed they could earn salvation with good works." The statement is true but is poorly designed as the main point of a sermon. It will leave listeners asking, "So what? What does that have to do with me?"

We must frame the main point in such a way that it deals with what we have in common with the people in the text. We might say, "We don't believe our works will gain salvation." Well, I may not believe in my head that my works will save me, but I sometimes feel and even behave that way. I am always tempted to believe that when I am good God will

³¹ Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: A Comprehensive Textbook on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 51–52.

love me more. We all have moments, or even years, when an aspect of us lives the Judaizers' theology. We all have vestiges of Babel with us— as a consequence of our fallen nature, we are all trying to climb our ladders to heaven and claim responsibility for the grace that saves us. Our pride wars against the admission that there is no good in us. Our sinful condition forever struggles with our total dependence on grace. Only when we can identify the humanness that unites us with the struggles of those whom Paul had to warn about the Judaizers do we really know why he wrote and what we are to preach.³²

Preaching does not point primarily at what happened to others— it points to us. Preachers identify principles of spiritual truth evident in the biblical situation that are also present in ours.³³

The Outline

Compose the Outline of Your Message

A good, clear outline will provide a number of distinct advantages. It will allow both you and your hearers to know exactly where you are at any given time. It will help ensure that you teach the message of the text. It will better enable you and your hearers to remember and apply the message. The old saying goes: "If there is a mist in the pulpit, there is a fog in the pew."

Coordinate Your Points with Your Proposition

When you compose your outline, try to make sure that each point fits your plural-noun proposition and coordinates

³² Chapell, *ibid.*

³³ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 152.

with the other points. Your points ought to flow out of your propositional statement. For example, if you promise four reasons that we should worship Jesus, don't give three reasons and one command:

1. Jesus is divine.
2. Jesus is powerful.
3. Jesus is holy.
4. ~~You must love Jesus.~~ Jesus is worthy (of our love).

Each Point Should Flow from the Text

Also make sure that each point flows directly out of the text. Each point of your outline should capture a complete thought expressed in the text. Each point of your outline should be informed by the grammatical structure of the text.

For example, in I Peter 4:7-11, Peter begins verse 7 with a statement of fact in the indicative mood: "The end of all things is at hand." The next word in verse 7—the conjunction "therefore"—tells you that Peter expects his readers to live in a certain way in response to this truth, and the four commands in the imperative mood in verses 7b-11 set forth how he expects them to live.

Example Exegetical Outline – 1 Peter 4

The exegetical outline of the passage, then, looks like this: Peter says "The end of all things is at hand" (7a), and then he gives the conjunction: "Therefore" and four ways his hearers should live in light of the Second Coming of Christ:

1. "be of sound judgment and sober in spirit" (7b)
2. "keep fervent in your love" (8)
3. "be hospitable to one another" (9)
4. "employ [your gift] in serving one another" (10-11)

Example Homiletical Outline – 1 Peter 4

In letting the structure of the passage inform the structure of your outline, you might set up your homiletical proposition and outline something like this:

Peter provides four ways you must live in light of the imminent return of Christ:

1. You must be sober in prayer (7b).
2. You must be sacrificial in love (8).
3. You must be sincere in hospitality (9).
4. You must be selfless in service (10-11).

Practice Proposition and Outline

Let's practice what we are learning. What would be the propositional statement of Ephesians 2:1-10? Write out the exegetical outline as well as the homiletical outline.

It might look like this (practice before you turn the page):

Example Exegetical Outline – Ephesians 2

The believers in Ephesus were saved by grace in Christ (vs. 5)

1. The Ephesians were unable to save themselves. "you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked" (1-3)
2. God saved the Ephesians because of His love. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us..." (4a)
3. God saved the Ephesians by His power in regeneration "even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (4b-9)

4. The Ephesians are God's masterpiece. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (10)

Example Homiletical Outlines – Ephesians 2

Our homiletical proposition might be: Paul proposes four proofs that God has given us salvation by grace in Christ alone.

1. Consider your life before Christ (1-3) "dead in trespasses."
2. Consider the love you have because of Christ (4a) "because of the great love with which He loved us..."
3. Consider your life because of Christ (4b-9) "made alive with Christ."
4. Consider your life since you have come to know Christ (10) "we are His workmanship."

Or you might formulate it this way: Paul gives us four reasons that salvation is by grace alone.

Because of [this reason] we see that salvation is by grace alone through Christ alone.

1. Our sinfulness (1-3) "dead in trespasses."
2. God's love (4a) "because of the great love with which He loved us..."
3. God's power (4b-9) "made alive with Christ."
4. God's masterpiece (10) "we are His workmanship."

Memory Devices

Make sure that each point is clear and easy to remember. This can be accomplished through the use of **alliteration** and/or **parallelism**. Alliteration consists of beginning key words (usually the first word) of each point with the same letter.

Alliteration

For example, consider the following outline of James 1:2-4: Here are three ways you must respond when you encounter trials:

1. **Consider** it all joy (2).
2. **Cling** to what you know (3).
3. **Capitalize** on the opportunity (4).

Parallelism

Parallelism consists of making sure each word in each point is grammatically parallel to each word in the other points.

For example, consider last week's message on genuine faith. Here are five perspective that help us see what genuine faith is in Matthew 15. We see...

1. False faith is outward only (1-9) - Pharisees
2. True faith comes from God alone (10-20) - God
3. True faith is humble (21-28) – Canaanite woman
4. True faith is for all peoples (29-31) – People of Decapolis getting healed
5. True faith should be celebrated interculturally (32-39) – 4000 People of Tyre and Sidon

Notice that each point follows a different perspective.

Point 1: Faith contrasted

Point 2: Faith clarified

Point 3: Faith compared

Point 4: Faith exemplified

Point 5: Faith celebrated

The Importance of Personal Address

When you compose your outline, try to make sure that each point is applicatory and therefore specifically addresses your audience. A preaching outline is designed to thrust truth into the midst of lives in order to change those lives.³⁴

This normally involves using either the 2nd person in general ("you," "your" or "yourself"), or specific exhortations directed toward your hearers.

The Difference an Applicatory Outline Can Make

Consider the following two outlines of 1 Peter 2:18-25:

Outline #1

Three aspects of your submission to unjust authority:

1. The Mandate – submit when suffering (18)
2. The Motive – Trust God when suffering (19-20)
3. The Model of Christ in suffering (21-25)

Outline #2

We see three ways that you ought to respond when suffering unjustly:

1. Submit yourself to the authority of man (18).

³⁴ Jay Adams, *Preaching*.

2. Entrust yourself to the sovereignty of God (19-20).
3. Conform yourself to the pattern of Christ (21-25).

What makes the second outline better than the first?

Conclusion

The thought of a biblical writer typically shines more clearly when an expositor creates a study outline of a passage. Outlines visually exegete the thought flow of a text and enable a preacher to see the chief features of its development. The length and nature of the passage under consideration determine which of the following three types of exegetical outlines will best aid a pastor's study.³⁵

³⁵ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 67–68, 240–42;

Name: _____

Homework Exercise

Choose a favorite passage from the New Testament epistles. Craft a propositional statement and outline exegetically and homiletically. Turn it into me at the next class period.

Passage of Scripture: _____

Exegetical Proposition: _____

Homiletical Proposition: _____

Exegetical Outline:

Homiletical Outline:

5

FILLING OUT THE SERMON: ILLUSTRATION, EXPLANATION, ETC.



“The sermon is the text repeated more fully.”

G. CAMPBELL MORGAN



"As a skeleton is nothing without the rest of the body – the flesh, the veins, the blood, the muscles and skin, so it is that a bare homiletical outline needs to be filled out.³⁶

The body of your message will consist both of the points of your homiletical outline and the “meat” that you put on that “skeleton.” You should have a clear introduction that launches the sermon. Each point of your outline should contain several components: explanation, illustration, and application.

THE SERMON TITLE

The sermon title is not the most important part of a sermon. And choosing a title is not an essential part of sermon preparation. Understanding the intended meaning of the text and preparing a clear message are infinitely more important than what you title the sermon. Yet selecting compelling sermon titles should not be dismissed as trivial. Some preachers carelessly slap any title on the sermon after the hard work of preparation.

Others decide not to give the sermon a title at all. They just announce a text and plunge right in. This is understandable. It is also unwise. Your sermon needs and deserves a good title. To present a sermon without a title is like trying to sell a book with no title. The most well-respected and well-known authors would not try to do that. Neither should you. There are good reasons for labeling the sermon as clearly and creatively as you can.

³⁶ A good portion of this chapter is from the book by H. B. Charles Jr. (2014-04-15). *On Preaching: Personal & Pastoral Insights for the Preparation & Practice of Preaching*. Moody Publishers.

- It promotes the content of the sermon.
- It is the first impression the congregation will get of your message.
- It gives the sermon a personal identity.
- It advertises the subject of the sermon beforehand.
- It names the baby before you present it to the world.
- It buys the goodwill of the congregation, as it determines whether to give you their attention.

The sermon title advertises the message to grab attention. It is the logo that promotes the biblical message of the text. The title is the sermon concealed. The sermon is the title revealed. Since the title and sermon are so linked, give careful thought to the message's stated name. Craft the title skillfully. Be original. Practice clarity. Use subtlety. Leave mystery. Spark curiosity. Choose a title that holds the congregation's interest until you formally state the proposition of the sermon.

Examples of Sermon Titles

Good sermon titles come in different forms. Take advantage of them. Don't be monotonous, especially if you are preaching to the same people every week. Repetitive questions, Scripture quotes, or "how-to" titles soon lose their punch and stereotype your preaching. Stay fresh by trying different title styles. Consider the following examples:

- Biblical references: "Thorns in the Flesh" or "The Hymn of Christ" or "When You Pray"
- Declarations: "God Knows What He's Doing" or "God Won't Take No for an Answer"
- Questions: "Which Way Are You Going?" or "Are You Faithful?" or "Can You Handle an Answered Prayer?"

- Exclamations: “Trust God!” or “What a Fellowship!” or “Get With the Program!”
- Paradox: “Seeing Is Believing” or “Strength through Meekness” or “The Upside of Down”
- Alliteration: “Practicing the Presence of God” or “Facing Friendly Fire”
- Application: “How to Get to God” or “How to Clean Up Your Life” or “How to Live a Fruitful Life”³⁷

Emphasize Scripture

Sermon titles may come to you at any time during the preparation process. But it is best to make your final selection after the theme, proposition, and movements of the sermon have been determined. We are to preach the Word, not our sermon title. The text and its message should have priority in the sermon, including the title. So go from text to title, not the other way around. Don’t tie the title to a quote or illustration in the sermon. Anchor it to the text. Choose a title that will cause the listener to remember the message of the text.

THE INTRODUCTION

The takeoff is arguably the most important part of a flight. Sprinters work to get a strong start from the blocks to win the race. The opening notes of the song must be right for the song to be performed with excellence. And the introduction is key to preaching a strong message. The introduction

³⁷ Charles Jr, H.B. (2014-04-15). *On Preaching: Personal & Pastoral Insights for the Preparation & Practice of Preaching* (Kindle Locations 867-880). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

is meant to grab the congregation's attention. Its aim is to build interest and provoke thought.

The introduction should make the case for why the listener should actually listen to the rest of the sermon. At the same time, the introduction is just as much for the preacher as it is for the congregation. The congregation will never be interested in a sermon that doesn't seem to be interesting to the preacher. A good introduction should light your fire and stoke your passion for the message of the text.

H. B. Charles Jr. in his book "On Preaching" gives nine ideas for a good introduction.

1. Introduce Something

Many homileticsians encourage preachers to write the introduction last. I am not legalistic about things like this. I think you should write as it comes to you. If the introduction comes to you first, so be it. Yet there is wisdom in not beginning with your introduction. The more you work through the body of the message, the more clarity you will have about how to get into the sermon with a good introduction.

Write out a complete sermon skeleton first (as we looked at in chapter 4). Establish the point of the message, organize the structure, and identify objectives of the message. Know what you are introducing before you write your introduction. Then make sure your introduction to the message actually introduces the message.

You might locate the area of systematic theology your text falls into, or you might simply introduce the subject's theme.

2. Place the Text in its Context

A text without a context is a pretext. So make sure to help listeners understand how your text fits into its larger biblical context.

Don't drag them through a long survey of the entire book. You are preaching a sermon, not giving a seminary lecture. But help them to see how the text fits into the theme of the section of the book it occurs in, and its relationship with Scripture as a whole. Explain the historical background and literary context, yet avoid the temptation to blitz the congregation with too much exegetical data. Use the introduction to show how your text correlates with the same or similar theme in related Scriptures.

3. State the Point of the Message

There is an increasingly popular style of preaching that holds the point of the message until the conclusion. But preachers should view this as a novelty that should not be regularly employed. If you are striving for faithful exposition, find the main point of the text. Craft that point into a clear, direct, one-sentence statement, and state the big idea of the sermon at the beginning. Point to the destination in the introduction. Let the congregation know up front where you are going, even if you don't tell them how you are going to get there.

4. Give an Accurate Forecast

Some preachers transition from the introduction by summarizing the body of the message that is to come. This is

a good practice, even though it can also be good to build suspense by revealing your main ideas as you go. Either way, the introduction should be an accurate forecast of where the sermon is headed.

It's terrible when the weatherperson predicts sunshine and then it rains. However, I understand that the weatherperson only predicts the weather, but doesn't control it. Preachers, on the other hand, can and should ensure that what we forecast in the introduction actually takes place in the message. Don't misrepresent the message. Don't contradict yourself. And don't oversell what you will deliver. If it is not on the shelves, do not put it on the showcase. Present in the introduction what you will proclaim in the message.

5. Write it Out

I believe it is best to write out a complete sermon manuscript, whether or not you use it in the pulpit. But if you do not write out anything else, write out specific sections of the sermon. Your introduction should be one of the sections you write out word for word. You don't want to stumble out of the gate. You want the sermon to begin strong and build momentum as you get to the meat of the message. So untangle your opening thoughts by writing them out. Strive for clarity. Know where you are going. Map your way through the opening moments of the sermon. Establish that the sermon is moving toward a purposeful destination with a clear and compelling introduction.

6. No Dumping Allowed

If you take your study seriously, you will inevitably have more material than you can preach in one sermon. What

should you do with that additional material? Answer: save it for another message. Do not stick the excess data in the introduction. The introduction is not the place to dump information you cannot find a place for anywhere else. You want your introduction to be clean and tight and strong. Don't undermine it by stuffing it with too much material. The body of the message should be filled with good meat. The introduction should be fat free. So make sure everything in the introduction has a real purpose for being there. Know why every sentence is there, and ruthlessly edit out whatever does not fit.

7. Know Your Audience

Effective preaching requires that you exegete your audience, as well as your text. You should know whom you are preaching to, as well as what you are preaching about. Then craft your introduction for your listeners. Seek to grab the attention of the congregation from the beginning. This is easier if you preach to the same congregation each week. If you are a consistent preacher, your congregation will give you the benefit of the doubt and wait to see where the sermon is going. But don't take them for granted.

Keep them on their toes by engaging them in the introduction. If you are preaching in an unfamiliar setting, it is all the more important to make a connection as quickly as possible.

8. Practice Variety

Compelling introductions are not easy to develop. Some preachers make their work easier by finding a template to use every time. It simplifies the work, but makes sermons

monotonous. Don't start every sermon the same way. Be creative. Use different doors to get into the house.

- Tell a story.
- Raise a question.
- State a problem.
- Use a strong quote.
- Make a startling statement.
- Describe the background of the text.
- Do an object lesson.
- Try multimedia.

Mix it up. Practice diversity. Change the way you come at them, especially if you preach to the same congregation each week. Practicing variety in the introduction is a simple but effective way to stay fresh in the pulpit.

9. Keep it Brief

This is key advice for preachers who strive to do Bible exposition from week to week. You want to spend the bulk of your time explaining and applying the text. So get to the point quickly. Don't ramble. Don't waste words. Don't loiter on the front porch. You can undermine yourself by taking too much time to tell a story, build suspense, or make an application, leaving limited time to deal with the text. Don't saunter through the introduction and then rush through the body of the message. We are prone to say, "I wish I had more time to deal with this." Give yourself more time by keeping your introduction brief. Make the front porch attractive, but don't spend so much time there that the listener does not want to go inside the house. The best things you can show them are inside the text. Get there in a hurry!

TRANSITIONS

There is an increasingly popular style of preaching that holds the point of the message until the conclusion. But preachers should view this as a novelty that should not be regularly employed. If you are striving for faithful exposition, find the main point of the text. Craft that point into a clear, direct, one-sentence statement, and state the big idea of the sermon at the beginning. Point to the destination in the introduction. Let the congregation know up front where you are going, even if you don't tell them how you are going to get there.

Do you know where most car accidents take place? At intersections. Accidents also occur frequently during lane changes. Safe drivers make careful transitions. So do good preachers. You have prayerfully chosen a specific text to preach. You have worked to craft the point of the message in a clear sentence. You have carefully chosen an attention-grabbing title. You have crafted a compelling introduction. You have a powerful message to deliver.

Don't weaken the presentation by leaving it up to chance to get you from one place to another in the sermon. Don't stumble into the text by tripping over "three things." Don't get into an accident at the intersection between the first and second point of the sermon because you ran into "things." Don't land the plane awkwardly on the runway of "things."

This is the one piece of advice I want to give you as it relates to using good transitional sentences in preaching. I do not have a list of points to give you in this chapter. I just want to offer one piece of advice: Get "things" out of your sermon. Work hard on your transitional sentences. Move

smoothly from one idea to the next. Give a clear signal and get the right of way before you change lanes.

“Things” don’t make good transitions. The word “things” is nonspecific. The more specific you are, the more compelling your ideas will be. So try other key words instead of “things.”

- Give four reasons why believers should pray.
- State three requirements for Christian discipleship.
- Share five benefits of forgiving people who have wronged you.
- Describe the dynamics of a healthy church.
- Explain the signs of true conversion.
- Present three principles to practice for loving your spouse.
- Warn of the dangers of living selfishly.

Reasons, requirements, benefits, dynamics, and signs are better than “things.” They make transitional sentences concrete, lively, and powerful. There are many effective words you can use to make your transitional sentences come alive. Hunt them down. Practice using them. Work hard to get “things” out of your sermons.

EXPLANATION

Explanation is the foundation of a biblical message. The goal is to explain what the text means by what it says in its context.

Explanation is the unfolding the meaning of each point from the Scriptures. How do we do that? Articulate the point plainly. and tie it to the proposition as you do. Explain the

point. Simply tell the people what you mean. Read the text, always announcing the verse you're going to read.

Explain the Scripture text itself – this is of utmost importance. You may need to explain the context. You may need to explain a word study. You may need to overview a part of the Bible that is referred to.

Emphasize your point in the text by defining key words and phrases. Capture the flow of the passage. Don't lose track of where you are. No rabbit trails!

Repeat significant statements in the text. For instance, Matthew 16 – Peter's confession – You are the Christ, the Son of the living God is a pinnacle in that chapter. "Holy, holy, holy" is a significant phrase in Isaiah 6. "The Lord is my Shepherd" is a significant phrase in Psalm 23.

Restate key points in various ways. Keep the people "in the text." Major on the majors – preach the Word, not issues. Restate your main point many times in various ways.

Discard everything that is not absolutely necessary. John Stott in his book "Between Two Worlds" says we should ruthlessly cut the unneeded and extra. Look for places where you can be more concise. Err on the side of cutting things – especially long quotes. Cut everything that is not absolutely necessary.

Be precise with your words. Use concrete terminology. It is impossible to convey a precise message without choosing precise words. Use simple and clear words. Ryle said that we ought to "Preach as if you had asthma." Use vivid words. Words should conjure up images in the mind. Use honest words. Beware of exaggerations and be sparing in use of superlatives. C.S. Lewis said, "Don't just tell people how to feel, describe in such a way that people feel it themselves." Do not

use words too big for the subject. Simplify difficult concepts by the use of illustrations.

Avoid the three pitfalls:

- Don't zero in so closely on the details that you miss the big picture.
- Don't bog the people down with language they don't understand, unless it is a significant help to the passage.
- Don't drown the people in a sea of irrelevant background material.

ILLUSTRATION

The effective preacher must work to clarify meaning, make ideas stick, and call the listener to action. To this end, illustrations are the preacher's friend.

Want proof? Read the Gospels again and note how Jesus taught. The Lord often told parables to illustrate the point of His messages. On many occasions, the parable was the message. Jesus would place some common experience alongside a spiritual truth to reveal and conceal truth at the same time.

Yet beyond telling parables, Jesus' teaching was filled with word pictures that helped people see what He was saying. In the same way, a compelling illustration sheds light on the message and helps the congregation see what you are saying. Here are nine tips for making good use of sermon illustrations in your preaching.

Choose Appropriate Illustrations

A good illustration is like a window on a house. It helps your listeners see in or out. But merely painting a picture of a window on a wall doesn't help anyone. Giving an illustra-

tion just because it's a good story you found and had to tell is counterproductive. Don't just share an anecdote that you think your congregation will find interesting, moving, or entertaining. You are not a comedian going for laughs. You are a herald who has been sent to proclaim a life-changing message. Make sure your illustrations have a relevant point. And remember that you are still obligated to preach the Word as you illustrate.

Don't Overpower the Message

The value of real estate is based upon its location. The same is true of sermon illustrations. You will hurt the sermon if you stick a story somewhere it does not fit. A story that is too emotional can derail the sermon. People may be moved by it, but they will remember the illustration instead of the sermon.

Position illustrations where they will best clarify the text, highlight the point, or enforce the application. Place the illustration in a strategic place in the sermon. And don't use it at all if it's too good. Illustrations should support the message, not overpower it.

Find Illustrations Everywhere

Life presents possible illustrations every day. Just keep your eyes and ears open, and you will find more illustrations than you can use. Do some people watching. Expect God to point you to a potter's window, as He did with Jeremiah, to rivet a spiritual truth to daily life. And have a means of keeping a record of what you learn. Likewise, if you can get several good ideas from an illustration book, it's worth whatever it costs. Ultimately, Scripture is the best place to find illustra-

tions. Using biblical illustrations allows you to continue to teach as you illustrate. And scriptural illustrations carry divine authority.

Do Not Bear False Witness

Tell the truth in your sermon illustrations. Do not bear false witness. Do not make things up and present them as true. Don't stretch the truth to make the story more compelling. You can only stretch the truth so far before it is no longer the truth. An exaggeration is a subtle lie. Consider your sermon illustrations a matter of ministerial ethics. Make sure the story is true. Get the facts straight. Guard your credibility. Be honest and accurate about your sources. Where appropriate, give credit where credit is due. And don't tell someone else's personal story as if it happened to you.

Preach the Text, Not the Illustration

We are charged by God to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2). The proclamation of Scripture, therefore, must be our priority. So build the sermon around the text, not illustrations. The illustrations should not get more attention than the text. You want the text to speak loud and clear. So give the illustration, make the application, and then move on. Let the text guide the sermon. And don't let a good story lead you astray from your assignment to preach the Word.

APPLICATION

John Calvin's observation still rings true: "If we leave it to men's choice to follow [what] is taught them, they will never move one foot. Therefore the doctrine of itself can

profit nothing at all.”³⁸ Preachers make a fundamental mistake when they assume that by providing their hearers with biblical information the people will automatically make the connection between scriptural truth and their everyday lives.³⁹ We have failed if we do not apply the Word of God. Application is absolutely necessary for people to be growing and changing in Christ.

Sermon Incomplete without Application

Application fulfills the obligations of exposition. Application is the present, personal consequence of scriptural truth. Without application, a preacher has no reason to preach, because truth without actual or potential application fulfills no redemptive purpose. This means that at its heart preaching is not merely the proclamation of truth but truth applied.

The Westminster divines understood this when they formulated the answer to the catechism question, “What do the Scriptures principally teach?” The answer, “What man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man,” clearly specifies the dual task of the preacher who would unfold the meaning of a biblical passage. The exposition of Scripture remains incomplete until a preacher explains the duty God requires of us.

Application Asks “So What?”

The duty that God requires in a passage is the “so what” of expository preaching that causes application. David Veerman summarizes:

³⁸ From Calvin’s sermon on 2 Timothy 4: 1–2, as translated in *Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy and Titus* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 945–57.

³⁹ David Veerman, “Sermons: Apply Within,” *Leadership* (Spring 1990): 121.

“Simply stated, application is answering two questions: So what? and Now what? The first question asks, “Why is this passage important to me?” The second asks, “What should I do about it today?” Application focuses the truth of God’s Word on specific, life-related situations . It helps people understand what to do or how to use what they have learned. Application directs and enables people to act on what they have been persuaded is true and meaningful.”⁴⁰

A Word of Caution

As helpful as these familiar distinctions are, a word of caution needs to be added before summarizing the obligations of application. Too much emphasis on duty, action, and What do you want me to do? can leave the impression that application always requires a pastor to dictate behavior in a sermon.

Application may be attitudinal as well as behavioral . In fact, the frequent mark of immaturity among preachers is too much (or too early) an emphasis on behavior. Mature preachers do not ignore behavior, but they carefully build an attitudinal foundation for whatever actions they say God requires.

A good example of application is the book of Ephesians. The first three chapters are doctrinal. The last three are applicational.

Sermons that merely instruct— don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t lust, don’t procrastinate— will lead to little spiritual maturity, even if parishioners do all they are told. Many applications exhort action (e.g., share the gospel with a neighbor, turn from a sinful practice, give to a worthy cause), but

⁴⁰ Veerman, “Sermons,” 122.

just as many should identify an attitude needing change (e.g., prejudice, pride, or selfishness) or reinforce a faith commitment (e.g., grasping the freedom of forgiveness, taking comfort in the truths of the resurrection, or renewing hope on the basis of God's sovereignty). Transformation of conduct and heart are both legitimate aims of application.

Information without Application is Vexation

Application justifies exposition. We might say "information without application is vexation." It's boring and has little relevance to my life.

If there is no apparent reason for listeners to absorb exegetical insights, historical facts, and biographical details, then a preacher cannot expect what seems inapplicable to be appreciated. No doctor will have much success saying to patients, "Take these pills," without explaining why. Application explains why listeners should take a sermon's expositional pills.

Through application a preacher implicitly encourages parishioners to listen to a message's explanations because they establish the basis, reasonableness, and necessity of particular responses. Thus, John Broadus, the father of modern expository preaching, declares, "Application is the main thing to be done."⁴¹

CONCLUSION TO THE SERMON

"So how was your flight?" When I am asked this question, I typically respond by saying it was a good flight. I

⁴¹ John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. J. B. Weatherspoon (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 210.

Speak positively about the flight for one reason. It landed. I may not like my assigned seat. There may have been no room for my bag in the overhead compartment. It may have been a bumpy flight the whole ride. But none of that matters as long as the flight lands safely. The same is true of sermons. It may get off to a bumpy start. You may have to play catch up to stay within the allotted time schedule. The people on board may not like where the sermon is headed. There may be turbulence the whole time and you never get to a comfortable, cruising altitude to turn off the “Fasten Your Seat Belt” sign. But all will be forgiven if you can safely land the sermon at its intended destination. Here are some tips (from H. B. Charles Jr.) on landing the sermon safely with a strong conclusion.

Be Intentional!

Make sure your conclusion is a true conclusion. Don't just stop the sermon abruptly. Don't let the sermon trail off. Don't preach until you hit your time limit and then sit down. Don't merely go until you run out of material to talk about. Don't simply end by saying a prayer or extending an invitation. Conclude the sermon intentionally. View the sermon as a unit with an introduction, body, and conclusion. And treat the conclusion as important as the other parts of the sermon. Plan out your conclusion. Work to craft a conclusion that is clear, compelling, and climatic.

Only Conclude Once

We preachers like to note that Paul says “finally” several times in Philippians and then keeps writing. But remember that Philippians is divinely inspired. Our sermons on Philip-

pians are not. So when you say “finally,” mean it. If you are not ready to end, don’t say it. If you say you are closing the sermon, mean what you say. Don’t use the false promise of a conclusion to buy yourself more time. You will only make the congregation nervous if you keep circling the runway. No skilled, responsible pilot plays with the landing gear. And flight attendants don’t promise to land early just because the passengers look bored. So don’t go into an unnecessary holding pattern by introducing new material at the end. Land when it’s time to land.

Know Your Destination

Where is the sermon going? What is the point of the message? How should the congregation respond to the truth of the text? What are your objectives for the message? What do you want the listener to know, believe, or do? The answers to these questions will determine how to end the message. How can you land the plane safely if you do not know where the runway is? You should take off with a predetermined destination. And the navigational devices of the message should head in that direction and lead to a logical conclusion. A good conclusion is the fitting end of a sermon that has purpose, unity, and movement. Land the message at its intended destination.

Review the Message Again

It is often said that a speaker should tell the audience what he is going to say, then say it, and then tell them what he said. That may be a cliché, but it often works. An effective way to conclude a sermon is to review the major points of the message. Don’t just repeat the main ideas. Restate them, giv-

ing the congregation a look at the same ideas from a different vantage point. Enforce them with solid exhortation. Apply them, showing your people how to live out the life of the teachings of our faith. Illustrate them with good, memorable stories. Celebrate them as reasons to rejoice. Find different ways to drive home the key themes of the message at the end. View the conclusion as the introduction in reverse. Close by making the points again.

Issue a Call to Action

We often separate truth from life, theology from practice, doctrine from duty. But the two are actually inseparable lovers that will not show up without the other. A biblical sermon should both explain and exhort. Application should take place throughout the sermon, but the conclusion is a good place to emphasize it. It is self-deception to hear the Word without doing what it says (James 1:22). It is foolish to look into the mirror of God's Word without making the necessary changes the truth calls for (James 1:23–25). The goal of preaching is application. So end there. Challenge the congregation to live out the teachings of the faith. Exhort them to be doers of the Word. Explain why obedience matters. Show them what following Jesus looks like in practical terms.

Run to the Cross

Jesus should be the hero of every sermon. The message must be about Him or it is not Christian, biblical preaching. Christ is the good news we proclaim. And the conclusion is a good place to point your hearers to Christ. Of course, the message should be saturated with the gospel. Christ is not

honored when He is mentioned at the end of a message that ignores Him throughout. But there is power in concluding with a clear declaration of the gospel. Give a clear explanation of who Christ is and what He has done for us. Run to the cross. Explain the need for salvation and the power of Christ to save. Call the hearer to repent and believe. End by exalting the sufficiency of Christ's divine person and redemptive work.

Leave a Good Impression

First impressions are lasting impressions. But so are closing ones. A message that starts with a bang but ends with a whimper loses credibility. A poor conclusion can trump a good introduction and strong main body. It can be like a movie with a good premise that starts strong but seems to run out of material midway through. Good movies carry out the plot to the logical conclusion. The same is true of good sermons. So finish strong. Practice clarity. Use variety. Make it memorable. Strive for an economy of words. Don't ramble. Write it out. Be familiar with it. Think of the conclusion as a lawyer's closing argument. Don't leave any reasonable doubt. Preach for a verdict.

Name: _____

Homework Exercise

Take the passage of Scripture you chose last week, and fill it out with an introduction and conclusion as well as explanations, illustrations, and applications with appropriate transitions. You have two weeks to complete this homework.

Please be sure for this class to label each unit appropriately. For example:

Explanation: This text shows...

Illustration: This text reminds us of the butterfly...

Application: When considering this passage, we must make a change in our lives...

Transition: We were dead in our sins, but secondly, we are alive in Christ.

Please write out the introduction, conclusion, and transitions. Manuscripts are preferred, but if you do not have a manuscript, please at least summarize your points, explanations, illustrations, and applications.

Next week we will have a “sermon workshop” to help you along on your sermon.

6

INTERPRETING OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

M. A. TIBERI



“There are many reasons why pastors must preach from the Old Testament: ¹The Old Testament is part of the Christian canon. ²It discloses the history of redemption leading to Christ. ³It proclaims truths not found in the New Testament. ⁴It helps us understand the New Testament. ⁵It prevents misunderstanding of the New Testament. ⁶It provides a fuller understanding of Christ.”

SIDNEY GREIDANUS⁴²



⁴² Sidney Greidanus. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 25.

Forty percent of our Old Testament is written in the genre of narrative. Narratives, or stories, are a natural human joy. We all love stories. We enjoy being caught up in a plot that needs resolving. We take pleasure in identifying with different characters and watching them develop. We relish twists in the story that keep us guessing and catch us by surprise.

Yet there often seems to be a disconnect when we read the stories of the OT. They tend to become dull, repetitive, never ending accounts of an ancient people who have no bearing on our contemporary life. Maybe this is because many of us have grown up in the church and have heard these same old narratives countless times, usually told in a cold, monotone voice. Or maybe its because we have read them so many times that our eyes glide right over the page, missing the drama and the details of the text. Or maybe it's because we have divorced in our mind historical record and literary writing (if this later point is the case you have probably been cringing at my use of the word "story" in reference to Scripture).

If you can relate to the first two of these reasons, you are not alone. We live in a noisy impatient society that has a hard time slowing down and soaking things in. Unfortunately many of us bring this same mindset to our Scripture reading. We want a quick hit of feel good motivation from our devotions. A time-crunched rush through the text, hoping that checking our devotions off our list will make us feel good. This is a sad reality for many of us and we would be good to check our hearts on this point. Superficial reading of the word will inevitably yield shallow devotion to God. It is through the medium of God's word

that we meet with the Word of God, Jesus Christ, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. How tragic it is that instead of wrestling with our God like Jacob (Gen 32:22-32), we instead tap out before the match has even begun. But if we will take the time to slow down and read the text prayerfully and pay attention to the details we will find that the word is far from dry and boring – it is life giving and transformative.

Another reason we often find it hard to see the drama in OT narrative is that though we live in a *literate* society, we do not live in *literary* one.⁴³ There is a certain art to reading literature that has been lost today. This is primarily for the reason that though we are a literate society we are a functionally illiterate one.⁴⁴ I don't think it would be too much of a stretch to say that the average American spends more time in front of a television in a week than they do reading in a year – and the same seems to be true in the church as well. Since OT narrative is literature in its own right, the inability to read literarily makes the reading and understanding of these narratives extremely difficult and dry. What we need to learn is not simply how to read words, but how to read story.

Furthermore, OT narrative is written following literary rules of the Ancient Near east and is far removed from our own time. Unlike an epistle of the NT, which bears many similarities to our use of language and form, we are unable to simply intuit how OT narrators told stories and therefore we need to do the hard work of learning how to best interpret

⁴³ I attribute this insight to Dr. Andrew Schmutzer, my Bible professor at Moody Bible Institute.

⁴⁴ By this I do not mean those who have been taught how to read but because of a learning disability find it difficult or impossible to read. Rather by “functionally illiterate” I mean those who possess the knowledge and ability to read but simply do not.

these ancient writings. This is one of the primary jobs of an expositor – we must do the hard work of breaking down the text in its context (exegesis) and then bridge that context to the 21st century church. It is our job to put in the hours of careful study so that we can prepare a meal for the people of God that has enough nutrition to sustain them and feed their faith. If we are to preach the whole counsel of God this requires for us to become well versed in the literary techniques used in the OT. That is primarily what we will focus on in this chapter.

Before we get into the rules of interpreting OT narrative we must establish what it means for it to be literature and how that relates to it being historical. Often the assumption is that for something to be historical it must relate all the facts in chronological order with no bias interpretation. If this is what defines historical writing, then we don't find that in the OT. But this definition of historical record is grounded on nothing more than modern, rationalistic thinking. It assumes a certain requirement, man-made I might add, for what constitutes historiography (the method of historical research and writing).

The reality is no human being can approach any subject, especially history, without a preconceived bias. As Pascal said, "The heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing." We all have presuppositions and certain values to which we hold. This is our worldview, and we view everything through this lens. An atheist who approaches the Bible as a mere great literary document will dismiss its historical viability right at the forefront simply because it makes metaphysical and supernatural claims that do not fit within his/her worldview. Correspondingly, an evangelical

Christian who holds to the truthfulness and authority of God's Word will take its claims about reality seriously and believe what it says through faith. (Find possible example of national histories told from different perspectives).

My guess is that most people reading this believe in the inspiration and authority of Scripture and are not second-guessing its historical accuracy. Rather, I suspect that the issue is more one of reading OT narrative like one reads an epistle from Paul in the NT. As westerners we tend to be more comfortable with linear didactic teaching. But this is not what we find in the OT. The Hebrew language (which is what the OT was written in) and thought process was much more poetic and circular than the Greek language and thought process of the NT, which is very precise and linear.⁴⁵ This is not to say that there is disagreement between the testaments but rather a different way of speaking and relating words and ideas. If we approach the book of Genesis the way we undertake the book of Romans we will be sorely disappointed and end up making disastrous interpretive decisions. We cannot come to Genesis and expect it to tell us directly what to believe and how it should affect our lives. Narrative instead draws us in and teaches us through the art of storytelling.

We must not draw a sharp distinction here between storytelling and historical truth. Story does not mean fiction. Stories are artistic accounts of people and events that may or may not be true. Stories can be fiction, but they are not necessarily fiction. Story can relate historical fact in a

⁴⁵ I am by no means trying to say that there isn't a certain level of artistry to the writing of the NT – far from it. One only has to read Romans 8 or the book of Revelation to see the beauty of NT writing, albeit differently than the OT.

creative way. Indeed story is the genre of writing that most successfully recounts past events. Simply recounting a list of dates and names may be a form of historical record, but is not one that will leave any lasting impression upon ones mind. History must be told in story format for it to have any significant impact in the reader/hearers life. Thus God in His all-wise providence has given us a Bible filled with historical narrative.

What is the nature of this historical narrative we find in our OT? We must begin with the understanding that OT narrative is *theologized history*. That is, it is the history of Ancient Israel told with *primarily* theological concerns in mind. The narrators of the OT are not attempting to give us all the facts and events of Ancient Israel, only those things that are most theologically important. Thus they may leave out entire centuries of historical data at times, such as the period that Israel is in Egypt between the life of Jacob and Moses. At other times they may focus on a short period of time in pain staking detail, such as the forty years that Israel is in the wilderness (Ex 15-Josh 1). Moreover, the OT is not seeking to give us all the facts about every subject. These writings are very selective and have a particular focus in mind that we must not lose sight of.

How to Interpret OT Narrative

Now that we have shown why it is important to interpret OT narrative in light of its genre, and that we need to learn how the Ancient Israelites told stories, let us turn our attention to their narrative techniques so we will be better equipped to correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).

Slow Down! Before we can dive into the parts and particulars of interpreting narrative a brief exhortation is needed – that is the need to slow down and pay attention. One sure-fire method to foster a better reading of OT narrative is to simply slow down and absorb the parts and particulars of the story. *Pay attention* to the details. When we speed hastily through the text we often miss subtle nuances that reveal the intention and meaning of the stories. For example, when we pay careful attention to the narrative in Genesis 2 we notice a very beautifully crafted story that may just be amongst the top literary scenes in existence. After the Lord God made the man and placed him in the garden to work and keep/guard it, He observes that it is not good for man to be alone and resolves to make him a compatible helper. The Lord God then parades before the man every beast of the field and every bird of the air to see what the man would name them, but, the narrator points out, there is not found a compatible helper for him. It is only after the man encounters all the animals that it is obvious to him that there is not a living creature that matches him. He is alone. Then the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and takes part of his side and makes (lit. “built”) a woman and presents her to the man. It is only after this that we hear the first recorded words of the man upon his first encounter with his compatible helper: “This, *at last*, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh! She shall be called woman (*isha*) because she was taken out of man (*ish*).” In the drama of the narrative this exclamatory poem serves to capture the awesomeness of this moment. The man could find no true companion amongst the animals, but “*at last*” he met his match, made specially for him. *Only* when we pay attention

to the details of this scene do we appreciate the full weight of these words and see the beauty of what God has done.

Literary Unit. The first thing we must do when preparing a message from a narrative text is to determine the unit of Scripture we will be teaching from. Each narrative book of the Bible constitutes a literary unit made up of multiple episodes and scenes. Genesis is itself a literary unit that tells the story of beginnings. In this book many episodes take place, such as the creation story and the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Within these episodes we have scenes, events that take place in a particular time and place. When preparing to preach a message from a narrative text it is important that you determine the literary episode/scene you will preach from. For example, the creation narrative is one episode with two scenes: Genesis 1:1-2:3 is scene one focusing on the cosmic scope of creation, while Genesis 2:4-25 is scene two emphasizing man's place in God's creation.

Plot. The best way to determine the literary unit you will teach from is to ascertain the plot. Each episode has a beginning, middle, and end. The development of this story is called the plot, which usually follows the pattern of peaceful beginnings, a conflict, and climaxing in the resolution/outcome.⁴⁶ Take your time tracing the plot: identify the initial situation, the conflict that arises, and the resolution that brings the story to a climax. Each unit of Scripture that you preach should be a complete story. Breaking down your message into smaller chunks may sound easier, but in order to capture the full meaning of the text

⁴⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, ed. D. Brent Sandy, Ronald L. Giese Jr., (Nashville:B&H, 1995), 72.

you need to preach it as a whole. Dividing a single literary unit into multiple messages will lose the tension of the plot and make it difficult for people to see how everything ties together. Sometimes this means preaching from large sections of Scripture. Do not be overwhelmed by this since most of the material in a narrative passage can be summarized pretty quickly and easily.

It must also be noted at this point that you must get the feeling of the story into your heart. What would it have been like to be Abram called by God to leave everything you knew: your home, family, etc.? What would it have been like to be David facing Goliath, trusting that the Lord would have the victory? You need to get the emotion of the narrative in your heart. You need to see the majesty of God in redemptive history so you can preach it in such a way that moves the hearts of God's people in faithful obedience.

Point of View. Understanding the point of view through which a story is told is of the utmost importance. We can only see what the author wants us to see and we can only know what the author wants us to know. We must be aware of what perspective the story is being told from. Biblical stories are narrated by a third person omniscient narrator. But it must also be understood that “the narrative is not conveyed solely through the eyes or mouth of the narrator.”⁴⁷ Adele Berlin explains in her book, *Poetics and Biblical Interpretation*, that the point of view through which we see the story is akin to a camera angle in a movie: our attention is directed exactly where the director wants us to focus.

⁴⁷ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 44.

Biblical narrative... narrates like film. The narrator is the camera eye; we 'see' the story through what he presents. The biblical narrator is omniscient in that everything is at his disposal; but he selects carefully what he will include and what he will omit. He can survey the scene from a distance, or zoom in for a detailed look at a small part of it. He can follow one character throughout, or hop from the vantage point of one to another.⁴⁸

What this primarily means for our purposes is that we need to learn to ask the right questions. You should always ask these questions about a narrative: By focusing on certain details, or omitting certain ones, what is the narrator emphasizing? Why did the narrator summarize one event while focusing on the minute details of another? Whose perspective(s) is the narrator telling the story from? By asking the right questions we can get the right answers. Understanding what the narrator is emphasizing is key to knowing what the main point of your sermon should be.

Voice. This brings us to the use of *voice*. The point of view in the story is conveyed through who is speaking. Who is speaking in the story makes all the difference in the world. Is it the narrator's voice or a character's voice? We hear the narrator's voice when he gives background information (geographical, historical, parenthetical clauses, ect.), relates the actions of a character(s), describes the inner life of a character (what someone thought, felt, ect.), or simply through the phrase, "he said." We also hear the narrator's voice when he makes evaluative comments on a situation, such as the statement in 2 Samuel 11:27, "But the thing that

⁴⁸ Ibid.

David had done displeased the Lord.” The narrator’s voice is ultimately God’s voice, as He inspired the human authors by His Spirit, and is thus the objective and authoritative voice.

The character’s voice is heard through the dialogue of the story. Hebrew narrative is mostly carried along through dialogue not description.⁴⁹ The narrator’s voice often serves to set up the dialogue of the characters and to confirm the assertions made in the dialogue.⁵⁰ When a character is speaking in the story we must understand that in that moment we are seeing things through their perspective. Thus we must continually ask the questions: Who is speaking? Is what they are saying different than what the narrator said? Have they changed what they were instructed to say by another character? A character’s perspective can be subjective: they may be wrong or correct. The narrator’s voice is always objective: His evaluation is always authoritative and represents God’s perspective (2 Sam 11:27). It is important for us to take into account who is speaking and to evaluate their speech by the authoritative voice in the story. Obviously whenever the LORD speaks His voice is authoritative. Furthermore, whenever a prophet speaks the word of the LORD, his voice is authoritative. But all other characters must be tested by the Lord’s, prophet’s, or narrator’s voice. Job’s friends say a lot that is recorded in Scripture, but much of what they say is wrong (Job 42:7-9). We must take the book as a whole to understand the error of their words and the truth that is being taught. This same principle applies in the narrative books as well.

⁴⁹ For example, in Hebrew narrative not much is given in way of describing the appearance of a character or scenery. The narrator is more concerned with specific actions that characters make and what they say.

⁵⁰ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 82.

Characterization. Characterization is a term that denotes the way in which the author portrays or characterizes a particular man or woman in the narrative. It answers the question: “What is a particular character like and how does he/she function in the story?”⁵¹

Unlike Western literature, we rarely find physical descriptions of a character’s appearance in OT narrative, and when we do they are not the same type of detailed descriptions we are use to. We do not know how tall Abraham was or what color his hair was because the narrator never tells us. They are not interested in giving us a photographic description. Thus, whenever the narrator describes a particular physical quality of a character we should be clued in that it is extremely important. When we are told that Esau was hairy and Jacob was not it is because it is an essential detail to the story (Gen 27:11, 16). No words are wasted on details that do not somehow develop the plot or a theme.

Instead of detailed physical descriptions the narrators choose to focus more on descriptions of status (widow, wise man, wealthy, poor, ect), profession (king, prophet, priest, shepherd, ect.), ethnicity (Hittite, Amalekite, Israelite, ect.), and important physical features (tall, beautiful, strong, ect).⁵² Adel Berlin explains well, “The purpose of character description in the Bible is not to enable the reader to visualize the character, but to enable him to situate the character in terms of his place in society, his own particular

⁵¹ In what follows I attempt to summarize Adele Berlin’s very helpful analysis of characterization in her book *Poetics and Interpretation*.

⁵² Berlin, *Poetics*, 36.

situation, and his outstanding traits – in other words, to tell what kind of a person he is.”⁵³ Thus we should pay careful attention to the details the narrator gives us about a character because every detail is essential to understanding the type of person he or she is and to the furthering of the plot.

In addition to description we often learn about a character's inner life. The inner life of a character is information that we are given as to the thoughts, intentions, or emotions of that person. This is done mostly through the narrator's voice, but sometimes through inner dialogue (so-and-so said in his heart, e.g. Gen 27:41).⁵⁴ Since the majority of this information is given directly from the narrator's voice we can assume that the evaluation of a character's inner life is accurate and correct (unlike the words/dialogue of a character which may not be truthful). The inner thoughts of Jacob's sons are essential to their characterization in the story: their jealousy and hatred for their brother Joseph is their motivation for their actions (Gen 37:4). This is an essential detail of the inner life of Joseph's brothers that informs our understanding of their characters and qualifies why they seek the life of their brother.

Up to this point we have focused on what we are told about a character (which is objective), now let us look at how we are shown what a character is like (which is subjective). This is done through speech and actions.⁵⁵ We can tell what a character is like both by what he says and what he does. Moses' dialogue with the LORD at the burning bush is telling

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

of his initial character traits. He is a humble man who does not understand why God would choose him for such a great task (Ex 3:11; c.f. Num 12:3). He is not a man of high standing who is respected by the Israelites and thus questions whether the people will really believe him and follow him (Ex 4:1). Nor is he a natural leader who is good with words and so he doubts whether the LORD can really use him (Ex 4:10). And finally, he is a fearful stubborn man, not easily convinced by the LORD's rebuttals to his objections (Ex 4:13). We learn a significant amount about Moses character traits from this one dialogue.

Of course we see a drastic development in the character of Moses throughout the book of Exodus and Numbers: he quickly goes from a fearful, bumbling, reluctant leader to a courageous, bold, willing mediator (Ex 18:13-16; 32:11-14). We see this not only in Moses words but also in his actions. He stands courageously before Pharaoh on numerous occasions; the people come to him for judgment, a sign of their acknowledgment of his position of leadership; and he even boldly prays to God on behalf of the people of Israel (32:11-14), willing to die in their place (32:32). Through the words and actions of Moses we see him develop into God's faithful servant and mediator, leading the people of God out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the edge of the promise land.

Now that we have seen how characterization works in biblical narrative, let us now turn our attention to how characters function in stories. Adele Berlin has helpfully distinguished three main categories of character types in biblical narrative: (1) round, (2) flat, and (3) agent.⁵⁶ Walter

⁵⁶ Berlin, *Poetics*, 23.

Kaiser's description of these character types is helpful: "A round character has many traits, is more complex, and therefore less predictable, but more real. A flat character usually only has one trait and thus is one-dimensional. An agent has no personality at all, but simply functions to move the story along."⁵⁷ Each character in a story essentially fits in one of these categories, though the same person may function as a round character in one story and a flat or agent character in another.⁵⁸

Going back to Moses, we can easily categorize him as a round character in the Exodus narrative. He is complex and develops over time. He is not predictable and is thus more real to us. What is the book of Exodus without Moses? He is its most prominent human character in the story (of course God is the ultimate hero of Exodus and Moses is only who he is because of YHWH). Since Moses is such a prominent character (round) you need to pay careful attention to his role in the story. His actions and words are most important.

In the Exodus narrative Pharaoh functions as a flat character. He is one dimensional and entirely predictable. There are moments when he seems to change his mind and to act differently, but then turns back to hardening his heart against God, which becomes the consistent pattern.

Ultimately Pharaoh is a foil of YHWH, but at another level of Moses.⁵⁹ Pharaoh's character is essential to the story of Exodus, but mainly to serve as a means to glorifying the LORD (Ex 7:3-5). Pharaoh, who was considered a god in

⁵⁷ Kaiser, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 74.

⁵⁸ Berlin, *Poetics*, 24.

⁵⁹ A foil is a character that functions as a comparison or a contrast to the main character of a story in order to heighten their qualities. Often the flat character in a story functions as a foil (but not always).

Egypt, and his many gods could not stand against the LORD and his power over creation. Pharaoh's magicians and his sovereign throne over Egypt are no comparison to Moses and the LORD of all the earth (Ex 9:29; Ps 24:1-2). Moses, though reluctantly, obeyed the LORD and did not harden his heart against Him; Pharaoh defied the LORD habitually and hardened his own heart even before the LORD hardened it further.

Finally, in Exodus Aaron functions as an agent.⁶⁰ Though Aaron is present at every important event in Exodus he simply functions to move the story along. He has no personality in the story, and so we only hear direct speech from him in one literary unit (Ex 32). Aaron did obviously speak in the historical events of the Exodus, he was Moses' mouthpiece and presumably did all the talking, but in the narrative of Exodus we never really hear him speak. Interestingly, the narrator (Moses) only reports of Aaron recapitulating what the LORD or Moses told him to say, but never has him speak directly. He functions not as a main character in the Exodus narrative, but simply as Moses' mouthpiece.

Why does all this matter? Does it really make a difference for our exegesis or exposition how a character functions in the story? Yes, indeed it does. In expository preaching we want to emphasize what the Author emphasizes. By understanding the characterization of Moses and how he functions in the story we can portray him in our preaching as he is being portrayed in the biblical text.

⁶⁰ The only exception to this is Exodus 32 where Aaron functions as a flat character. Indecently this is the only literary unit in Exodus that we hear direct speech from Aaron.

Understanding how the Hebrews characterized the persons of the Bible is the hard work of exegesis. As we have seen they use literary devices that are foreign to most modern readers. The preacher's job is to understand how a text means so that he can understand what a text means. By understanding characterization the preacher is enabled to grasp what a character is like and what about that character is being emphasized in the biblical text. As we have seen, we learn an awful lot about the type of person Moses was by closely analyzing his speech and his actions. Furthermore, by understanding the types of characters used in biblical narrative we observed that Pharaoh functions as a foil to YHWH and Moses and thus much of the emphasis should be placed on comparing Pharaoh with YHWH and Moses with the aim of highlighting the latter's qualities. Finally, by looking at how Aaron functions in the story we observed that his character is not essential, but serves as an aspect of the plot who aids the character of Moses. Thus we must not place undo emphasis on his character.

Repetition. The last literary device I would like to discuss is that of *repetition*. We have all noticed the seemingly endless repetition in Old Testament narrative, but we should not be surprised to learn that these repetitions are intentional. One practical reason for these repetitions is that the Bible was originally written to be read aloud and heard. Not many people had the skill of reading and relied on the scribes to read God's word aloud. People would have gathered to hear God's word read to them, and you can just imagine how hard it might have been to hear in a crowd at times! People could not go back and reread what they heard,

so repetition in the story aided in memory and understanding.

But repetition serves more than practical reasons. Repetition is used to accomplish a number of things. One of these purposes is to convey the promise-fulfillment motif so often found in the Bible. The LORD states what will happen and then later in the narrative we have a report of that event taking place, often with verbatim repetition. This can be clearly seen in Exodus 7:17-18 and 7:20-21. First God tells Moses what he is to do and what will happen, and then we are told of Moses doing what he was told and the result. More than a pointless repetition, this serves to highlight God's word as being true.

Another way repetition is used is through *key words*. A key word is "a word or a word [group and its synonyms] that is meaningfully repeated within a text, or a sequence of texts..."⁶¹ Noticing the repetition of a key word can reveal or clarify the meaning of a story. Bruce Waltke insightfully demonstrates how the key words "wild game" and "tasty food" reveal the character of Isaac. In the Isaac, Jacob, and Esau episode the key word "wild game" occurs ten times, while the key word "tasty food" occurs six times. As Waltke states, "Isaac is said to 'love tasty food' by Rebekah, Isaac himself, and the narrator. This repetition makes clear the story's message: Isaac's [appetite] has distorted his spiritual taste. He has given himself over to an indulgent sensuality."⁶²

⁶¹ Marin Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative," in *Scripture and Translation*, ed. M. Buber and F. Rosenzweig, trans. L. Rosenwald and E. Fox (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 114.

⁶² Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 116-117.

Another form of repetition is called a *motif*. Robert Alter describes a motif as “a concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object that recurs through a particular narrative... It has no meaning in itself without the defining context of the narrative.”⁶³ One such example is the presence of a goat in the deceptions in Genesis. Jacob deceives his father Isaac by wearing the skins of young goats on his arms so that his father would mistake his hairiness for Esau’s (Gen 27:16). Later in Jacob’s life his own sons deceive him by means of a goat. They take his most beloved son Joseph’s royal coat, after they sold him into slavery, and dipped it in goat’s blood in order to simulate Joseph’s death (37:31-32). In the very next chapter (38), Jacob’s son Judah is deceived by his daughter-in-law Tamar who dresses up as a prostitute and agrees to sleep with him for the payment of a young goat (38:17). The use of the goat motif ties these stories together and implies that deceit runs in the family.

One last type of repetition we should take notice of is that of *refrain*. A refrain is a “repetition of a phrase or sentence.”⁶⁴ A refrain can be used to both emphasize a point or to help divide material. We see this most prominently in the book of Judges. In a series of six cycles we encounter basically the same formula introducing the six major Judges of Israel.

- 1) “The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD”
- 2) “The LORD sold them into the hands of X”
- 3) “The sons of Israel cried out to the LORD”
- 4) “The LORD raised up a deliverer”

⁶³ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 120.

⁶⁴ Waltke, *Theology*, 117.

- 5) “The LORD gave X into the hands of the deliverer “
- 6) “The land had rest X years”

Though every element of this formula is not repeated each time, the refrain is obvious. In fact the elements that are not repeated for the later Judges, notably the last three phrases, signifies the degeneration of both Israel and the Judges, concluding with the refrain “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25).⁶⁵

A Guide

Walter Kaiser has written a very helpful guide that summarizes the steps to interpreting narrative. We will build on those here.

- 1) Select a text to preach from that consists of one main plot
- 2) Break the text into it’s various scenes (events that occur in particular time and place)
- 3) Summarize the words and actions of the main character(s) in each scene with the aim of discerning “the narrator’s point of view and the reason for recording these details”
- 4) “Analyze the plot of the narrative. Note how the action rises toward a climax and how the author paces the plot and highlights the high points of the story, thereby marking the beginning, middle, and end of... the story.”

⁶⁵ There are many, many more literary devices than what we have covered here. For a more comprehensive summary and guide to literary devices and their use in interpretation refer to Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 78-142.

- 5) "Determine the point of view from which the narrative is recorded. How does the narrator tell the story? Which character in the story does the narrator focus on? Does the narrator reveal the thoughts and emotions of the characters or add a critique of the action?"
- 6) "Pay close attention to the details of the scene." What description does the narrator give of the characters if any? Is the geographical location of the scene important? Does the narrator mention something that seems out of place? Is a word repeated? Does time move quickly or slowly through the scene?
- 7) "Examine the dialogue that the author uses to narrate the story." When and how is the dialogue introduced? What was important about the events or situation that precluded the dialogue? Who does most of the speaking? What does each character's speech reveal about them?
- 8) "Study the [literary] devices the author used." Does the author use key words, motifs, or refrain (some or all may apply)? Does the author use irony or omit important details?
- 9) Ascertain the big idea of the story (main point) and make an exegetical summary. "Samson did what was right in his own eyes and lost his eyes, but the LORD still had the victory."
- 10) Transfer the big idea into a homiletical summary that is easy to remember: "If you play with fire you get burned, but God draws straight lines with crooked sticks."

- 11) Make applications that flow naturally from your text but have immediate relevance to your audience.

A Word About Preaching From Narrative

We cannot treat at length here how to best preach from narrative so I will point you to a helpful guide. I encourage you to pick up *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* by Steve D. Mathewson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002). This is a helpful book that explains well the art of preaching from narrative. Mathewson purposes a way of preaching that fits the genre. This has become known as narrative preaching. There are two types of narrative preaching and it is entirely up to you which one to use at any given time, but of course some texts lend more to one way than the other.

The first type is a third person narrative sermon (I include a manuscript from a message I preached in this style). This is quite possibly the easiest type of sermon to preach, since it is mainly retelling the biblical story in an artistic way that is engaging to the congregation. The preacher will still have to do all the necessary preparation to get a good understanding of the story, but then will retell the story emphasizing the important details and points that are often missed. In order to preach a narrative passage well the preacher will have to develop his imagination and use it as a tool to aid in his preaching. It is important to note that exegesis must drive the imagination here, not the other way around. After you retell the story in a vivid and artistic way, causing the congregation to live redemptive history, you end with the big idea and the applications. This is a powerful way to preach from narrative because God's people will hear the

stories they have listened to since they were children and be struck by it in ways they never have before. Trust me, I have watched it happen first hand.

The second way you can preach a narrative passage is a first person narrative sermon. This is a sermon in which the preacher preaches as one of the characters in the story (or you can preach as an implied character viewing things from the outside). This is a more challenging way to preach that requires you to have a strong grasp on the characterization of the character you assume. The preaching style is very similarly to the second person narrative sermon, except that you must preach as if you are experienced the story first hand. You must be very careful with this style of preaching that it not become a show or a Broadway act. Never get your eyes off the purpose of preaching, which is to magnify Christ. Quite simply, don't make it about you. Only use this type of preaching if you think it will best convey the message of God's word to the congregation.

Sermon Example**SAMSON****Judges 16**

Prepared by: M.A. Tiberi
Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois

Introduction

He's a truly gifted man isn't he? God's chosen one from birth. A strong man. A warrior. But now look at him over there.... well now he looks quite pathetic doesn't he. He lives in darkness and shadows. He is sweltering in this heat. His mouth is parched. His tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth. His stomach begs with earnest growling to be fed. And he wonders to himself, "How did I ever get here? I never imagined it ending this way. Oh the humiliation! I'm a slave in my enemies sweatshop. Oh how did this ever happen to ME???" Me... the chosen one from birth. My mother always told me that I was special... That I was a gift from God. How could I ever end up in this place??"

This man, gifted of God, has been completely humiliated. He has lost his special status in society. He has lost everything that he relied on. He has been brought low. He has been broken. [Dramatic Pause] Samson, the elect Nazirite of God, has been stripped of his gifts and humiliated before his enemies. How did he get here? I'm glad you asked. Let us turn in our Bibles to Judges chapter 16 so we can find out.

Narrative

While your turning in your Bibles to Judges 16, let me give you some background info on our friend Samson. You see, before Samson was ever born an Angel of God came to his mother and told her that she would conceive a child and that he was to be set apart as a Nazarite to God and that he would begin to deliver Israel from her enemies the Philistines. Now a Nazarite was someone who was completely dedicated to The Lord. Samson was unique in that a Nazarite vow was usually a voluntary oath, but for Samson it was determined that he would take this vow from birth. He was God's chosen servant. Now a Nazarite vow had three significant requirements. The person was to 1) Never come in contact with anything that was dead, 2) Never to drink wine or strong drink, and 3) Never cut his hair. And so Samson was born and he was set apart as a Nazarite to God, and he was a very strong man. But, he was also a very sensual man. A man led by his desires. He SAW a Philistine woman and took her to be his wife, a thing not done in Israel. And what is worse, he began to break his vow. He drank wine at his wedding feast! He scooped honey from the body of a dead lion and ate of it! He used a dried jawbone of a dead donkey as a weapon to kill the Philistines! He took lightly the calling of Lord. But even so, The Lord used Samson, and on at least two occasions the Spirit of The Lord rushed upon Samson and empowered him to do great and mighty things. He was a warrior and he struck down many Philistines. The Lord was beginning to deliver Israel from her enemies. But, the Philistines grew in their hatred toward Samson and they sought an opportunity to rid themselves of this long-haired pest.

And that is where we pick up our story. Read with me in Judges ch 16:1: "Samson went to Gaza [that is in the land of the Philistines], and there he SAW a prostitute, and he went in to her." Samson is back at it again! He sees a woman and he wants her, and this time there is no marriage ceremony. Now he is with a Philistine prostitute, fulfilling his sexual urges. And so while he is indulging in the flesh, the Philistines hear of it and they set into motion a plan to rid themselves of this pest. They surround the place that he is staying and they wait silently, in the darkness and the shadows. They keep as quiet as they possibly can. They set an ambush for him at the city gate, and they wait until the morning. But something stirs Samson to leave, to get out of this place. And so at midnight he gathered his clothes and snuck out and made his way to the city gate. And he seized the two posts of the gate and he pulled with all of his strength and ripped them out of the ground. He lifted them upon his shoulders and he began to walk. And in a display of supernatural ability he carries the gate of the Gaza all the way to Hebron, about 40 miles! He escaped and boy did he humiliate and infuriate the Philistines. And I can imagine that from that day forward they plotted and planned of how they can humiliate and degrade Samson like he had so many times done to him. He must be rid of!

Some time later, Samson fell in love with a woman. The only woman he is ever said to have loved. She must have been a beautiful woman for Samson to fall in love. And this woman that he fell in love with lived in the Valley of Sorek, just on the outskirts of Philistine territory. This woman was no doubt another Philistine, Samson's taste in women had not improved. And her name was Delilah.

The five lords of the Philistines, from the five cities of Philistine, hear of this. Samson is in love with one of our very own. This is our chance! We will finally have our revenge! And so I imagine they set up a secret meeting with her to hatch their plot. In verse 5 we see what they are up to: "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humiliate him [like he humiliated us!]. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver." 1,100 pieces of silver, each! That is 5,500 pieces of silver! Somewhere around the 15 million dollars in today's currency! They are offering her an absurd amount of money, an amount too good to pass up. The time has come... to find out whether or not Delilah loves Samson more than money. She doesn't even hesitate! She agrees on the spot and assures the lords of the Philistines that she will seduce Samson and find out the secret to his power.

It was late that night that Delilah turned to Samson, as she lie there with her head on his shoulder, and with a very flirtatious look and with smooth seductive words (Prov 5) she says to Samson, in v. 6, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could humiliate you." Shockingly she comes right out and says it! She asks him to reveal the secret to her strength! This is a bold woman. And may I suggest, that if we use our sanctified imagination, it is not too much to suggest that Delilah has construed this question in the context of a sick and twisted game, something perverse that surely would not have been out of bounds in pagan Philistine culture. She begins her seduction with a perverse game in order to seduce the

answer out of Samson. And so Samson, who is far from the ideal model of holy sexuality, agrees to play along.

He says to her in v. 7, "If one were to bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." So the next morning Delilah informed the lords of the Philistines to bring her 7 fresh bowstrings to tie Samson with, and they brought them to her immediately. And they hid in an inner chamber of her house, in the darkness and the shadows, and waited for Delilah's signal so that they could humiliate Samson. In the mean time, Delilah seductively approached Samson, and I imagine she said something along the lines of, "Oh Samson my love, guess what I have this evening? I got the seven fresh bowstrings you told me about. Want to play a game?" And a being a man who never turned down a woman who was willing to satisfy his desires, he agrees, and she binds his hands with the seven fresh bowstrings. But in order to test Samson's claim that these magical bowstrings would sap him of his strength she has to perform a test. And so in an unexpected moment she screamed out with a voice of utter surprise, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!!" And in that moment Samson snapped the bowstrings from his wrists as if he had placed them over a flame.

He had lied, and Delilah took offense. She turned to Samson with a look of heart broken amazement, saying, "Look! You have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound." And so again Samson plays along, and he says to her, "Ok, ok, I will tell you the truth now. If one were to bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and like any other man." And so the next day Delilah got some new thick, strong ropes and

she had the Philistine men hiding in the inner chamber again, in the darkness and the shadows, waiting for her signal. And just as before she seduced Samson and bound him with new ropes. And with same exact cry of distress she yelled, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" Now apparently Samson doesn't catch on very quickly and he jumped up and snapped the new ropes as if they were mere twine.

He had lied to Delilah again, and she took offense. And she said to him in v. 13, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound." And again, without hesitation, the ever cunning Samson tells her how he might be bound. He says in the last part of v. 13, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." Now what Samson is speaking of here is a weavers loom. A horizontal table that thread would be woven across to make clothes. I picture it looking something like spiders web of thread. And so that night, after much passionate love making, when Samson was tired and worn out, he fell into a deep, deep sleep. And Delilah wove the seven locks of his head into her web of seduction, the fly had been caught by the Black Widow. Samson is trapped. And like before she cried out with a convincing scream of despair, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" Samson woke up with a start and his hair was caught in the loom! But in a quick moment he pulled out the pin and released himself from the web.

Samson had lied again, and Delilah took offense. And like a pouting child she pulls out the big guns and says to Samson, "How can you say 'I love you,' when your heart is

not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies." But this time Samson does not play along. He lets her ask, but he is not telling. And the narrator tells us in v. 16, "With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it." She pressed the matter hard, as long as it took. She wanted her 15 million dollars! She was not a woman who was going to give up, and Samson was getting tired of it.

Now he has a choice. The pressure has become so great... the tension is overwhelming, heavier than the gates of Hebron were upon his shoulders, and he is being crushed in the vice of her nagging words. Now he has only two options, either leave, or tell her the truth. And Samson, not being a man of much resolve or self discipline cannot help but to give in, to let the seductress have her way with him. And so in v. 17 the narrator tells us that, "He told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazarite to God from my mothers' womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak like any other man." He gave in. He told her his secret. He has succumbed to the seductresses temptation. And notice something with me: Samson does not attribute his strength to the LORD. In fact other than the mention of God in this verse, YHWH has yet to be mentioned in this episode of Samson's life. When he took the gates from Hebron there no mention of the Spirit of the LORD and here Samson attributes his great strength to his hair. Like it was some sort of magical source of power. May I suggest that Samson has forgotten where his strength comes from? That he has begun to believe that his strength comes from his being a Nazarite and from having uncut hair. He has told her

his heart and in his heart he believes that his strength is from himself.

Armed with this information, knowing that Samson has finally told her the truth, Delilah sends for the lords of the Philistines to come back, for she has finally got Samson to spill his guts. So they traveled back to the Valley of Sorek, with the silver in their hands, all 15 million worth, ready to finally be rid of the pest Samson, to humiliate him like he had them. This time Delilah had a man lurking in the darkness and the shadows with a razor ready to cut the hair from Samson's head. And when Samson was wore out and tired, Delilah put him to sleep on her lap. And while he was in a deep, deep, deep sleep she called for the man and he quietly came into the room and crept up to Samson with the razor in his hand. And he gently took one lock of his hair and snip, he cut it off. Samson still remained fast asleep. Then the man grabbed another lock of hair, and snip, he cut it off. Then three, then four, then five, then six, and then seven. The hair of his head was gone. He has completely broken his Nazarite vow. Delilah had begun the humiliation of Samson.

And like before she cried out with a loud voice, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!!" Samson jumped up and thought to himself, "I will do the same thing as last time. I am indestructible." But, as the narrator notes, "little did he know that the LORD had left him." YHWH, the source of Samson's strength had left and he was utterly helpless. He was at the mercy of the enemies. And the Philistines rushed in and they seized Samson as he had seized their gates and they took a dagger and as they held him down they gouged out his eyes, the very eyes with which he had lived his life,

and they brought him back to Gaza as a weak and vulnerable man, like he had left them when he had removed their gates. And learning from the past, they bound him with bronze shackles. There was no snapping of these bonds. And him in a prison where he ground grain.

And there he is. Samson, chosen of God from before birth. A strong man. A warrior. And now he lives in the darkness and the shadows. He is sweltering in this heat. His tongue sticks to the top of his mouth and his stomach groans for food. He has been completely humiliated. His status as Nazarite has been taken. He has been degraded from a warrior to a prison worker. He is a grinder of grain. A slave in a sweat shop. And the LORD had left him. All seems to be lost. [Dramatic pause] But the narrator makes an interesting comment in v. 22: "But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved." Could this be a sign that there is still hope for Samson? That his story is not yet over? Is this the narrators way of telling us that more is yet to come by using the symbol of Samson's hair?

We enter into a new scene. There is a party in Gaza today. The lords of the Philistines have thrown a celebration! There is to be a great sacrifice today! In my imagination I see the temple of Dagon, a large and extravagant temple, filled with people. There are large pillars lined across the outer parameters made out of the finest wood and they rest upon giant stone bases. Everything looks exquisite and the temple is buzzing with excitement. Men and women are everywhere. The temple is packed! And on the upper balcony upon the roof there are 3,000 men and women. And down on the main floor are the lords of the Philistines, all five of them. They have finally had their victory! The pest Samson has

finally been captured. He has been degraded and humiliated. Dagon had delivered them from their enemy. And with great shouts of rejoicing they praised Dagon for this great victory, saying in v. 24, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has multiplied our slain." I can just see the living God, YHWH, the maker of the heavens and the earth, sitting upon his throne in heaven looking down upon this celebration and laughing with disdain at their impotence. "Dagon has delivered Samson into your hands? That mute and powerless god Dagon? It is I who delivered my servant Samson into your hands!" But the Philistines are none the wiser and they continue with their celebration.

And when their hearts were merry someone suggested that they have Samson come out and entertain them. And so they called for him and made him come out before them. And he performed for them. Now the narrator doesn't tell us what they had him do, but in my imagination I see Samson there in the midst of the temple and there are giant posts lying on the ground and a man with a whip stands near by and he is forcing Samson to try and lift the pillars. And Samson lifted with all his might, but he could not budge them. I can just imagine the frustration of this mighty warrior who had so easily carried the gates of this very city forty miles now unable to even lift one post. His strength is gone.

After he had finished entertaining the man attending to Samson had him stand among the large pillars on the outer perimeter of the temple. Samson, familiar with these types of temples knew that the pillars had to be near by and so he asked the young man if he could lean against them. So the

young man agreed to this harmless request and helped Samson find the pillars with his hands.

And in this moment, Samson, knowing that his strength has been completely removed, does the only thing he can think to do. He cries out to God. In v. 28 we read, "Then Samson called to the LORD and said, 'O LORD God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.'" Then with the small amount of faith that this weak man had he trusted God to answer his prayer and seized hold of the two pillars, which just happened to be the ones that held up the structural integrity of the temple, and he began to push against them. And in one last breath he cried out, "Let me die with the Philistines!" and pressed with all of the strength that he could muster and the pillars began to shake and the upper balcony began to quiver as if there were an earthquake and the shaking became more and more violent as Samson pushed. And the pillars gave way and the temple, along with the 3,000 people in the balcony, fell upon the lords of the Philistines, and upon Samson the Israelite Judge, and they all were crushed and died. Samson had got his revenge. But sadly it cost him his life. And the narrator closes the story with a bittersweet comment in v. 30, "So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. Then his brothers and all his family come sown and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years." Samson accomplished more by dying than by living. A tragic ending to a gifted man's life. But amidst all his failures the LORD accomplished what he had promised to do through

Samson. He had begun to deliver the people of Israel from the Philistines. The enemies of Israel have no more leaders and their god Dagon has been destroyed. YHWH was victorious!!

Big Idea and Applications.

What can we learn from this ancient story? What is it that this tragic story of Samson teaches us? Two things. One, ***When you play with fire you get burned! (repeat 3x's)***. As Proverbs 6:27 states, "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?" Sexual sin is like a fire that once kindled will burn everything in its sight. Samson kindled fire throughout his entire life until it consumed all he had. My question to you my brothers and sisters, are you playing with fire? Are you kindling fire at your computer desk? Are you kindling fire with you iPhone? Are you kindling fire in your words with others? Are you kindling fire in your relationships? Are you playing with fire? If you are I plead with you as a fellow brother in The Lord to put out the fire! It will destroy everything in your life. You have been able to keep it controlled thus far, but it will become a blaze so great you cannot stop it. Sin will destroy your ministry. It will destroy your family. It will destroy your relationships. It will destroy you. Put out the fire! Repent and cling to the grace of Jesus. Do you not know that Christ dwells in you? Then live as such. Live in the reality of your new life in Christ and stop returning to that sin. For shall we go on sinning that grace may abound? By no means! May it never be so!

I encourage you by fellow saints to get some help of you are struggling and failing in sin. Confess your sins to your

pastor, or some other spiritual authority in your life. Leave no rock uncovered. Take radical measures to remove sin in your life, to be holy as the One who called you is holy. You can either wait until God humbles you and exposes your sin or you can come to him in repentance. Gouge out your own eye, cut off your own hand if it is causing you to sin! Take whatever steps it takes to be holy. Live without technology. Get rid of your smart phone. Stop hanging out at those places that you know lead to sin. Take whatever steps that are necessary to live a holy life.

The second thing Samson teaches us is that, ***God's purposes cannot be thwarted. God always wins in the end.*** Though Samson was far from the ideal Judge, God worked through him to accomplish what he set out to do. He promised that Samson would begin to deliver Israel from her enemies, and that is exactly what Samson did. God uses imperfect, sinful, flawed human beings to accomplish his purposes in the world. God's sovereignty is most magnificently displayed in His ability to use the brokenness of humanity to accomplish his perfect will. God always wins. And the beautiful thing is that he is a God of grace and takes and uses the flawed faith of his servants to do great things. For our God is faithful, and Jesus Christ is the Faithful One on our behalf. Though Samson's story is a tragic one it encourages me to know that the author of Hebrews found room in the Hall of Faith for a man like Samson, and if Samson can make it in there, then there has to be hope for us.

7

PREACHING FROM THE GOSPELS



“We are on the wrong track if we think expository preaching merely as a preaching style chosen from a list (topical, devotional, evangelistic, textual, apologetic, prophetic, expository)... As John Stott says, 'All true Christian preaching is expository preaching.'”

ALISTAIR BEGG



What are we aiming at as we preach through the Gospels? We want to develop a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused model of expository preaching. This is not about preaching Christ in the Old Testament, but in a sense it is. Christ is coming in a transition period, where He is announcing His Kingdom.

The almost universal assumption is that no one has difficulty preaching Christ from the New Testament, especially from the Gospels (or more accurately, the four accounts of the one Gospel).

Preaching Christ from the Gospels

Preaching Christ from the Gospels means that we do not take the gospel for granted. The Gospels reside in a biblical-theological context that constitutes an eschatological blast of the trumpet. In Jesus, the biblical storyline moves from the Old Testament promise of a messianic kingdom to the presence of the messianic King. Jesus' preaching of the kingdom was in continuity with the kingdom emphasis in the Old Testament; but what made his preaching unique was his contention that the kingdom was being presently fulfilled in him. Jesus' life, ministry and preaching revealed the inaugurated eschatological tension of the kingdom, an overlap of the ages, in which the kingdom of God was already present but still awaits consummation in the age to come.

We see the outline of the synoptic Gospels corresponds together. It also goes together geographically as follows:

1. Judea (birth and John the Baptist)
2. Galilean Ministry
3. Journey to Jerusalem
4. Great Commission in Galilee

Similarly, here is an outline of each of the Gospels that follows the geographical outline just mentioned.

MATTHEW OUTLINE

Birth Narratives	1-2
Baptist and Temptation (desert)	3:1-4:11
Galilean Ministry	4:12-16:20
Journey to Jerusalem	16:21-20:34
Triumphal Entry through Resurrection	21:1-28:15
Great Commission in Galilee	28:16-20

MARK OUTLINE

John and Baptism in Judea	1:1-13
Galilean Ministry	1:14-8:30
Journey to Jerusalem	8:31-10:52
Triumphal Entry through Resurrection	11-16

LUKE OUTLINE

Preparation: Jesus & John	1:1-4:13
Galilean Ministry	4:14-9:50
Journey to Jerusalem	9:51-19:27
Triumphal Entry through Ascension	19:28-24:53

JOHN OUTLINE

Prologue	1:1-18
John the Baptist	1:19-51
Public Ministry	2-12
Upper Room through Resurrection	13-20
Peter in Galilee	21

A Purpose for Each Gospel

Preaching Christ from the Gospels means that we do not take the gospel for granted. The Gospels reside in a biblical-theological context that constitutes an eschatological blast of the trumpet. In Jesus, the biblical storyline moves from the Old Testament promise of a messianic kingdom to the presence of the messianic King. Jesus' preaching of the kingdom was in continuity with the kingdom emphasis in the Old Testament; but what made his preaching unique was his contention that the kingdom was being presently fulfilled in him. Jesus' life, ministry and preaching revealed the inaugurated eschatological tension of the kingdom, an overlap of the ages, in which the kingdom of God was already present but still awaits consummation in the age to come.

Each Gospel presents us with a little different angle or view of Christ, depending on the audience.

Matthew is written to the Jews and presents Jesus as King. There are more quotations of prophecy in Matthew than in any other Gospel.

Mark is written to the Roman Empire where some say over 50% were slaves, and so Jesus is presented as a servant. The Gospel of Mark uses the word "immediately" quite a bit, and is written (in Greek) mostly in the present tense (though it is not often translated that way. Mark's source for his Gospel was Peter, so this could really be nicknamed: "the Gospel according to Peter."

Luke is written to the Gentiles and presents Jesus as in His humanity. "Son of man" is Jesus favorite title for Himself. It should be mentioned that there are four categories of the way "Son of man" title is used in the Old Testament. Three out of four are used of Christ in the New Testament:

(1) Generic man, (2) Prophets, Daniel & Ezekiel, (3) Davidic, messianic king, (4) Pre-existent being of Dan. 7. This does refer at times to His humanity, but also to His deity as a Messianic title from the book of Daniel, chapter 7.

Luke has many sources and is a companion of Paul, so this Gospel could also be nicknamed: “the Gospel according to Paul.”

Finally, John is written to the whole world and presents Jesus as the Son of God. John is not a synoptic Gospel and presents much additional information that is not included in the synoptic Gospels.

Four Gospels: One Message

Though there are four Gospels, we must be careful not to split Christ into pieces. There is one Savior and therefore only one message: Jesus Christ is the promised Savior of the Old Testament and has come to bring His kingdom. People enter the Kingdom through repentant faith in Him.

Types of Preaching from the Gospels

Genealogy

Genealogies are important in the Bible. The beauty of genealogy has various layers. First, genealogies root Jesus life and the entire Bible in historical fact. This genre is not myth like the pagan gods, but actually comes out of history.

Secondly genealogies help us to see the sinfulness and humanity of those whom God has called. For instance Jesus' family tree in Matthew includes a prostitute (Rahab) and two gentile women: Rahab the Cananite from Jericho and Ruth

the Moabitess. Not only that but God saves adulteresses: Tamar with Judah and Bathsheba with David.

Even kings (some who are idolatrous, and some who came to repentance) are named and part of Christ's genealogy: Solomon, Rehoboam, Manasseh to name a few.

Parables

William Barclay defines a parable as an earthly story with a spiritual meaning. Jesus presents parables as earthly stories that present the truths of the Kingdom. Each of the parables may present one or more of the main themes of Jesus' ministry: His person, His work, His Kingdom and family.

For example you have the parable of the four soils which speaks of regeneration and the work of God in the heart.

You have the Kingdom parables that present the way the Kingdom will expand and spread and it also presents who the recipients will be and who will reject the kingdom.

There are also Eschatological Parables like the Ten Virgins and the Ten Talents that have to do with difference between true Kingdom citizens and pretenders.

Parables are meant to hide the meaning of Jesus' message from the proud. J.I. Packer said, "One of the divine qualities of the Bible is that it does not yield its secrets to the irreverent and the self-satisfied."⁶⁶ "God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble" (Jms. 5:5).

We have the most powerful message that will convert souls. Yet Jesus hides the message of the Gospel through parables. William Barclay defines a parable as an earthly story with a spiritual meaning. Paul tells us that "the things of

⁶⁶ J.I. Packer. *God Has Spoken* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 1993), 41.

the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural [or unconverted] mind” (1 Cor. 2:14).

As we see Jesus speaking in parables, we are awakened to a very important change in Jesus’ ministry. This is the moment when Jesus stops speaking plainly to the crowds, and starts hiding the glorious mercy and grace of God from proud hearers. We know of many parables in Jesus ministry, somewhere around 27 in total. Examples are abundant: the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46), and others, including the parables of the kingdom that we have come to now (Matt. 13:1–52). As I said, by my count there are twenty-seven parables in the four Gospels, though some are similar and may merely be different versions of the same root story.⁶⁷

Narrative

Most of the Gospels are made up of narrative. Narrative sermons usually have to do with the person and work of Christ and how a person comes to Christ.

Didactic Literature (Teaching)

There is much didactic teaching in the Gospels. There are five extended sermons of Jesus in the book of Matthew alone.

⁶⁷ Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 230). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

8

PREACHING FROM THE PROPHETS



“There are specific prophecies throughout the Bible. There are 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament for a total of 1,817. These prophecies are contained in 8,352 of the Bible’s verses. Since there are 31,124 verses in the Bible, the 8,352 verses that contain prophecy constitute 26.8 percent of the Bible’s volume.”



About twenty-seven percent of the entire Bible is given to Bible prophecy. There are 17 books of prophesy in the Old Testament and they are divided into two groups: the long books (the major prophets) and the short books (the minor prophets).

Not only that, there are specific prophecies throughout the Bible. There are 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament for a total of 1,817. These prophecies are contained in 8,352 of the Bible's verses. Since there are 31,124 verses in the Bible, the 8,352 verses that contain prophecy constitute 26.8 percent of the Bible's volume.

So Bible prophecy is important. A lot of the Old Testament (which is 60% of our Bible) is dedicated to prophecy.

Have You Preached from the Prophets?

When was the last time you preached from the section of the Bible called the Prophets? I am not talking about using a verse from the Prophets in passing but rather preaching from a particular passage in the Prophets. We have likely preached from the books of Daniel and Jonah or on familiar passages, such as the fourth servant song in Isaiah 53 and the vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37. But when was the last time your congregation heard a sermon based on the books of Hosea, Obadiah, Micah, Haggai, or Zecharia, or on Isaiah 19 or Lamentations?

The Prophetic Books

The major prophet books are:

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah

- Lamentations (written by Jeremiah)
- Ezekiel
- Daniel

The minor prophet books are:

- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

A Comparison of the Four Major Prophets

The major prophets are only called “Major” because of the length of their books. The so-called “writing prophets” have left us seventeen books. Four of these prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—are called the major prophets. Twelve others are represented by much shorter books and are called “minor prophets”—a reference to the length of their writings, not to their quality or importance. The minor prophets were normally compiled in one scroll and called the “Twelve Prophet Book”. The Major Prophets bring us major hope!

- Isaiah – Hope of Messiah’s Rescue of Those Deserving Judgment
- Jeremiah – Hope of Justice

- Lamentations (continuation of this hope of justice)
- Ezekiel – Hope of Paradise
- Daniel – Hope of Survival

Definition of Prophecy

The term “prophecy” literally means “to speak before.” There are two types of prophecy. (1) Predicting the future Some biblical prophecy involves the actual prediction of future events, and (2) Relating the Word of God to people.

The primary responsibility of the prophets was to *forthtell* not *foretell*. They spoke God’s message and warnings, often calling on the people to respond in obedience. The prophets often acted as *covenant enforcers* reminding the people of what God already said about blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Most biblical prophecy falls into this category.

Divisions of Bible Prophecy

It may be easier to divide the prophetic books into the times and peoples they prophesied to. In this sense we understand that various prophets were contemporaries of one another and several knew each other. We may divide them as such within their natural context:

- Pre-exile prophets
- Exile prophets
- Post-exile prophets

The Former Prophets (Historical Books)

Obviously, the Hebrew Bible is divided differently than our modern English Bibles. The first division of the Old

Testament was known as the Law with the second being called the Former Prophets, but these included four historical books—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. Though these books deal with the history of Israel, they were composed from a prophetic viewpoint and possibly even the authors themselves may have been prophets by profession.

The Latter Prophets

The seventeen books of the Major and Minor Prophets considered in this section were classified in the Hebrew Bible as the Latter Prophets. The term ‘latter’ speaks primarily of their place in the canon rather than of their chronological position. These prophets are sometimes called *the writing prophets* because their authors wrote or recorded their utterances. There were other *oral prophets* like Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Oded, Shemaiah, Azariah, Hanani, Jahaziel, and Huldah who left no records of their utterances. Mostly because of their size, the Latter Prophets are subdivided into the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), and the twelve Minor Prophets, whose writings could all be included in one large scroll which came to be known in Greek as “the Twelve-Prophet Book”.⁶⁸ Daniel, usually viewed as one of the Major Prophets in the English Bible, actually appears in the third division of the Hebrew Canon called “the Writings.”

Lamentations will also be dealt with here because of its place in the English Bible, though in the Hebrew Bible it is among the five rolls or *megilloth*, the shorter books, which were brief enough to be read publicly on anniversaries.

⁶⁸ Archer, Electronic Media.

The Time Span of the Prophets			
Pre-exile prophets		Exile Prophets ---70 year Exile---	Prophets after Return to Israel
To Israel Amos (776) Hosea (755) To Edom Obadiah (840) To Ninevah Jonah (760) Nahum (660)	*Date of Assyrian Captivity: 722 BC To Judah Joel (835) ISAIAH (740) Micah (735) Zephaniah (630) JEREMIAH (627) Habakkuk (607) Lamentations (586)	*Date of Babylonian Capivity: 605 BC To Jews in Babylon DANIEL (605) EZEKIEL (592)	*Decree of Cyrus: 537 BC *Date of Return from Captivity: 536 BC To the Remnant after Returning Haggai (520) Zechariah (520) Malachi (452)

Subject Matter of the Prophets

The subject matter of all the Prophets, according to Gerhardus Vos, can be easily divided into the following parts:

- 1. The Self-Revelation and Attributes of God (YHWH)
- 2. The Love of YHWH for His people
- 3. The Sin of God’s people
- 4. The Judgment and Restoration of His people

Threefold Function of Prophets

As God’s spokesman, their message can be seen in a three-fold function they had among the people of God in the Old Testament:

PREACHING – First, they functioned as preachers who expounded and interpreted the Mosaic law to the nation. It was their duty to encourage, admonish, reprove, denounce sin, threaten with the terrors of

judgment, call to repentance, and bring consolation and pardon. Their activity of rebuking sin and calling for repentance consumed far more of the prophets' time than any other feature of their work. The rebuke was driven home with predictions about the punishment that God intended to send on those failing to heed the prophet's warning (cf. Jonah 3:4).

PROPHECY – Second, they functioned as predictors who announced coming judgment, deliverance, and the amazing promise of the coming Messiah and His kingdom. Predicting the future was never intended merely to satisfy man's curiosity, but was designed to demonstrate that God knows and controls the future, and to give purposeful revelation. The prediction given by a true prophet would be visibly fulfilled. The failure of the prediction to be fulfilled would indicate that the prophet had not spoken the word of *Yahweh* (cf. Deut. 18:20-22). In 1 Samuel 3:19 it is said of Samuel that the Lord was with him and let none of his prophetic words fail (lit., "fall to the ground").

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY – Finally, they functioned as watchmen over the people of Israel (Ezek. 3:17). The prophets were enforcing the Torah, and especially the book of Deuteronomy, which is a summary and a fuller treatment of God's law in light of the prophecies of the book.

For instance, Deut. 28:1ff relates the blessings: "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth."

And Deut. 28:15ff relate the curses of the covenant: "But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be

careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. ¹⁶ Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field.”

Hosea acts as a prosecuting attorney in Hosea 4:1, finding Israel guilty of breaking the covenant.

Ezekiel stood as a watchman on the walls of Zion ready to trumpet a warning against religious apostasy. He (with all the other prophets) warned the people against political and military alliances with foreign powers, the temptation to become involved in idolatry and Canaanite cultic worship, and the danger of placing excessive confidence in religious formalism and sacrificial ritual.

While the prophets functioned in various ways as they communicated God’s message, *they occupied one major role* in Israel’s religious system. The prophets in Israel occupied the role of *a royal diplomat or prosecuting attorney*, indicting the nation for violations of the Mosaic covenant.⁶⁹

Principles of Interpretation of Prophecy

Hosea is a book about God’s Covenant love (*hesed*). In order to interpret it or any of the prophets rightly, we must have several presuppositions of interpretation given to us by the New Testament.

1. The Old Testament is valuable for the instruction of New Covenant believers.

- **1 Corinthians 10:11**, “Now these things [in the Old Testament] happened to them as an example, but

⁶⁹ Carl Laney, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct.-Dec. 1981, p. 315-316.

they were written down for **our instruction**, on whom the end of the ages has come.”

2. The Old Testament is a shadow (or we might say a “photograph”) of things to come.

- **Hebrews 10:1**, “For since the law has but a **shadow** of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.”
- **Colossians 2:16–17**, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a **shadow** of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”

The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed.” This famous statement by Saint Augustine expresses the remarkable way in which the two testaments of the Bible are so closely interrelated with each other. The key to understanding the New Testament in its fullest is to see in it the fulfillment of those things that were revealed in the background of the Old Testament. The Old Testament points forward in time, preparing God’s people for the work of Christ in the New Testament.⁷⁰

3. Salvation has always been by grace through faith (Rom. 4:11-12-outside the law, 4:13-14 – by faith). See Hebrews 11 as well. God’s purpose in justification and sanctification is always by grace through faith.

⁷⁰ From “Ancient Promises” by R.C. Sproul; Ligonier Ministries.

4. One's view of Israel and the church may play a role in how you interpret the prophetic books, but it doesn't have to! Regardless of one's system of theology (i.e. Dispensational or Reformed) we can remember that the prophecies for Israel are for us in the New Covenant church age since we Gentiles have been grafted into Israel (Romans 11) and we follow Abraham by faith, so "*all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us*" (1 Cor. 1:20); "*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise* (Gal. 3:29).

5. One's view of eschatology (end times) often plays a view in the interpretation of prophecy – this is especially true concerning prophecies of paradise-like conditions on the earth (Isa. 11:6; 65:25) or the gathering of God's scattered people (Eze. 39:2-5; Isa. 2:2-4). The verses listed are a very small sampling – there are many many more.

While one may hold to a pre-millennial view of end times, there is a way to preach so that one can call attention to the major themes of the Bible without getting into speculation. For instance while some may believe paradise like conditions will occur on the earth in the millennium, we can be sure that this will surely occur during the eternal state. Likewise with the gathering of God's people – God will save and gather and preserve all who are in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. It is best not to get into speculative end times scenarios.

Why Do Pastors Avoid the Prophets?

There are a number of possible reasons why we avoid this area of the Bible:

1. These books seem strange in the sense that they appear to portray God as a harsh God, or at least as One that appears to conduct cruel acts. For example, Isaiah 1:24 states, “*The Lord says, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, ‘Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies.’*” In other places, the prophets perform strange acts. For example, Isaiah walked “*naked and barefoot*” (Isa. 20:2).

2. Prophets are complex to understand and interpret. As preachers and teachers, we tend to prefer passages that are narrative in nature. However, most of the prophets wrote in poetry style, making it harder to understand their messages. The latter prophets wrote in a genre not at all storylike. Furthermore, the prophets do not always write in chronological order. Sometimes in the Prophets we also find apocalyptic prophecy (such as Isaiah 24–26), and this genre requires a different approach from the remainder of Isaiah.

3. Some of us assume that these books seem to talk only about judgment, and there appears to be nothing positive about their message. However, the same prophets who talk about judgment call for repentance, righteousness, social justice, moral uprightness, and salvation.

4. As pastors, we may assume that church members are not interested in prophecy. Or we may let church members dictate what types of preaching they want—to the detriment of their spiritual growth. Richard Mayhue observes this trend: “What the people want, the church should provide.

What the church provides, pastors should be trained to deliver.’”⁷¹

5. We assume that the prophet’s message was only for people back then and does not apply to us today. Many pastors and theologians think that the Old Testament was meant for a different culture of long ago and is not relevant for today.

6. As a society, we have become well adjusted to injustice; therefore, we cannot identify with the prophets’ outrage over injustice.⁷²

7. Biblical readers often prefer the New Testament over the Old Testament. Bruce Moulton rightly points out: “Unfortunately, much of the Old Testament and many of the Minor Prophets are not being preached and taught. Pastors deem these books too controversial, hard to understand and irrelevant.”⁷³ Walter Kaiser fittingly asks, “Why do so many pastors admit to having a mental block, feelings of inadequacy or plain guilt when it comes to preaching the Old Testament?”⁷⁴

The preaching or teaching of the New Testament is more appealing for the simple reason that this portion of the Bible is easier to understand and interpret. Furthermore, a perception lives on that the New Testament was written for Christians, while the Old Testament was written for Israel.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry,” *Masters Seminary Journal* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 50, 51.

⁷² See Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 3–5.

⁷³ Bruce Moulton, “Analyzing the Applicability of Preaching the Minor Prophets in the 21st Century” (DMin thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 1.

⁷⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 201.

⁷⁵ See Moulton, “Preaching the Minor Prophets,” 52–54.

8. Some pastors do not take time to explore the Prophets in great detail. We have busy schedules and often need to quickly put together a sermon or lesson. We may not have time to dig deeply into the Bible; but the busyness of life should not prevent anyone from finding new truth, including that revealed in the Prophets.

The Benefits of Preaching from the Prophets

There are great benefits, for a balanced spiritual diet, to preaching and teaching from the Prophets:

1. We will have a more balanced view of God's character by taking into account the prophets' perspectives.

2. We will deepen our skills of preaching and teaching by spending more rigorous time researching God's golden truth in challenging passages.

3. We will discover that the Prophets do not have a different message from the rest of the Bible; they just packaged their writing differently. While the theme of judgment practically flows throughout the Prophets, this should not stop us from exploring the reasons why God brings judgment upon His people and the nations of the world (e.g., Isa. 5; 13–23; Jer. 25; Amos 1–3). Although readers will find judgment in these books, the documents also reveal the character of God and humans.

4. We will see that the Prophets' messages not only present judgment, but they are also saturated with the love of God and His desire to redeem humanity, God's grace toward humanity, and a restless God who reaches out with incredible patience to bring back those He loves (e.g., Isa. 1:16–20; 6:1–7; 12:1–6; Jer. 3:6–25; 23:1–8; Ezek. 33:10–19; Mic. 7:1–20).

5. As we study the Prophets, we will see how Jesus is the fulfillment of their predictions and promises. The disciples came to know that Jesus was the Messiah by studying the Prophets.

6. We will discover that the Prophets' messages are as applicable to us today as they were back then. Our society has grown cold toward spiritual things, and the Prophets' messages were directed to a similarly apathetic and lawless society before the time of Christ.

7. We, and our church members, will see a bigger picture of God's working in the lives of His people.

8. Pastors who take the extra time to research and preach from the prophetic books will uncover a rich treasure of truth for their own lives and for the church.

Example of Messages from Hosea

A. The Story of Redemption

1. The Prophet and the Prostitute, Hos. 1
2. The Empty Promises of Addiction, Hos. 2
3. A Picture of Redemption, Hos. 3

B. The Realities of Backsliding

4. God's Lawsuit Against His People, Hos. 4:1
5. Worldliness in the Church, Hos. 4:2-19
6. False Conversions, Hos. 5
7. True Repentance, Hos. 6
8. Unsatisfied, Hos. 7:1-10
9. God's Discipline, Hos. 7:11-16
10. How People Drift Away from God, Hos. 8
11. The Consequences of Drifting, Hos. 9

C. God's Unrelenting Love

12. Good News for Hypocrites, Hos. 10:1-12

13. Soften Your Heart, Hos. 10:12-15
14. God's Sanctifying Love, Hos. 11
15. Return to Your First Love, Hos. 12
16. Hope for the Fallen, Hos. 13
17. How to Repent, Hos. 14:1-4
18. God's Garden of Love, Hos. 14:5-9

Sermon Outline Example

Here is an example of a sermon outline (see handout). The handout is from the sermon "God's Sanctifying Love" from Hosea 11.

- I. God's Past love is an **Electing** Love, vs. 1-4
- II. God's Present love is a **Conforming** Love, vs.5-7
- III. Future: God's **Relentless** Love, vs.8-12

9

PREACHING FROM THE PSALMS AND WISDOM LITERATURE

M. A. TIBERI



“We are on the wrong track if we think expository preaching merely as a preaching style chosen from a list (topical, devotional, evangelistic, textual, apologetic, prophetic, expository)... As John Stott says, 'All true Christian preaching is expository preaching.'”

ALISTAIR BEGG



Approximately thirty-seven percent of the Old Testament is written in poetry: all of Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and the book of Job almost exclusively.⁷⁶ The major and minor prophets are predominantly written in poetry as well. Even the historical books, which are written in the prose style, have a range of poems in them (Gen 2:23; 49; Ex 15; Deut 33; Judges 5; 1 Sam 2:1-10; 2 Sam 1:19-27; etc.). Thus it is important for every preacher to have in his toolbox the skill to interpret Hebrew poetry.

Mark Futato helpfully defines Hebrew poetry as “a type of literature that communicates with terse lines employing parallelism and imagery in high frequency.”⁷⁷ Like English poetry, Hebrew poetry is terse and uses vivid imagery and figures of speech. Many of the grammatical features of Hebrew prose are absent in poetry. The use of the definite article (“the”), relative pronoun (“who”), and other common elements are absent. This is also true of English poetry. However, unlike English poetry, the essence of Hebrew poetry is not rhyme or meter, but rather parallelism. This is a distinctive feature that is often overlooked by English readers. We are use to poems like, Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall; but Hebrew Poetry does not work like this. Rather we have: “A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother.” The point is made not by rhyme of words, but by the rhyming of ideas (parallelism).

⁷⁶ J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry* (Louisville: WJK, 2001), 1.

⁷⁷ Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 24.

Structure

So what does a Hebrew poem consist of? First we have the basic unit of Hebrew poetry, “the line.” “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Ps 23:1). A poetic line should not be confused with an English sentence, since a Hebrew poetic line can consist of more than one English sentence: “He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters” (Ps 23:2). Nor should a verse of Scripture be confused with one poetic line – sometimes there is more than one line in a single verse (Ps 47:9).⁷⁸

The most common poetic line is made up of two halves. These halves are called *colon*. “A wise son brings joy to his father” is one *colon*, and “but a foolish son grief to his mother” is the other. Together we call these a *bicolon*. This is the most frequent type of poetic line. Notice that the second *colon* corresponds to the first – this is the essence of parallelism. There are also poetic lines that are made up of three cola (plural of colon) called a *tricolon* (Ps 1:1). Sometimes there are even four cola called a *quatrain* (but these are rare). Periodically you will encounter a *monocolon*, which is a line made up of only one cola (such as “Blessed is the man” at the beginning of Psalm 1). Thus we can define a poetic line as one complete poetic parallelism.⁷⁹ Most modern English translations help us identify the cola in a line by making a series of indentations at each *colon*. You should be able to distinguish poetry from prose in your Bible by this distinct feature.

In prose writing we group sentences together into paragraphs. In poetry we group lines together into *strophe*. A

⁷⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 28.

strophe is a section of a poem that is unified by its focus on a common theme. Psalm 23 is easily divided into two strophes: 1) vv. 1-4, 2) vv. 5-6. Again many modern English translations indicate the strophes in a poem by making an extra indentation between the lines. This is the translator's way of indicating the division of thought in the poem. It must be remembered that these divisions are not found in the original Hebrew and are stylistically placed there by the translator. Each English translation tend to divide poems in different ways. You may decide as you study a passage that the strophe should be divided in different locations and that is ok.

There is also a larger grouping called a *stanza*, which is comprised of two or more strophe. Usually you only find stanzas in a large poem such as Psalm 139. This poem contains two stanzas (vv. 1-18, 19-24), the first of which contains four strophes (vv. 1-6, 7-12, 13-16, 17-18) and the second two (vv. 19-22, 23-24).

By being able to identify types of poetic lines (bicolon, tricolon, ect.) and dividing a poem into strophes and stanzas the expositor is better equipped to trace a poems meaning and will help aid him in developing an exegetical and corresponding homiletical outline. Therefore it is important to get a solid grasp on these aspects of a Hebrew poem.

Parallelism⁸⁰

Now let us turn to understanding the use of parallelism. It is essential for the faithful expositor to master this aspect of Hebrew poetry. The essence of parallelism is the "corre-

⁸⁰ Adapted from Tremper Longman III, *How To Read The Psalms* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998).

spondence of one thing with another.”⁸¹ In Hebrew poetry parallelism is the correspondence between the cola of a poetic line.⁸² There have been different explanations over the years as to *how* this correspondence works. Tremper Longman explains that, in what he calls the “early view,” Hebrew parallelism was thought to not really be parallelism at all: the second cola has a different meaning than the first ($A \neq B$). He then explains the what he calls the “traditional approach.” After 1750 A.D. the parallelism of the cola came to be recognized and it was believed that the second colon says the same thing as the first colon but in different words ($A = B$). In this view, “the goal of interpretation, therefore, is to reduce the two poetic phrases into one prose sentence.”⁸³

Until more recently this has been the standard approach, but close study of Hebrew poetry has uncovered something more. Whereas the traditional approach has a lot right in recognizing the parallelism, it has been convincingly proven that in Hebrew poetry the second colon relates in meaning to the first colon, but “*always* carries forward the thought found in the first phrase in some way (A , what’s more, B).”⁸⁴ That is, Hebrew parallelism is not merely stylistic repetition – the cola together comprise a complete thought and if one colon were missing the whole meaning would be too. This is important to grasp and is essential to soundly interpreting OT poetry: the meaning of colon A is made clear by colon B (and C , D). When what is stated in co-

⁸¹ Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 2.

⁸² Futato, *Interpreting*, 33.

⁸³ Longman, 97.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 98. For a more in-depth study of Hebrew poetry see Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

lon A is unclear look to colon B and read them together as one thought.

Synonymous parallelism is the most common type of parallelism used in Hebrew poetry. Essentially colon two (or three) corresponds to colon one by using synonyms. You could say that colon two says the same thing in a different way than colon one, but it must be understood that colon two is clarifying colon one by either carrying the thought further or giving a fuller picture. This need not be in a drastic way, but in a manner that taken together the cola express a whole thought.

Psalm 1:1 serves as a helpful example:

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers

“Blessed is the man” here serves as a kind of introductory statement that is gapped in cola two and three. Walks, stands, and sits are parallel, as well as counsel, way, and seat, and wicked, sinners, and scoffers. Also notice the repetition of “in” that draws a clear correspondence through the cola. Cola two and three carry forward the meaning of colon one through a series of synonymous parallelisms that display an ever-increasing hardness in sin.

Antithetic parallelism is very similar to synonymous parallelism, except that it uses antonyms (words whose meaning are the opposite of another’s) rather than synonyms. Again the second colon clarifies the first by carrying the thought further or giving a fuller picture (or both). Proverbs is filled with antithetic parallelism. For example:

A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich (Prov 10:4)

Notice the antithetic parallels: slack/diligent, poverty/rich. The point here is made by contrasting “two polar extremes.”⁸⁵ Laziness leads to poverty, diligence to wealth.

Emblematic parallelism makes an explicit analogy by using a word of comparison such as “like” or “as” “in order to bring together two thoughts from different spheres of life to illumine a theological or didactic teaching.”⁸⁶

As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God (42:1)

Repetitive/Staircase parallelism is when cola B, C, ect. Partially repeat a portion of colon A but carries it a bit further each time.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts! (96:7-9)

Pivot Pattern parallelism is when “there is a word or clause which stands in the middle of the poetic line and which can and should be read with both the A and B phrases.”⁸⁷

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

⁸⁵ Longman, 100.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Longman, 101.

I will fear no evil,
for you are with me; (Ps 23:4)

Chiastic Parallelsim is a more complex parallelism in which the first colon is parallel in the reverse order of the second colon.

A. For the LORD watches over
 B. the way of the righteous
 B' but the way of the wicked
A' will perish

Notice that the first phrase of colon one is parallel with the second of colon two and that the second phrase of colon one is parallel with the first of colon two. In a chiasm the emphasis is on the middle phrases. We must also note that chiasm can be found in larger units than a poetic line. A strophe or stanza can be structured as a chiasm, as well as an entire psalm (Longman points to Psalm 2 as being structured as a chiasm).

One thing we must note is that not all parallelisms are complete. Sometimes a word or phrase's parallel in colon B is gapped with the intention that you carry over the word or phrase from colon A (often the verb). This is poetic device called an *Ellipsis*. For example, Psalm 77:5,

I consider the days of old,
the years long ago

Notice that the subject and verb “I consider” are gapped in colon B. In this instance we quite naturally read the subject and verb into the second colon, but sometimes it might not be as clear and you will need to determine that an ellipsis is being employed.

Imagery

“Poetry is the language of images.”⁸⁸ One of the basic building blocks of all poetry is the usage of vivid imagery. Poetry conveys meaning most often through imagery – and by so doing engages not only our minds but also our emotions. As Futato puts it, “Images often grab our emotions before they engage our minds. We feel their sense before we grasp their meaning.” Every image has a meaning – a truth that it is conveying. By engaging the imagination the poets of Scripture are able to teach us in a way that is both moving and memorable. This is where we need to be cautious, for many preachers have committed grievous exegetical fallacies at this point.

There is a ditch on either side of the road here. On one side is imprudent literalism, and on the other is meaningless metaphor. The former is the preacher who insists on a literal reading of Scripture that gives no regard to the usage of language. This exegete fails to recognize that we must understand how a text means before we understand what it means – we must interpret texts according to the rules of its genre. The strict literalist must conclude from Psalm 18 that God is a fire-breathing dragon who rides on the wings of angels. This is obviously not what Psalm 18 is teaching. Rather by

⁸⁸ Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1984), 89.

using vivid imagery David conveys in a powerful and memorable way that the LORD is a warrior who defends His people when they call out to Him. We can only understand this when we respect the use of figures of speech and images.

The other ditch of meaningless metaphor is where the exegete writes off images as nothing more than mere flare – flash with no bang. This is not usually done explicitly, but can be seen whenever the images of Scripture are taken to have no literal meaning. Those who fall into the trap of meaningless metaphor will say things like, anthropomorphisms are used of God only so we can relate to Him as creatures, but do not teach us anything about the nature of God. Unfortunately it has been the error of many great men to read God's comments in Genesis 6:5-6, ⁵The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart," and conclude that God's grieved heart is a mere anthropomorphism but does not teach that God has any emotion. This is the fallacy of meaningless metaphor. Though figures of speech are not to be read woodenly, they do have a literal meaning to which they point. The job of the exegete is to distill the meaning of the image so as to determine its meaning.

Mark Futato provides a very helpful guide to interpreting images in his *Interpreting the Psalms* that we will summarize here. First we need to identify the target domain – who or what does the image refer to? "He is like a tree planted by streams of water" (Ps 1:3) is fairly easy to determine. "Tree" refers back to the blessed man who meditates on God's Law, while "streams of water" refer to God's Law that

nourishes him. It is not always this easy to determine the target domain, but context should help you determine to whom or what the image is referring to.

Next we must study the source domain. Examine thoroughly the historical context so that you understand the context of the image and what it would have meant for the ancient Israelites. "There is no substitute for the study of topography, climate, and agricultural practices of 'ordinary life' the psalmists drew upon to create images."⁸⁹ For Psalm 1:3 we would study the topography and climate of Israel and find that it is an arid climate where trees and water are rare. A flourishing tree was a valuable asset, even more so a stream of water to give it life. Unless we understand the geography of Ancient Israel we will not fully appreciate this image in Psalm 1.

Next we must identify the aspects of the source domain that are associated with the target domain. How is the image being used to convey a truth about the target domain? How does what you learned about the source domain inform your understanding of its use in reference to the target domain? Context is key here. The meaning of the image in Psalm 1 then is that when a man delights himself in God's word he is nourished with life giving truth and so is blessed with enduring strength and spiritual fruit, unlike the wicked who are blown about by the wind like chaff and bear no fruit.

For a very helpful reference work I would highly recommend *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*.⁹⁰ It contains a very helpful introduction to how the Bible uses imagery and also

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ryken, Leland, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, Colin Duriez, Douglas Penney, and Daniel G. Reid. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

contains a large number of articles on images used in the Bible. They helpfully survey the use of an image throughout the entire canon and give helpful background info. For bible backgrounds information I would recommend *Baker Encyclopedia of The Bible*⁹¹ and *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.⁹² We do not have enough space here to cover the usage of the many different types of figures of speech and so I would recommend a copy of *Figures of Speech Used in The Bible*⁹³ for an in-depth guide, or the first volume of Allen Ross' *A Commentary on the Psalms*⁹⁴ which contains a very helpful introduction in which he summarizes Bullinger's survey of figures.

Now let us turn to a brief treatment of how these rules of interpretation apply directly to the Psalms and Wisdom literature.

Psalms⁹⁵

The Psalms teach the church how to pray and praise. They are uniquely the prayers and praise of men to God, inspired by God. Said another way, they are God's words from the mouths of men directed to God. Thus we are instructed by God in how we ought to praise and pray to God. Indeed the importance of the Psalter for the people of God can hardly be over-estimated. Of the 283 direct quotes of the OT in

⁹¹ Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.

⁹² Bromiley, Geoffrey W., ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988.

⁹³ Bullinger, Ethelbert William. *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*. London; New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode; E. & J. B. Young & Co., 1898.

⁹⁴ Allen Ross, *A Commentary on The Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 81-109.

⁹⁵ This section is a concise summary of Mark Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms* with some added insights of my own.

the NT, 116 (41%) are from the Psalter. Furthermore, Jesus alludes to the Psalms fifty times. If the Psalter was that important to Jesus and the Apostles then they are essential for the church in the twenty-first century too.

The Psalter is a difficult book to preach well. This mostly has to do with the difficulty moderns have with poetry in general, not to mention ancient Hebrew poetry. Many of the types of psalms are foreign to our way of thinking, and their images can often be strange to us. Moreover, we tend more toward didactic teaching and so the Psalms often are preached the same way as a Pauline epistle. This is not to say that the main principles of preaching change – the proclamation of the Word is always to be Spirit filled and Christ centered – but that the way we preach must fit the genre. What I mean is this: Psalms are not always going to be linear – they may be parallel or symmetrical – nor are they always going to be straight forward – they are going to use figures of speech and vivid imagery to convey meaning. Thus the preacher has a bit more work in front of him to not only interpret meaning but also to preach the psalms well.

The first step in preaching a psalm is to get oriented. It should go without saying, but always begin with prayer. You cannot hope to interpret or proclaim the word of God well if you do not rely on the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, so do not just skip this essential aspect of the sermon. Then, if you have not already done so, you will need to select the psalm you will be preaching.

Next you will need to determine how your psalm fits in relation to the whole. Contrary to popular belief the Psalms are not a haphazard collection of poems, but a carefully crafted book. The psalms are in a particular order for a rea-

son.⁹⁶ For example, Psalms 1 and 2 are the gateway to the Psalter, or to change metaphors, the two lenses through which the Psalter is to be viewed. Psalm 1 tells us what purpose of the Psalter is:: instruction for a rightly ordered life; and Psalm 2 tells us what the message of the Psalter is: God will reign through His messiah over His people and all the nations. These two psalms are essential to being oriented to the rest of the Psalter and make it clear that this book is not a haphazard collection of poems. Furthermore, we can discern that there is a movement through the book of Psalms, beginning with the David covenant and dynasty (1-72), the failure of that dynasty and the subsequent exile (73-89), the people turning to God for restoration and looking to the LORD as their king (90-106), and the final section looking to an eschatological hope in which God will reign through His anointed king/messiah (107-150). So you must begin by taking into account where the psalm you will be preaching from fits into the whole.

Then you will want to read the psalm over and over again until you have a good grasp on how it fits together. After this you will need to determine what type of psalm you are dealing with: is it a hymn of lament, praise, thanksgiving, or wisdom? The type of psalm you are preaching will determine the mood of your sermon. It is not fitting to preach a lament psalm the same way you would a praise psalm – they serve different, albeit important, purposes.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ For a more in-depth analysis see Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, *Introduction To The Psalms* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004).

⁹⁷ For a helpful analysis of the Psalms see Andrew J. Schmutzer & David M. Howard Jr., *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul* (Chicago: Moody, 2013); or, Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 145-172.

Next make a rough outline of the psalm noting the main divisions of thought. Your English translation usually separates the stanzas with paragraph spaces, but these are not in the original and may not be correct. You may determine that the psalm should be divided differently and that is ok.

After you have noted the divisions of thought it is time to interpret the parallelisms. Analyze each lines parallelism and note what type of parallelism is being used. Take time to appreciate the beauty of the poetry and allow it to move you so you will get the meaning in your heart. Ask questions, such as, “what does the parallelism reveal about the meaning of the individual lines and the psalm as a whole?”

Thereafter identify the images and figures of speech used throughout. Get a good grasp on their meaning by following the rules of interpretation outlines above. Be sure you understand the significance of the images and how they relate to the meaning of the psalm. The beautiful thing about preaching from the Psalms is that most of the illustrations are provided for you. Rarely do you need to provide additional illustrations to help people understand the picture a psalm is painting.

At this point it would be a good time to consult some good commentaries. I always recommend starting with the more technical commentaries and then moving onto something a bit more pastoral/homiletical. For example, Matthew Henry, James Montgomery Boice, John MacArthur, and Charles Spurgeon may be very helpful with homiletical points and applications, but they do not get into an in-depth analysis of the passage, and that is what you are looking for first. For the Psalms I highly recommend Allen Ross' three-volume set. It has both exegetical depth and homiletical

helps.⁹⁸ I would also commend to you John Calvin's classic Psalms commentary which is rich with exegetical and theological insights. Another helpful one is Willaim VanGemeren's volume in the Expositor's Bible Commentary. For a more concise and beautifully written commentary see Derek Kidner's two volumes in the Tyndale OT Commentary series. For a good homiletical commentary you can never go wrong with Spurgeon's Treasury of David. I would also recommend Gerald Wilson's volume in the NIV Application Commentary series (though there is only one volume covering up to Psalm 72 due to Wilson's passing).

Next you will want to make an exegetical outline. Go back and make adjustments on your rough outline if you have determined the psalm should be divided differently. Then work your way through the psalm summarizing each line. Next summarize each section of the psalm giving it a heading that captures the collective meaning of the lines you already summarized. Lastly, summarize the entire psalm in one sentence.

Now that you have an exegetical outline it is time to turn it into a homiletical one. An exegetical outline is by definition a summary of the psalms original meaning; the homiletical outline is taking that original meaning and bridging the context to today's church. Instead of a wooden summary a homiletical outline is phrased in a memorable to the point way. We must note that the outline of our sermon should flow directly out of the outline of the passage.

There are a couple types of sermon outlines that can be used for preaching a psalm. The first is called an analytical

⁹⁸ My only concern with Ross is that his dispensational theology often keeps him from going far enough in his connections between the Psalms and Christ.

outline. This is a sermonic outline that follows the logic and flow of the psalms and is the most common one you will use. For example Psalm 1 tends toward an analytical outline:

1. Life the Way it Was Meant to Be (Ps 1:1a)
 - a. Steer Clear of the Wicked (v. 1b)
 - b. Stay in the Word (v. 2)
 - c. Prosper in the Kingdom (v. 3)
 - d. No Ground to Stand On (v. 4)
 - e. The Wicked Are Cast Out (v. 5)
 - f. The Blessing of Being Known (v.6)

Another outline you can use is a topical outline. This is a sermonic outline that highlights the themes of the psalm. This type of structure works best for lengthy (Ps 119) or repetitive circular psalms. Psalm 145 is a good example for a topical outline:

1. Praise the King! (Ps 145).
 - a. For He is *our* King (1-2, 10-13).
 - b. For He is our Great King! (3-6, 11-13).
 - c. For He is our Good King! (8-9, 13c-20).
 - d. For it is our Duty (4-7, 10-13, 21).

Now that you have your psalm outlined and a general structure for your sermon it is time to ask some important questions. First, what does this Psalm mean in the context of the entire Canon? How does this Psalm relate to Christ and the Church? We have already said that the Psalms are remarkably the prayers and praise of men to God, inspired by God. They are the prayers of the saints to God and teach the Church how she ought to praise and pray.

Moreover we must say that the Psalms have a remarkable concern for the LORD's anointed one. Many of the Psalms are Davidic or royal in some sense. As Derek Kidner points out, "It would scarcely seem too much to infer... that wherever David or the Davidic king appears in the Psalter..., he foreshadows to some degree the Messiah [Jesus]." ⁹⁹ Thus wherever we encounter the king of Israel in the Psalms we encounter a type of Christ, and of course the anti-type must be greater than the type. ¹⁰⁰ Sometimes the Psalms are explicitly prophetic of the Messiah and other times they are more subtle. Bruce Waltke calls these more subtle Psalms "typico-prophetic" – that is, "David's sufferings and glory typify Jesus Christ, but sometimes his language transcends his own experience and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ (e.g., Psalm 2, 22)." Thus the original intention of the human author was to give voice to his own suffering or glory, but the intention of the Divine Author was to speak of someone greater than David. Psalms that are explicitly prophetic are those in which the psalmist "predicts exclusively David's greater Son" ¹⁰¹ So we must begin by asking the question of how the psalm we are dealing with relates to Christ.

Next we need to answer the questions: So What? What does this mean for the people I am preaching to? What does it teach us to believe? What does it teach us to do? What does it teach us to feel? ¹⁰² These are all important questions that you must answer, and be sure to answer them in very specific and practical ways. The answers to these questions

⁹⁹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 23f.

¹⁰⁰ Bruce K. Waltke & James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 111.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰² Futato, *Interpreting*, 205.

are your applications, and applications always need to be tangible and specific.

Wisdom Literature

Many of the same principles apply in the Wisdom literature that we have covered under poetry and the Psalms. Here I would like to make a few comments on how to approach the Wisdom books.

It has been observed that the Wisdom books do not stress the central themes of the rest of the Bible (covenant, promise, redemption), but “they do *assume* the theological underpinnings of the rest of the Old Testament.”¹⁰³ You may not find many explicit mentions of God’s covenant with His people or to the promises of that covenant, but you do find a series of writings that give a practical theology for the people of God. They assume that we know the covenant relationship between God and His people – that we cannot earn God’s favor - it is all of grace. These books are meant to be read with an understanding that wisdom is the way of life for the redeemed, not the way to be redeemed. They are meant to develop godly character in God’s people.

Duval and Hays give a helpful big picture of the Wisdom literature and how these four books when read together relate to one another. Proverbs gives us a basic approach to life – how to live life the way it is meant to be lived. Proverbs 3:13 says, “Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding.” The Hebrew word for “blessed/happy” is used of those “who experience life opti-

¹⁰³ J. Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 389.

mally, as the Creator intended.”¹⁰⁴ Here we see that the person who experiences life the way it was meant to be is the person who gets wisdom. Wisdom is living life according to God’s design, as is defined by righteousness (living according to God’s standard), justice (putting things to right when God’s righteous order is disrupted), and uprightness (not veering from the straight path of God’s design)(Prov 1:3). Furthermore, wisdom can only be truly attained by those who fear the LORD (1:7).

Proverbs is a book of universal truths with eternal promises. Many of its universal truths are presented in an “all things being equal” sort of way: if you live this way, most of the time this is the result under the sun (i.e. Laziness leads to poverty; diligence to riches). Yet Proverbs implies an eternal perspective in which the universal truths include a promise of eternal reward. Proverbs presents life as it is meant to be lived and promises [eternal] reward for those who will walk according to God’s design.

Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon provide a window into the not so black and white aspects of life under the sun. “Job demonstrates that there are often events in life that humans cannot grasp or understand through the wisdom approach delineated in Proverbs.”¹⁰⁵ Sometimes calamity strikes those who are righteous, just, and upright, and God does not explain why. Life under the sun is filled with unexplainable evil and all we can do is throw ourselves upon the sovereign benevolent Creator who’s ways are mysterious to us finite human beings.

¹⁰⁴ Waltke, *Psalms*, 133.

¹⁰⁵ Duvall, *Grasping*, 390.

Ecclesiastes presents us with “an intellectual search for meaning in life.”¹⁰⁶ Solomon, who had unparalleled wisdom from God, resolved to find the meaning of life and could not find it through either pleasure or knowledge. He concludes that the meaning of life is not found here under the sun, but in knowing God who dwells above the sun. Only by fearing God and keeping His commands can one understand the true meaning of life.

The Song of Songs is a series of love poems that celebrates the romantic love between husband and wife. Here we find a celebration of love that takes us beyond the merely practical insights of Proverbs and into “the crazy, madly-in-love, slightly irrational couple of Song of Songs.”¹⁰⁷ Romantic love is a powerful force that cannot be bought – “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.” (8:7).

So how should we approach these books in order to preach them? I will say a few brief words to point you in the right direction – it will be up to you to seek these things out further.

When preaching from Proverbs we must understand that it is not a haphazard collection of wisdom sayings, but is carefully crafted like all other books in the Bible. The main division of Proverbs is between chapters 1-9 and 10-31 (which consists of six sections). The former are the prologue to the book, consisting of a series of teachings from father to his son with a few interludes in between. This sets out the purpose and motivation of the book: to know wisdom and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 391.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

instruction for in them are life and peace. Proverbs 1-9 can easily be preached through systematically, one section at a time (though there are periodic repetitions). Your approach for this section is similar to that for Psalms.

Chapter 10 begin the proverbs proper. Proverbs are “short, pithy, observations, admonitions, warnings, and prohibitions”¹⁰⁸ that follow the rules of Hebrew poetry using parallelism and imagery. (Longman, 21). Because the of the breadth, variety, and repetitions of the proverbs in this section it is best to preach through it topically. This is helpful for the very fact that a single proverb does not provide us with the entire truth on a subject but rather a facet it. Taking one proverb on its own is like looking at one angle of a diamond – you cannot get the full picture unless you look at it from every angle. So in this instance it is best to compile every proverb you can on a particular topic (e.g. wealth/poverty, pride/humility, anger, alcohol, ect.). You will often find many proverbs saying similar things: group them into categories – different aspects of the truth concerning the topic. You should be able to construct an exegetical outline based on these groupings that together give you the entire wisdom teaching on a subject. Turn that into an homiletical outline and fill in illustrations where needed. Remember to always stress when teaching the practical truths of Proverbs that this is wisdom for the redeemed, not the way to be redeemed. Christ alone is our wisdom from God, our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30).

Ecclesiastes is a bit more challenging to preach and will require wisdom in handling well. “Of all the books of the Bi-

¹⁰⁸ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* in BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 21.

ble Ecclesiastes is perhaps the least straightforward.”¹⁰⁹ Because Ecclesiastes is a search for meaning that is mostly futile we must interpret the sections of the book in light of the conclusion. That is to say, the book must be read as a whole to get the true meaning.¹¹⁰

There are two options for preaching this book. You can either preach the entire book in summary form, or you can break it down into sections and preach through it systematically. There are merits to both; my only counsel is that if you choose the later you choose larger sections to preach at a time while all the while keeping the end in mind. The point of the book is that life apart from God is meaningless. You can wisdom, but if you do not have a right relationship with God you will have nothing – Solomon learned this the hard way and so we should learn from him. Furthermore, “Wisdom does not explain the contradictions of life; it only points them out. Therefore people should simply trust God. Life is not a puzzle to be completely understood, but a gift to be enjoyed.”¹¹¹ In light of the new covenant the main point of Ecclesiastes can be summarized as this: life outside of Jesus Christ is meaningless and futile.¹¹² When preparing a message from this book many of the same principles apply from Psalms. Take into account the use of poetry, rightly interpret the images, make an exegetical and homiletical outline, and ask the right questions.

As has already been stated Song of Songs is a collection of love poems. There have been a plethora of proposed outlines of the book, but the most basic one divides the book in-

¹⁰⁹ William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 17.

¹¹⁰ Duvall, *Grasping*, 402.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

to three units: “The Courtship (1:2-3:5), the Wedding (3:6-5:1), and the following Life of Love (5:2-8:14).”¹¹³ The majority approach throughout church history to the Song of Songs has been allegorical – the meaning of the book is symbolic of the love between Christ and the Church and has nothing to do with marital love between husband and wife. Though there is some truth to this approach it does not stand up to a close reading of the text. Song of Songs is primarily a celebration of a romantic, sexual love between husband and wife. Sexuality is basic to human life and is thus covered extensively here in the wisdom literature. But to say that the only meaning of Song of Songs is the romantic love between man and woman misses the typological significance of marriage. As the Apostle Paul teaches in Ephesians 5, marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church, and so it is totally appropriate for the preacher to make the connection between marriage on the human plane and to the greater reality to which it points.

Job is a story of tragic suffering that brings to the forefront the question of God’s justice in allowing the righteous to suffer. Where Proverbs insists there is a moral order in the world that connects blessing with wisdom/obedience and suffering with folly/disobedience (though Proverbs does acknowledge that the righteous suffer at times), Job deals with the reality of the righteous suffering for no apparent reason. Job, like Ecclesiastes, needs to be interpreted as a whole. There is much that is said in the book that cannot be taken at face value – we must read it in relation to the conclusion.

¹¹³ Ibid., 404.

The book of Job can be structured into five parts. Prologue (1:1-2:13), Three Cycles of Dialogues (3:1-31:40), Elihu's Four Speeches (32:1-37:24), The LORD's Speeches and Job's Response (38:1-42:6), The Denouncement (42:10-17).

We must take into account that the reader has information that Job does not: we are given a glimpse into the dialogue between the Accuser and God in which the LORD allows Satan to test Job's faith by bringing utter desolation upon him. Job loses everything, his family, house, and even his health. Then we encounter his friends. Waltke says it well, "Job's friends explain all suffering, including Job's, as punitive, corrective, and exemplary, but Job rejects their explanations of his suffering as baseless and calls into question whether the Sovereign of the universe is good and just."¹¹⁴ First, we cannot take the words of Job's friends as true – they get it all wrong, as the LORD's denouncement of them makes clear (42:7-9). We learn through the falsehoods of Job's friends that suffering is not so easily explained, nor is it always a result of personal sin – there human wisdom has no way of explaining suffering in a world where God is sovereign. Furthermore, we learn from Job that man has no ground to stand on in questioning the Creator for how He rules His world. Notably God never answers Job's questions as to why he suffered even though he did no wrong, but only points to His majesty and power calling Job to trust Him and the mystery of His will.

Preaching Job can be quite a challenge. As with Ecclesiastes it is either good to preach the book as a whole, highlighting significant passages, or by preaching large sections

¹¹⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 927-928.

at a time while keeping the end in mind. Job tends more to a topical series than a systematic work through of the book. An example series could be: 1) God's Sovereign Rule Over Evil in which you deal with God's giving permission to Satan to test Job. 2) Why Do The Righteous Suffer in which you cover how Job's suffering not only proved his faith but also gave him a deeper knowledge of God. 3) Trusting God When Calamity Strikes in which you encourage the saints to trust in the sovereign plan of God for their suffering. Remember that Job is written in poetry so all that has been said above about parallelism, imagery, and figures of speech apply here.

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10

PREACHING FROM THE EPISTLES



*“What Christ has done is the basis for what
the believer must do.”*

JAMES DUNN



Why should we preach from the New Testament epistles? How do we go about preaching from the epistles. What are the Epistles anyway?

The New Testament epistles are letters (21 in all) written to mostly fledgling churches, a few “mega-churches,” and several individual believers in the earliest days of Christianity. The Apostle Paul wrote the first 13 of these letters, each addressing a specific situation or problem. In terms of volume, Paul's writings constitute about one-fourth of the entire New Testament.

Four of Paul's letters, the Prison Epistles, were composed while he was confined in prison. Three letters, the Pastoral Epistles, were directed toward church leaders, Timothy and Titus, and discuss ministerial matters.

The Pauline Epistles

Romans

1 and 2 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians - *Prison Epistle*

Philippians - *Prison Epistle*

Colossians - *Prison Epistle*

1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians

1 Timothy and 2 Timothy - *Pastoral Epistles*

Titus - *Pastoral Epistle*

Philemon - *Prison Epistle*

The General Epistles

Hebrews

1, 2 and 3 John

James

Jude

1 and 2 Peter

Reasons for Preaching the Epistles

They are God's Word! (This may go without saying!) The Epistles, even though they are personal letters, are written under the inspiration of God. Peter

In the Epistles, doctrine and life connect. Preaching on the Epistles allows sermons to help hearers in their quest to find meaning in the relationships and commitments of their lives. The New Testament Epistles are quite theological, but they are not doctrinal in the systematic sense. The authors of the New Testament letters wrestle with the theological claims of the gospel in the cauldron of real-life conflicts and experiences. It is one thing to talk abstractly about Christian freedom or justification by faith; it is quite another to see these claims struggled through by Paul in the Letter to the Galatians, with people who are suffering a loss of zest and meaning in life because they have lost their nerve, have been willing to trade identity in Christ for conventional religious marks of status, and have drawn back from the strong winds of freedom and love in the gospel.

The Indicative and the Imperative

Who says theology is unimportant? There are plenty of times in which a little theology can go a long way in not only helping us to better understand the Word of God, but to actually help us in our Christian life. That after all is the ultimate aim of theology; it is not meant to be a mere intellectual exercise, but something to be used as an aid to loving God more and serving him better.

One little theological principle, known as the indicative/imperative, is a very good example of this. It is not only a vital key to helping us better understand the theology of

Paul, but all of Scripture as well. And a working knowledge of it should help us all in better living our Christian life.

Let me preface my remarks by asking a few brief questions: How exactly are we to live the Christian life? Is it all God, as many believers argue? They will insist, "Let go and let God." Or is it all our own activity, as others will argue? The crude version of this is "God helps those who help themselves."

Or is it a combination of the two? The short answer is yes – it is both a matter of God working on our behalf, but also of us doing things. A key to understanding all this, especially as we see in Paul's thought, is to be aware of how he uses the indicative and imperative.

So what is that all about? In both English and New Testament Greek grammar the verb is described in terms of tense, mood, etc. (The noun is described in terms of cases, etc.) Two moods are worth highlighting here.

The indicative mood indicates or expresses an objective fact or reality. It makes a statement or asks a question. It is declarative, denoting a simple assertion or interrogation. It is the mood of certainty. As to the New Testament, the indicative refers to what God has done for believers in Christ. It declares the reality of what Christ has done for us. This is the God side of the equation.

The imperative mood in contrast expresses a command, an order, an entreaty, a request or an exhortation. It is the mood of volition. Theologically, the imperative calls on believers to live in a certain way, for example, in a Godly manner. This is the believer's side of the equation.

Of interest, the imperative usually flows from and depends upon the indicative. In a theological context, first we

have the theological proclamation, and then we have the moral exhortation. The “indicative-imperative” relationship can be expressed like this: “God has done this, therefore you should do that.”

This has been put in various forms:

- “What Christ has done is the basis for what the believer must do.” (James Dunn)
- “Because God works and has worked, therefore man must and can work.” (Herman Ridderbos)
- “In the NT, the imperative of ethical action is rooted within the indicative of God’s act and is part of God’s gracious act.” (Gene Green)

This reflects the standing/state relationship which we often speak about. While we have a perfect standing in Christ because of what he has done for us, we still must work on our actual state. Our standing is the indicative, while our state is the imperative.

This is also reflected in the justification/sanctification relationship. Freely by God’s grace we are justified completely in God’s sight when we become Christians. But the rest of the Christian life involves the process of sanctification whereby we become more and more Christlike. Justification is the indicative (declaring righteous), while sanctification is the imperative (making righteous).

We are to become what we are, in other words. We are declared to be righteous in God’s sight because of the finished work of Christ, but we are to live this out in ongoing, progressive sanctification. In faith and obedience we follow our Lord, becoming more like him and less like our old

selves. But all this is based on what God has already done on our behalf.

Macro Examples of Indicative / Imperative

The NT epistles generally have this as their format. For example, in many of Paul's epistles, a section on theology (the indicative) is followed by a section on ethics, or Christian living (the imperative).

Ephesians 1-3 tells us who we are in Christ (indicative, "in Christ...") followed by how we should live in Eph. 4-6, (imperative – "therefore, walk worthy...")

Romans 1-11 expresses the Gospel and who we are in Christ (indicative), and then follows with the practical applications Rom. 12-16, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice..." (Rom. 12:1).

Hebrews is the same. Heb. 1-11 lays the foundation of who Christ is and how our faith is linked the Old Testament system and specifically with Abraham and all true Old Testament believers (indicative). Heb. 12:1 begins, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus..." (imperative).

Micro Examples of Indicative / Imperative

There are plenty of examples of this in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul. Here are some of them:

Romans 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised

from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Romans 6:11-12 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Romans 13:14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

1 Corinthians 5:6-7 (KJV) Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as **ye are unleavened**. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

As David Garland comments, “The imperative to cleanse out the old leaven is predicated on the indicative: they *are* unleavened. In other words, Paul tells them to be what they are, to live like Christians. Who they are is revealed in what they do. What they do comes from who they are.”

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation

with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (in reverse order here).

Colossians 3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Colossians 3:3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

25 Helpful Pointers in Preaching the Epistles

Peter Mead has given 25 helpful pointers in preaching from the epistles.

Most beginner preaching classes use the epistles as the foundational preaching genre. We can end up thinking that preaching epistles is easy. After all, a passage in an epistle will tend to fall into “chunks.” Voila! Sermon. Hang on, there is more to preaching epistles than that. Here are 25 helps in preaching the Epistles

1. Drill into the occasion – Why was the letter written? Remember that epistle writers weren’t just letter pen meander over papyrus for the sake of it. They were prompted to communicate by some situation. Therefore a letter is a snapshot of a narrative. Be sure to read through the letter itself and look for all the clues in the text.

2. Check other biblical background – With ten of Paul’s epistles, you also have the fertile territory of Acts to explore. What background is available by a close study of the relevant Acts material. Its good to know which journey

each letter was written on, as well as what other letters were also written at that time. Fill in the background for your own benefit, and maybe also for the listeners.

3. Fill in your background knowledge – The biblical text is your main source, but be sure to check out whatever else might be helpful to understand. What was the geography of Ephesus at the time, what does an incipient Gnosticism look like, why do dualists tend to end up at one or both of two extremes? Other good reference material will be helpful.

4. Keep re-reading the epistle – That is the beauty of epistles: they are relatively short. So keep re-reading as you study background and the flow of thought will become clearer and clearer. Read the epistle so much that it isn't just the famous verses that stand out, but until the whole text starts to sing.

5. Become familiar with the letter-frame – Too many Bible studies and sermon series skip the beginning and end of the epistle. Don't. Dwell on every detail – author, recipients, greeting, thanksgiving, biographical prologue, main idea . . . what are the added details, what is missing? And how does it end? Why does he say that?

6. Grasp the flow of the whole – As a preacher you need to be able to explain the flow of the epistle. Some of us are better at the details, others at the big picture, but we all need to work on both. Preaching that just methodically explains the details without a good sense of the whole will be tedious, atomistic and disjointed. Preach so the whole epistle can hit home.

7. Study the sections in light of their detail and the big picture – So as you look at a particular section, you

will need to wrestle with the tiniest detail. That may or may not need to be explained when you preach. But don't forget to keep thinking about the big picture, the broad flow of thought – that will need to be explained!

8. Study details and structure – Close reading of a passage is not just about word studies, it is also about sentences, and how sentences connect, and how transitions are made, and how paragraphs link. Be sure to recognize repeated terms and themes, as well as patterns in flow of thought. We have to study and hold understanding of the text at multiple levels of elevation at the same time. A fun challenge!

9. Let the shape of the text shape your message – Or to put it another way, stop trying to find a list of three equal points in every text. Sometimes a text will offer a negative example, then a positive example and then five instructions. This is not three equal points. Sometimes a text is essentially in two parts. Preach a two-part message, you'll be fine, don't worry :) (You don't have to preach the sermon in the shape of the text, and there may be reasons not to, but as a default, it's not a bad way to go.)

10. Compare and contrast situations – The original audience and their situation is not going to be the same as your listeners. Compare and contrast the two. What need do your listeners have for this passage? Adjust how you present it accordingly. But don't adjust its original situation or meaning accordingly, that will weaken the message.

11. Preach, don't commentate – Don't offer your listeners either a running commentary or a labelled outline of the text. Make your points relevant to today, put them in today language, then show that from the "back then" as you

explain the text. Don't preach "back then" and then offer token relevance once people are disconnected and distracted.

12. Describe vividly, engage listener with letter –

If you can do a good job of painting the original situation, the emotions of the writer, the potential responses of the recipients, etc., that is, if you can make it seem full colour, 3-D and real, then your listeners will engage not only with you, but with the letter. Suddenly it won't seem like a repository of theological statements, but a living letter that captures their imagination and stirs their hearts. The theological truth will hit home when it is felt in the form God inspired!

13. Be sensitive to implicit imagery –

Often the writer will subtly or overtly be using imagery to explain himself, pick up on that and use it effectively. Our first port of call for illustration should not be external to the text (i.e. the books of supposedly wonderful illustrations – they are the last resort option. Start with the text, then move to the experience of your listeners trying to combine the two. Go elsewhere only if necessary.)

14. Keep imperatives in their setting –

Some of us have a tendency to use an imperative magnet. We cast our eyes over the text until we spot a command, and bingo! Now we think we have something to preach. We don't. Not until we get a real sense of how the whole passage is working. It doesn't take much skill to turn every epistle into a command collection. Certainly don't avoid the instructions, but don't ignore everything else too.

15. Tune your ear to the tone of the writer –

This is so important. Some tone deaf preachers make every instruction, implication, suggestion, encouragement or

exhortation into a shouted command. I think Paul and company would look on with consternation if they heard how their letters were preached by some. Be sensitive to the writer's tone and develop sensitivity in your own tone.

16. Aim for clarity in your explanation – You will dig up masses of information if you study properly. Sift and sort so that your sermon isn't packed and dense, but engaging and on target. You could offer a subsequent audio file of out-takes (bonus material!) and notice that most people don't take you up on the offer!

17. Be alert to different levels of application – Not every application has to be an instruction to action. Sometimes the text's application is at the level of belief rather than conduct. Sometimes the take-home should be a heart stirred by truth, by Christ, by the gospel. Affections, belief and conduct all matter. If we make application purely about conduct, then we are missing a goldmine of genuine life change.

18. Keep your message structure simple – An easy message outline will remember itself. If you need extensive notes to keep track of your message, don't expect first time hearers to get it (you've had hours of thought and study and practice and prayer, they're getting one shot only!)

19. Preach the message of the text, not a message from the text – There are any number of potential homiletical outlines, thoughts and applications in a passage. Some are closer than others to the actual message of the text. If you preach clever messages derived from texts you will get lots of affirmation. If you actually preach the message of the text, and you preach it well, you will be a gem of inestimable value in the church!

20. Begin your relevance in the introduction –

The old idea of explain for ages and then apply briefly should become a relic of an idea. You can demonstrate the relevance of a passage before you even read it. Get the relevance into the introduction, then continue to show the relevance of the passage and seem relevant as a preacher throughout the message.

21. Select the take home goal –

Is your goal for people to remember the outline? Why? Better to aim at them taking home the main idea with a heart already responsive to it, rather than a commentary outline of a passage. Let's not flatter ourselves – people don't need hooks to hang thoughts on, they need a thought to hang on to. Better, they need to leave with a changed heart. If they are changed by an encounter with God in His Word, then looking at the text should bring a sense of the structure back to mind. However, remembering the outline on its own has very limited value (unless they're taking a Bible school exam that week).

22. Pre-preach the message –

Don't rely on written preparation. Most things make sense on paper. It is important to preach through a message before preaching a message. Better to discover that it simply doesn't flow, or a particular transition is actually a roadblock, when you can still fix it. Pre-preach in a prayerful way – i.e. why not talk out loud to the Lord about the message before and after actually trying it out?

23. Don't just preach single passages –

I am not saying that the only way to plan your preaching is to preach through a book sequentially, but that should probably be the default approach. Series should not become tedious, but

cumulative. Let each message build on what has gone before, while standing in its own right. One way to inject variety is to vary the length of passage. You can cover more ground sometimes, zero in other times, and why not begin and/or end with an effective expository overview of the whole?

24. Converse with the commentaries and other conversation partners – This is not something you should do right at the beginning. I believe we should converse with others during the process, but not become beholden to one or another voice. It doesn't matter if your favorite preacher preached it that way, or a commentator explained it that way, or your friend sees it that way . . . you are the one who has to preach it. But all of those do matter. Your goal is not stunning originality. You want to be faithful to what the text is actually saying, and faithful to your unique opportunity, audience, ability, etc. So converse with, but don't ride on any of these partners.

25. Present the passage with engaging clarity and relevance – Here's the catch-all as we hit number 25. We've hammered the need to be truly biblical, rather than just biblically linked or biblically launched. But you also need to preach with a relevance to the listeners, and with a clarity that can be easily followed, and all of that with the engaging energy, enthusiasm, warmth, concern, love and delight that is fitting for someone soaked in a passage from God's Word. This engaging preaching certainly includes the content, but also the delivery – your expression, your gesture, your movement, your body language, your eye contact . . . it should all be about a heart brimming over with God's Word to connect with God's people. Your heart has

encountered His heart, so you want to engage their hearts for the sake of transformed lives and a pleased Lord.

11

PREACHING FROM ACTS



To be “full of the Holy Spirit” is to reflect a maturity of character; it is the ideal condition of every believer [see Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24]. To be “filled with the Holy Spirit” is to experience an anointing for power, purity, proclamation, and praise.

SAM STORMS



In the book of Acts, we discover how Peter and John and then Paul shares the message of salvation with people in the first century. We travel by boat and by foot, right alongside the apostles to watch the message of Jesus Christ change people's lives in the ancient world. This quest takes us to ancient cities, dangerous encounters, and fantastic moments when the Gospel of Jesus Christ transforms lives.

Acts gives us the inspired history of how Christ's Church was established and grew under the leadership of the apostles. There are four records of Jesus' life. There are twenty-one letters to the churches. There is only one record telling how the life and commission of Christ took form in the churches to which the letters were written. That record is in the book of Acts.

The Genre of Narrative

Understanding the genres of literature is absolutely crucial for a preacher or teacher. The variance in literary styles has to affect how we preach various sections of the Bible.

Peter and Paul

Acts is laid out in two major sections: The ministry of the 12 apostles mainly among the Jews, represented by Peter (Acts 1-12). Acts 13 begins a section that leads us to the rest of the book about Saul and Barnabas's first missionary journey. And so Acts 13-28 is primarily about the Gospel expanding to the Gentiles through the ministry of Paul and others.

We see the immediate results of the Apostles obeying the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation. Evangelistic preaching is primary in the book of Acts.

The Five Prescriptions

As we preach through the book of Acts we notice five major prescriptions for the church today. While there are certainly many descriptive things that were only for the church then (such as certain apostolic miracles or the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost), there are also many prescriptive activities that are for us today. Some of these are:

(1) how the church is established through the power and filling of the Holy Spirit,

(2) how the Gospel was preached by the inspired apostles and how we should follow their example

(3) how people in every age are to be saved through Christ through believing the clear Gospel,

(4) how missionary work is done when people radically follow Christ, and

(5) how the heroes of the faith lived and suffered joyously for their Lord, and how we should also be willing to suffer.

(1) The Filling of the Spirit in Acts

One of the goals of the study of the early church is to see that while some things are descriptive of events that happen only once (like the cloven tongues of fire at Pentecost), many other events are prescriptive – instructing us how Christians are to normally function. One of the greatest prescriptive events in the book of Acts is the filling of the Spirit. As Sam Storms mentions in a blog post, the filling of the Spirit is for every Christian. He says:

“To be “full of the Holy Spirit” is to reflect a maturity of character; it is the ideal condition of every believer [see Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24]. To be “filled with the Holy Spirit” is to

experience an anointing for power, purity, proclamation, and praise.”¹¹⁵

So one of the goals in preaching through the book of Acts is to show what normal Christian living with the filling of the Holy Spirit looks like.

(2) Apostolic Preaching in Acts

Another important mark of the book of Acts is the example of apostolic preaching.

In his book on Acts, Alan Thompson notes five characteristics of apostolic evangelistic preaching. These five features serve as good models for all types of preaching, both then and now.¹¹⁶

God-centered. The sermons in Acts begin with God. They announce the good news of what God has promised, what God has done, and what God will do. The preaching is not centered around the felt-needs of the audience, but around the mighty acts of God in history. The emphasis is on God’s initiative and how we are accountable to him.

Audience-conscious. While the preaching begins with God, it is not ignorant of those to whom the sermon is delivered. We see throughout Acts evidence of audience adaptation and sensitivity to what the audience already knows or doesn’t know. The sermons do not unfold as canned messages with a series of doctrinal propositions. The preaching is deeply theological, but not at the expense of being careful to communicate that theology in a way that is understandable.

¹¹⁵ Sam Storms. Baptism of the Holy Spirit – Part I, November 6, 2006, enjoyinggodministries.com. Used by Permission.

¹¹⁶ Alan J. Thompson. *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan* (New Studies in Biblical Theology) (IVP Academic: Wheaton, 2011), 90-99.

The core content stays the same, but the starting point and type of final appeal may change.

Christ-focused. Though God is often portrayed at the main actor in history, the preaching in Acts is relentlessly focused on Christ. The sermons highlight the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. They also explain the theological significance of these events. Christ is proclaimed as the climax of redemptive history and the good news for today's sinners.

Response-oriented. The preaching in Acts is not response-driven. That is, we never see messages crafted or delivered in such a way as to manipulate a desired response. But the preaching always called for a response. This is often the difference between faithful teaching and anointed preaching. The apostles not only taught about God and Christ, they peppered their preaching with promises and warnings. Specifically, they called people to faith in Christ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Boldness. The noun form of "boldness" is used five times in Acts and the verb form is used seven times (out of a total of nine in the NT). If there was one distinctive homiletical trademark of apostolic preaching it was boldness. In the context of much hostility, the apostles were often granted a unique freedom to preach Christ with exceptional clarity. In an age like ours with increasing opposition to Christianity and Christian claims, it is imperative that preachers reclaim this mantle of boldness. Preachers should not be obnoxious or obtuse, but we must question our approach to preaching if we are not willing "to be clear in the face of fear" (97).

(3) The Clear Gospel Presented in Acts

Another important mark of the book of Acts is the record of the clear Gospel being presented not only to the initiated in Jerusalem, but to pagans of diverse cultures throughout the Roman Empire.

It is thrilling to note that some form of what we can call the Great Commission is found in each of the first five books of the NT (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). It seems the Holy Spirit has gone to some length to impress upon Christians the urgency of winning others to Jesus through a clear presentation of the Gospel.

At least 13 times, the Gospel is clearly presented by the apostles in the book of Acts.

1. Pentecost, Acts 2:14-39.

Here Peter presents the guilt of the crowd for the crucifixion. The emphasis is on forgiveness of sin by Jesus the Messiah because He is the substitutionary sacrifice.

2. Peter at the Gate Beautiful, Acts 3:12-26.

We see after Peter and John healed a man lame from birth, Peter placed the blame for Jesus' death on the shoulders of the listeners. He then appealed to fulfilled prophecy and told them either to believe and return and thus receive forgiveness and times of refreshing, or be destroyed.

3. Peter before the High Priest, Acts 4:8-12.

Here Peter attributes the healing of the man lame from birth to Jesus the Messiah, whom the Jews had crucified, but whom God had raised from the dead. He quotes prophecy and says there is no other means of salvation but through Jesus. Peter then refuses to be silent about the Gospel.

4. Peter's Defense a Second Time before the Council, Acts 5:29-32.

Here Peter proclaims the resurrected Christ as Prince and Savior who brings forgiveness of sin and gives the gift of the Holy Spirit. He accuses the Council of putting Jesus to death. They are so infuriated they want to kill the Apostles. Instead, on the advice of Gamaliel, the believers are flogged and released.

We could speak of many other instances of the Gospel's clear presentation.

5. Stephen's Defense before the Council, Acts 7:1-60.
6. Peter's Message to the Household of Cornelius, Acts 10:34-43
7. Paul's Message to the Jews in the Synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, Acts 13:16-41.
8. Paul at the Areopagus in Athens, Acts 17:22-31.
9. Paul's Defense before the Jews in Jerusalem, Acts 22:1-21.
10. Paul's Defense before the Sanhedrin, Acts 23:1-6.
11. Paul's Defense before the governor, Felix, Acts 24:10-21.
12. Paul before Felix and Drusilla, Acts 24:24-25.
13. Paul's Defense before the Agrippa, Acts 26:1-29.

The emphasis of the Apostles is on the substitutionary atonement of Jesus, on the forgiveness of sins, and on the power of the resurrection to attest to the veracity of Jesus being the promised Messiah.

(4) Missionary Work in the time of Acts and Today

Acts tells the story of the birth of the church of Jesus Christ and its development from Jerusalem to Rome. Acts has been called "Infant's Progress," for it traces the history and growth of the "baby church" from its inception in Jeru-

salem. It is a thrilling and challenging book because it is the account of real people taking seriously the command of Jesus to win others to Christ. J. B. Phillips calls it, "The Young Church in Action." The expansion and growth of the infant church is recorded in various missionary endeavors through the book of Acts. Acts 1-12 generally shows the expansion of home missionary work as the Jerusalem church reaches all Judea, and then Acts 13-28 explores how the apostle Paul turns the church's vision to the evangelization of the Gentile nations.

In Acts we see that missionary work is not simply the constant global expansion of the kingdom of God as we see in Acts 13 and following, but also the expansion of the local churches through suffering as we see in Acts 5. The example sermon included in this chapter is called "Getting Small to Get Strong" and is an example of "prescriptive preaching" in Acts. We see that the best way to grow is to raise up leaders through smaller, intimate groups as they had in the early church.

Beginning in Acts 13, we see the great missionary journeys of the apostle Paul, called of God to be the apostle to the Gentiles. He is what we would call our "missionary par excellence" of the missionary activity recorded for us in Scripture. The apostle Paul is front and center. From all we know of him, he was an intense and supremely motivated man, both before and after his conversion on the way to Damascus (Acts 9). It was Paul's mission activities (Acts 13-28) that contributed remarkably towards the Christian church's move from the limited sphere of Judaism to the broader frame of the Gentile world. It then becomes, for all

religious history, a preeminent model for missionary outreach.

(5) Suffering in the Book of Acts

Another important mark of the book of Acts is the example of Christian affliction and suffering in the book of Acts.

There is a theme in the Bible so pervasive that it virtually defines the Christian life. That theme is suffering. Christians are not exempt from suffering. Pain and sorrow are real. We're not Stoics, Christian Scientists, or Muslim fatalists. Job confessed, "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1).

On their missions trip, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches, encouraging and exhorting the disciples to remain true to the faith, telling them, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Some encouragement that is! Paul taught the Thessalonians concerning their afflictions, "You yourselves know that we are appointed to this" (1 Thess. 3:3). Paul needs every ounce of courage because of the heavy sufferings he knows his work will bring. "The Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me," (Acts 20:23) he says. He is kidnapped (Acts 21:27), beaten (Acts 21:30-31; 23:3), threatened (Acts 22:22; 27:42), arrested many times (Acts 21:33; 22:24, 31; 23:35; 28:16), accused in lawsuits (Acts 21:34; 22:30; 24:1-2; 25:2, 7; 28:4), interrogated (Acts 25:24-27), ridiculed (Acts 26:24), ignored (Acts 27:11), shipwrecked (Acts 27:41) and bitten by a viper (Acts 28:3). Tradition says that Paul is eventually put to death for his work, although this is not recounted anywhere in the Bible.

Being a true Christian in a broken world entails suffering. Anyone who will not accept suffering as an essential element of the Christian life does not understand the Gospel rightly.

Michael Horton writes in *The Law of Perfect Freedom*: "We are in desperate need ... of a theology of suffering.... There is a deeper, richer theology in the old Negro spirituals than in most of the contemporary 'happy-clappy' jingles of congregations often characterized 'yuppy.' In those Negro spirituals, God-centeredness, the longing for heaven, the emphasis on the great events and truths of redemptive history wed personal struggle with hope in the Lord alone."

Dennis Johnson, in *The Message of Acts*, offers needed insight on suffering: "Can churches preoccupied with preparing a menu palatable to self-absorbed baby boomers afford to tell seekers the hard truth that Paul and Barnabas laid on young Christians in Asia Minor?" So-called "health and wealth" and "name it and claim it" gospels abound. There's no gospel of suffering in such circles. But saints through the ages knew better: "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Here Scripture uses a word that means "it is necessary"—tantamount to "what God has ordained." Other passages in which this word is used are:

- Jesus must be about his Father's business (Luke 2:49).
- Jesus must go to Jerusalem (Matt. 16:21).
- The Son of Man must be lifted up (John 3:14).
- The apostles must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

- Jesus showed Paul "how much he must suffer" for Christ's sake (Acts 9:16).

Suffering is part of the package. The disciple is not above his master. As with our Lord, his disciples must learn that the path to glory is the path of suffering. The book of Acts is filled with stories of God's ordained suffering for His saints in order to try their faith as well as demonstrate His grace and power in suffering.

How to Preach through Acts

The ideas about preaching through Acts can be applied to many other genres.

I find that when you preach narrative books, especially long ones, a few things are helpful:

1. Break it down

Break the book into the logical units. How does the story unfold? As you do this, some sections will be quite long.

2. Teach section-by-section

Rather than reading one verse at a time and then teaching on it, as you would in a book like Romans, when you have a long narrative section, read it all at the front of the sermon, then summarize the context and explain how the section fits into the story of the book and how the story of the book fits into the storyline of the whole Bible.

3. Look for the big idea

Pull a big idea, or a few big ideas, from the story and make those the centerpiece of your sermon, where you focus your teaching. This might be a moral example (positive or

negative), an explanation of how God worked in the story, an opportunity to talk about the effects of sin in the story, an illustration of redemption or another common principle articulated throughout the Bible, a key statement or phrase in the story worth camping on, etc.

4. Break it up

You can take a very long book, divide it into sections, and preach it in an expository fashion, just not all at once. For example, when I preached through Mark, I planned about thirty (30) sermons. At times when I felt led by the Holy Spirit I would slow down and focus on a few verses. Sometimes I will realize in the middle of a sermon that it needs to be split into two sermons. So I ended up preaching Mark in 33 sermons instead of 30. This will happen as you preach through any series.

Also I do not want to preach through Mark or Acts for 33 consecutive weeks. But I do want to preach through the entire narratives. I may preach through six months of a book, and then take a break with a shorter series and then come back to the longer series.

For a long book with units of thought within the book, this system could work well. Rather than preaching all 150 Psalms in a row, for example, working in sections of Psalms over the course of many years could be a good way to go.

12

PREACHING FROM REVELATION



Revelation is a picture book, not a puzzle book. Don't try to puzzle it out. Don't become preoccupied by isolated details. Rather, become engrossed in the story. Praise the Lord. Cheer for the saints. Detest the Beast. Long for the final victory.

VERN POYTHRESS



Vern Poythress begins his commentary John's Apocalypse by asking an important question: "Can you understand the Book of Revelation? Yes, you can. You can summarize its message in one sentence: God rules history and will bring it to its consummation in Christ. Read it with this main point in mind, and you will understand. You will not necessarily understand every detail—neither do I. But it is not necessary to understand every detail in order to profit spiritually."

He continues:

The same is true of all Scripture. Scripture is inexhaustibly rich, so that we never plumb all its depths and mysteries. But the main points are clear, so that we know what to believe and how to act (Prov. 1:1-7; Ps. 19:7-13). 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us not only that all Scripture is inspired, but "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." All Scripture, including Revelation, has practical value for exhortation, comfort, and training in righteousness. Paul underlines the point in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 by drawing a contrast between solid teaching of the gospel message and people's desire to have "teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (4:3). God gave us Revelation not to tickle our fancy, but to strengthen our hearts.

"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (Rev. 1:3). God knew that some of his servants would hesitate over this book. So he gives extra encouragement to our reading by pronouncing an

explicit blessing. Revelation is the only book in the whole Bible with a blessing pronounced for reading it.¹¹⁷

The Recipients

In Revelation 2:10-11 discloses that the prophecy of Revelation is written as an encouragement given to prospective martyrs. They are to be faithful unto death and Christ will give them the “crown of life.”

Though in today’s world, this book might seem intimidating, the apocalyptic genre was more familiar especially among the Jewish people. We must understand that the motivation for each Christian to read the prophecy of Revelation was to inspire confidence that Jesus is the Lamb of God who will conquer and be victorious so that martyrs could die with confidence.

Considerations the Genre of Revelation¹¹⁸

The book of Revelation is obviously not an ordinary book; this is quite apparent upon one’s first reading of the ancient prophecy. If it is not interpreted correctly, in light of the rest of Scripture, and especially looking to the source of its images from the Old Testament, John’s Apocalypse might be beyond the ability to understand. It will take some work to appreciate this amazing prophecy, but once you become a student of the apocalyptic genre, God promises you will be “blessed by reading the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 1:3).

¹¹⁷ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King*.

¹¹⁸ Much of the material for this chapter comes from Dennis E. Johnson. *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*, and Vern Poythress, *The Returning King*.

Dennis Johnson, in his book *Triumph of the Lamb* gives us several considerations for understanding the apocalyptic genre of Revelation.

The Genre: Apocalyptic

The apocalyptic genre can be one of the most difficult for the modern reader to understand. Indeed, Revelation seems resistant and unresponsive to the way of regular interpretation as applied to other books of Scripture. It is neither historical narrative like 1 Samuel, nor an epistle like Romans, nor a collection of laws (Leviticus), songs (Psalms), or wise sayings (Proverbs). Yet it speaks of historical events, opens as an epistle addressed dressed to seven churches, is deeply concerned with covenant faithfulness (the central theme of biblical law), is punctuated with songs of praise and victory, and demands a mind of wisdom to unlock its secrets (see Rev. 17:9). The impression that Revelation speaks a foreign language when compared with the rest of the Bible is only partly true. Revelation's mode of communication has affinities not only with significant portions of the Old Testament prophetic literature, as Stuart implies, but also with Jesus' teaching methods in the Gospels (both apocalyptic sections such as Mark 13 and his use of imagery in parables) and some sections of the epistles. Revelation is, as its Greek title implies, apocalyptic – not in the modern sense of “catastrophic” but in the ancient sense of “unveiling, disclosing” in vivid, visual form the invisible realities and forces that drive and therefore explain the course of observable historical events.

Most modern readers of the New Testament are not at home with ancient apocalyptic literature, so our sense of

Revelation's alienness can make us feel hedged in, frustrated because this book doesn't deliver its message in the form to which we are accustomed, a form accessible to reading strategies that have proved tried and true elsewhere.

A Genre to Bless, Not Confuse Us

The book of Revelation seems like it would be hard to understand. Not so, says Poythress:

If Revelation is clear, why do so many people have trouble with it? And why is it so controversial? We have trouble because we approach it from the wrong end. Suppose I start by asking, "what do the bear's feet in Revelation 13:2 stand for?" If I start with a detail, and ignore the big picture, I am asking for trouble. God is at the center of Revelation (Rev. 4-5). We must start with Him and with the contrasts between him and his satanic opponents. If instead we try right away to puzzle out details, it is as if we tried to use a knife by grasping it by the blade instead of the handle. We are starting at the wrong end. Revelation is a picture book, not a puzzle book. Don't try to puzzle it out. Don't become preoccupied by isolated details. Rather, become engrossed in the story. Praise the Lord. Cheer for the saints. Detest the Beast. Long for the final victory.¹¹⁹

Our starting point therefore in the book of Revelation should be confidence that God has given this book not to confuse, fuse, terrify, or divide his people but to give us light, to reveal to us the invisible forces and the secrets of his invincible plan that make sense of visible events and movements experienced by his church in the world. God's purpose

¹¹⁹ Poythress, *King*.

for Revelation is disclosed throughout the prologue, Rev. 1:1-3,

*“The **revelation** of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He **made it known** by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who **bore witness** to the word of God and to the **testimony** of Jesus Christ, even to **all that he saw**. 3 Blessed is the one who **reads aloud the words** of this prophecy, and **blessed** are those who **hear**, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”*

A Genre that Helps us See the Unseen

Revelation is a book of symbols in motion. What John has seen in prophetic vision is the true character of events, individuals, forces, and trends, the appearance of which is quite different on the physical, sociocultural, cultural, observable plane. One of the key themes of the book is that things are not what they seem.

The church in Smyrna appears **poor** but is **rich**, and it is opposed by those who claim to be Jews but are Satan's synagogue (Rev. 2:9). Sardis has a reputation for **life** but is **dead** (3:1). Laodicea thinks itself **rich** and but this church is **destitute** and naked (3:17).

The beast seems invincible, able to conquer the saints by slaying them (11:7; 13:7); their faithfulness even to death, however, proves to be their victory over the dragon that empowered the beast (12:11).

What appear to the naked eye, on the plane of human history, to be **weak**, helpless, hunted, poor, defeated congregations of Jesus' faithful servants prove to be the **true**

overcomers who participate in the triumph of the Lion who conquered as a slain Lamb.

What appear to be the invincible forces controlling history – the military-political-religious-economic complex that is Rome and its less lustrous successors – is a system sown with the seeds of its self-destruction, already feeling the first lashes of the wrath of the Lamb.

On the plane of visible history things are not what they appear, so Revelation's symbols make things appear as they are. Its surprising, paradoxical imagery discloses the true identity of the church, its enemies, and its Champion. Paradox is central to the symbolism. Not only are things not what they appear to be in history, but also typically their true identities as portrayed in the visions are the opposite of their appearance in the world.

A Genre of Symbolism

Revelation is filled with symbolism which has been both difficult and exhilarating to most Christians through the ages.

The **strength** of symbolism is vividness, for often a picture is worth a thousand words. The **challenge** of symbolism, however, is its ambiguity. All forms of metaphor, analogy, and simile place a demand on the reader to discern the precise point of comparison between two things that are dissimilar similar in many respects but alike in at least one. This is why Jesus exhorts those who hear his parables: "He who has ears, let him hear" (Matt. 13:9; Luke 14:35), a summons that is echoed in each of his letters to the churches of Asia (Rev. 2:7, 17, 29, etc.; see also 13:9). Revelation insists

that wisdom is needed to see what the symbols say about the realities they portray (Rev. 13:18; 17:9).

A Genre Coming from the Old Testament

Often the book of Revelation interprets its own symbols. Almost all of the symbols find their roots in the Old Testament prophets.

Allusions from the Prophets

The display of **divine splendor of God's presence** that initiates John's prophetic call (Rev. 1:10) has appeared before as prophets were commissioned to carry God's message from his council chamber (Ezek. 1; Dan. 9-10).

The **beast** that emerges from the sea in Revelation 13 is a composite of the four beasts of Daniel 7, namely, the world kingdoms that oppress press the saints until the Son of Man receives royal dominion from the Ancient of Days.

The **two witnesses** of Revelation 11 are the two olive trees of Zechariah 4, "the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth" (Zech. 4:14).

The **woes of judgment** that fall on the harlot **Babylon** (Rev. 1:8) echo those that fell on Israel's ancient oppressors, Tyre (Ezek. 27) and Babylon (Jer. 51; Isa. 48).

Allusions from Other Parts of the Old Testament

Revelation's symbolic vocabulary is drawn not only from the thesaurus of the prophetic literature but also from other parts of the Old Testament.

The **tree of life** in paradise at the dawn of biblical history (Gen. 2:9) reappears at the consummation (Rev. 2:7; 22:2).

The **ancient serpent** whose murderous lie seduced the woman and plunged the world into floods of misery (Gen. 3:1) is seen again, waging war against the woman, her son, and her other children-but this time his doom is sure and his time is short (Rev. 12; 20).

Plagues that struck ancient Israel's Egyptian oppressors (Exod. 7-12) strike the church's persecutors (Rev. 8:7, 10, 12; 9:3; 11:6; 16:13), so the church's exodus-deliverance is celebrated with the song of Moses and of the Lamb (Rev. 15:3; Exod. 15).

Indirect Allusions from the Old Testament

Although exact Old Testament quotations in Revelation are rare, allusion to Old Testament imagery is everywhere: Elijah and his nemesis Jezebel; Balaam, the prophet who masterminded the seduction of Israel; God's temple, served by his kingdom of priests, offering incense prayers on the altar, from which the fire of judgment falls, as on Sodom and Gomorrah; Israel the Messiah's mother; Israel the Lord's bride; Israel's twelve tribes, armed for holy war; God's winepress of wrath; the water of life, offered free of charge; Jerusalem, the city of God. Yet God does not cut and paste Old Testament images, unchanged, into the texture of John's visions. While remaining recognizable, they are modified and recombined into new configurations-as we would expect, since the sacrifice and resurrection of the Lamb have brought the warfare of the ages to a new phase and theater of operations. We dare not tackle the symbolism of Revelation without immersing our minds in the rich imagery of the Old Testament, but we also will pay attention to the transformation that these ancient pictures undergo as they are used

to express the impending, climactic victory of the kingdom of God and of his Christ.

A Genre Where Numbers are Important

One aspect of the symbolism of Revelation is the use of significant numbers to signal the structure of John's visions to the listening congregation and to represent important concepts. Seven, ten, and twelve and some of their multiples are especially important."

Seven is the number of churches to which the book is addressed and consequently the number of letters / proclamations addressed by the risen Christ through his Spirit to the churches. Though other New Testament writings show that churches existed in other cities of western Asia Minor when Revelation was given, these seven represent the churches of Jesus Christ generally, since their number, seven, symbolizes completeness. Likewise the Lamb's seven horns symbolize his complete power, and his seven eyes, his complete knowledge through the Spirit's presence in the whole world (Rev. 5:6). The scroll of the purpose of God for "the things which must soon take place" (1:1) is sealed with seven seals (5:1), and the visions associated with the Lamb's breaking of them structure the second major section of the book (6:1-8:2). The angels' sounding of seven trumpets structures the third major section (8:6-11:18), portraying providential disasters that span the time between Christ's comings. These disasters, though limited in scope, provide previews of the total destruction to be poured out in the seven bowls, limitless in scope and "last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (15:1, 7; 16). We also read of seven heads, seven hills, seven kings, and the seven Spirits of God.

The number ten is significant in itself when it numbers the dragon's heads (Rev. 12:3) and those of the beast (= kings; Rev. 13:1; 17:12; cf. Dan. 7:7) or signifies a brief, ten-day period of affliction to be endured (2:10). More frequently, however, it appears in its multiples. It is cubed to one thousand to symbolize a vast number of years (20:2-7) or cubed and multiplied by twelve to portray the vast dimensions (12,000 stadia [roughly 1,380 miles]) in all directions—length, breadth, and height—of the new Jerusalem (21:16). Or it is cubed and multiplied by twelve squared to symbolize the full registration of armed warriors in each of Israel's tribes, the sealed "bond-servants of our God" who are the Lamb's army, purified for holy war (7:4-8; 14:1-5). In even larger multiples (thousands of thousands = millions; myriads, ten thousands of myriads = hundreds of millions) it symbolizes the countless hosts of heavenly worshipers who praise the Lamb (5:11-12).

Twelve is the number of the people of God, identified with the tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:4-8; 21:12) and with the apostles of the Lamb (21:14). The number twelve is therefore employed in the symbolic presentation of God's people as the heavenly Jerusalem to enumerate its structural features such as gates and foundations and to measure the thickness (144 cubits $12^2 = 216$ feet) and the length, breadth, and height of its wall (12,000 stadia = 1,380 miles).

A Genre for the Church Under Attack

Revelation is for a church under attack. The violence of Revelation's visions have given children nightmares and offended the supposedly enlightened sentiments of adults. Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791) contended that the humane

reader cannot be blamed for finding the Book of Revelation "unpleasant and repulsive" in its descriptions of God's wrath on his enemies, for such visions conflict with the self-evident truth of "divine, all-inclusive love and charity for the restoration of men."¹²⁰ Such opinions, however, fail to understand the social and spiritual situation that Revelation addresses. Revelation is addressed to a church that is under attack. Its purpose, to reveal "things which must soon take place," is not to satisfy idle eschatological curiosity or feed a hunger for revenge but to fortify Jesus' followers in steadfast hope and holy living.

The seven beatitudes that punctuate the narrative promise God's blessing on those who keep Christ's word (Rev. 1:3; 22:7) even upon pain of death (14:13), who maintain purity in alert expectation of Christ's return (16:15), who are invited to the Lamb's wedding feast who have been beheaded for their faith and so share in the first resurrection (20:4-6) and share in the tree of life in the city of God (22:14). In these blessings we hear hints of the various forms of attack being launched against the church: persecution leading to martyrdom and seduction leading to defilement. The church's struggle is also reflected in the promises made to the victor, the overcomer. Each letter to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 closes with a promise "to him who overcomes," and generally all these promises reach ahead to the final victory portrayed in Revelation 19-22: to eat from the tree of life, to escape the second death, to share Christ's authority over the nations, to be a pillar in God's temple, inscribed

¹²⁰ J. S. Semler, *Treatise on the Free Investigation of the Canon* (1771-1775), quoted in Werner Georg Kummel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 63-64.

with God's name, and so on. The precise form that overcoming must take in each church depends on the particular challenge to faith and faithfulness that confronts each congregation, whether the attack comes in the form of a threat to unity, or ill external persecution, or in syncretism with pagan belief and practice, or in complacent compromise with the materialism of the surrounding culture.

The church's ultimate enemy, the dragon, "the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan" (Rev. 20:2), manifests the massive cunning symbolized in his seven heads (12:3) by attacking the church from within and without, through physical threat, spiritual deception, and material seduction. The visions of Revelation 12-19 symbolize these various avenues of assault as the beast from the sea (physical threat), the beast from the land (later called the false prophet; spiritual deception), and the harlot (material seduction). Though representing distinct forces by which the dragon seeks to separate the besieged bride from her triumphant Lord, these three form a devilish coalition in which the false prophet pours out lies to promote worship of the beast and the harlot rides on the beast and toasts the beast's victory with the martyrs' blood.

A Genre of Fast Approaching Events

Many of the time references in Revelation are puzzling and will require close attention in the chapters ahead: "ten days" (Rev. 2:10), "forty-two months" (11:2; 13:5), "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (12:0), "a time and times and half a time" (12:14), "one thousand years" (21:2-7). One of the clearest, most literal time references, however, ever, is the repeated description of the contents of John's visions as

having to do with "things which must soon take place" (1: 1). The prologue's call to hear and keep Revelation's message is reinforced with the motive: "for the time is near" (1:3).

Revelation gave first-century Christians insight into the purposes and poses of God in their time. We can at least conclude, therefore, that interpretations of the visions that lie completely beyond the original readers' frame of reference are suspect. If we begin our inquiry with the assumption that God intended first-century believers to get the message of Revelation, we read its visions against the backdrop of Old Testament imagery rather than forcing them into the template of twenty-first-century technologies or politics. This principle also encourages us to understand Revelation in the context of the cultural and intellectual forces that were affecting the churches of first-century Asia: religious institutions, political structures, military conflicts, natural disasters, and even, perhaps, the symbolic vocabulary of Jewish apocalyptic literature or pagan myth. God is so much the sovereign of history that he can use every dimension of his people's experience to communicate his word.

A Genre Permeated with Christ's Victory

The theme of the entire book of Revelation is that the victory belongs to God and to his Christ. Revelation is pervaded \ with worship songs and scenes because its pervasive theme despite its gruesome portrait of evil's powers-is the triumph of God through the Lamb. We read this book to hear the King's call to courage and to fall down in adoring worship before Him.

Come, Lord Jesus!

The whole of Revelation is meant to stir our longing and prayers for the full realization of God's purposes, which is to take place at the Second Coming. Revelation fittingly ends on this this reminder and invitation. As St. Paul said, "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!" (1 Cor. 16:22).

A Concise Overview of Revelation¹²¹

A valuable summary of the book of Revelation is found Dennis Johnson's book, *The Triumph of the Lamb* which is produced below:

Letters to Churches (1-3). Jesus is the glorious Son of Man, who is present by his Spirit in his churches (1:9-20). He knows their situation and their deeds as they are attacked by religious deception, persecution, and the seduction of pleasure, affluence, comfort, and conformity (2-3).

Seals (4:1-8:1). Jesus is the victorious Lion because he died as the sacrificial Lamb. He has authority to reveal the meaning of what will happen in history (4-5). At his bidding military conquest (white horse), war and bloodshed (red horse), and food scarcity (black horse), leading ing to death through violence, famine, and disease (pale horse) will punish the church's enemies until the end (6:1-8). Although his martyrs must wait awhile until their enemies are destroyed (6:9-11), God's justice will come (6:12-17). Through it all Jesus protects his covenant people, symbolized as a full army of twelve tribes (7:1-8), who are drawn from all the world's

¹²¹ Dennis E. Johnson. *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*, "Appendix 1."

peoples, so that nothing will separate us from his love (7:9-17). When Jesus brings woes on earth's evil powers, it is in answer to his people's prayers for relief (8:1-5).

Trumpets: Warning Signals of Coming Judgment (8:2-11:18). Jesus will bring limited, providential judgments on the earth as signal blasts, foreshadowing the great judgment and calling earth's inhabitants to repent. These include the effects of war (burning of land, bloodying of sea, defiling of fresh water, darkening of sky by smoke, 8:6-12). Even worse, rebels will be tormented by demonically induced despair and death (9). But Jesus gives John the sure testimony that his patient waiting will not continue forever (10). In the meanwhile his witness church cannot be harmed until its task is done, and even its visible defeat (martyrs' death) is its victory (11:1-14). In the end the kingdom of the world will belong to our Lord and his Christ (11:15-18).

The Dragon and the Lamb: The Heart of the Conflict (11:19-15:4). The center of the Revelation gives an X-ray of the central conflict: Christ versus the dragon. The birth, death, and enthronement of the child of Eve/Israel have abolished Satan's authority to accuse believers (12:1-12). In his death throes all that Satan can do is to try to attack believers on earth (12:13-13:1) through persecution (sea beast, 13:1-10), deception (land beast, 13:11-18), and sensual pleasure (harlot, 14:8; 16:9; 17-18). The Lamb and his pure army are enthroned in victory on the heavenly Zion (14:1-5; 15:1-4), and the Lamb will bring his enemies to judgment for the death of his martyrs (14:6-20).

Bowls: God's Wrath Completed (15:5-16:21). The complete judgment previously foreshadowed in the limited, providential disasters of history (trumpets) will come on

those who have served the dragon through the beasts and the harlot: neither earth, sea, water springs, nor sunlight will sustain life (16:1-9). The dragon's final conspiracy to gather the world's powers and peoples against Christ's church will result in the rebels' destruction (16:10-21).

The Harlot Babylon (17:1-19:10). The world's seductive power (harlot) has been supported by its coercive power (beast, 17); the source of her intoxication has been the death of Jesus' faithful witnesses (17:6; 18:6; 19:2). But the glamour of the beast's woman is a sham, and her luxurious wealth will be stripped from her in the full view of those who have loved the comforts she has offered (18:1-19:5). Jesus' bride will be vindicated (19:6-10).

Thousand Years, Last Battle, and Last Judgment (19:11-21:8). When the dragon, beast, and Use prophets have gathered the world's powers to destroy the church (16:14), Jesus will defeat his enemies and cast them into the lake of fire forever (19:11-21:8; 20:7-10). Until that time, however, Satan has been bound, prevented from assembling this worldwide conspiracy against the church (for "one thousand years" = a long time), while the martyrs who have died on earth live and rule with Christ in heaven (20:1-6). The climax of Jesus' victory is the judgment of all people, in which rebels are condemned for the deeds written in their "record books" (20:11-15) and saints who are written in the Lamb's "registry book" are welcomed into the new heaven and new earth as the bride-city of God (cf. 21:1-8).

The New Creation and the Bride Jerusalem (21:1-22:21). Her enemies destroyed, the church will stand complete in flawless beauty as the bride of the Lamb, the temple of God, resplendent with his glory. Overcomers will inherit the new

heaven and new earth (21:1-8) and will delight in God's presence forever. Even as the church cries out to her Husband, "Come, Lord Jesus" (22:20), his delay allows time for the thirsty still to come to him for the water of life (22:17).

Outline of Revelation (from Vern Poythress)

- A Heavenly Vision (1:1-20)
- The Messages to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22)
- God's Throne Room (4:1-5:14)
- Opening the Seven Seals (6:1-8:1)
- The Seven Trumpets (8:2-11:19)
- Seven Symbolic Histories (12:1-14:20)
- The Seven Bowls (15:1-16:21)
- Babylon the Prostitute (17:1-19:10)
- The Appearing of Christ and the Final Battle (19:11-21)
- The Judgments (20:1-21:8)
- The New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5)
- Closing Exhortations (22:6-21)

Sermon Example
WHAT WILL HEAVEN BE LIKE?
 Revelation 5:9-10

Heaven Series

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black
 Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois

“Since where God dwells, there heaven is, we conclude that in the life to come heaven and earth will no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be merged. Believers will therefore continue to be in heaven as they continue to live on the New Earth.”

Anthony Hoekema



pen your Bible to **Revelation 5**. We are continuing our series on “Heaven.” This morning we are looking at a message entitled: “What Will Heaven Be Like?”

The Earth is the Lord’s

Abraham Kuyper famously said, “There is not one inch in the entire area of our human life about which Christ, who is Sovereign of all, does not cry out, “Mine!”” “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” Man lost dominion on the earth, and the earth became a place of brokenness and iniquity. But the Lord is going to renew the earth one day.

If God were to end history and reign forever in a distant Heaven, Earth would be remembered as a graveyard of sin and failure. Instead, Earth will be redeemed and resurrected. In the end it will be a far greater world, even for having gone through the birth pains of suffering and sin—“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—” (1 Cor. 2:9). God owns the earth and He will take it back when heaven descends to earth at Jesus’ coming.

Hoekema: Earth and Heaven One

Listen to the words of Anthony Hoekema, “Since where God dwells, there heaven is, we conclude that in the life to come heaven and earth will no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be merged. Believers will

therefore continue to be in heaven as they continue to live on the New Earth.” Heaven and Earth will become one!

But what will we be like on the New Earth in eternity?

I. The **People** of the New Heaven and Earth.

The Abrahamic Covenant

When we think of the population of inhabitants in the New Heaven and Earth, we need to go all the way back to the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:1-3, “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Remember that God destroyed the human race with a worldwide flood, and started again with **Noah**. But not long after, the people of the earth again became proud, and tried to build a tower to heaven, believing that “nothing that they propose to do would be impossible for them” (Gen. 11:6). So God scattered them by confusing their languages and then started over again with **Abraham**. And through Abraham God promised to bless “all the families of the earth.” Remember,

A Promise to a Barren Woman

God promised that Abraham’s seed would bless all nations when Sarah was **childless** and **barren**! But you know the story, and God gave Sarah life in her womb. Eventually, that meant Jesus would come through Abraham’s family. And through Jesus all nations would be blessed!

What God meant for a curse at Babel will be a blessing in eternity. It seems very clear from Revelation 5:9-10 that we will retain our ethnic identities in the New Heaven and Earth.

What About Ethnic Identities?

Consider in Revelation 5:9-10 the song the elders sing to the Lamb:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.
10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10).

Every People, Family, and Nation

Will we have ethnic identities in the New Earth? According to this passage, absolutely. Is the risen Jesus Jewish? Certainly. Will we know he's Jewish? Of course. Our resurrected DNA will be unflawed, but it will preserve our God-designed uniquenesses, racial and otherwise.

Tribe refers to a person's clan and family lineage. People refers to race. Nation refers to those who share a national identity and culture.

We read in Revelation 21:24,26, "the kings of the earth will bring their glory into [the New Jerusalem]... 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations."

Dutch theologian **Herman Bavinck** said of the New Earth, "All those nations—each in accordance with its own distinct national character—bring into the new Jerusalem all they have received from God in the way of glory and honor."¹²²

Like the God's church on earth now, the New Jerusalem will be a melting pot of ethnic diversity. And like Christ's church, the groups in the New Jerusalem will be united by their common worship of King Jesus. We will delight in each other's differences, never resent or be frightened by them.

One New Humanity

Unfortunately, in this world under the Curse, there's often hostility between races and nations. They're divided by sin, intolerant of differences in appearance, language, and culture. Speaking of the racial divide between Jews and Gentiles, Paul says, "For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new [humanity] in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Paul goes further in **Galatians 3:26-27** and says that not only are racial divisions healed in Christ, but also gender divisions and societal divisions. Listen to Paul in **Gal. 3:26**, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

There will be no racial, societal or gender prejudice in Heaven. There will be no illusions of racial or national superiority, no disputes over borders.

¹²² Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next*,

A Corporate Aspect to God's Image

Some scholars argue that the image of God has a corporate dimension. Richard Mouw said we begin to see the glorious beauty of God as we see the uniqueness of all nations in the New Earth: "There is no one human individual or group who can fully bear or manifest all that is [reflected] in the image of God, so that there is a sense in which that image is collectively possessed [and displayed]. The image of God is, as it were, parceled out among the [all the redeemed] peoples of the [New] Earth. By looking at different individuals and groups we get glimpses of different aspects of the full image of God."¹²³

If this is true, and I believe it may be, then racism is not only an injustice toward people but also a rejection of God's very nature. On the New Earth we'll never celebrate sin, but we'll celebrate diversity in the biblical sense. We'll never try to keep people out. We'll welcome them in, exercising hospitality to every traveler. Peace on Earth will be rooted in our common ruler, Christ the King,

Christ will bring Peace on Earth not by the abolition of our differences but by a unifying loyalty to the King, a loyalty that transcends differences—and is enriched by them. The kings and leaders of nations who have put their trust in Christ will be united with the King of Righteousness.

As Isaiah says in **Isaiah 2:4**, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Living Hope - Multicultural

It is for this reason that we want to see Living Hope Bible Church further expand as a multicultural church that looks like heaven! We need to realize that not just your family or ethnicity or culture will be in heaven. Men and women from every tribe, tongue, people and nation will dwell there.

What can you do to expand God's multicultural mission at Living Hope?

1. You can learn another language.
2. You can keep yourself informed on the mission of God around the world. We just returned from Brazil, and it is amazing where there are about 44 million Protestants. The Gospel is expanding by leaps and bounds. In Mexico, new churches are being established on a daily basis.
3. You can pray for more multicultural ministries will be established at LHBC. Currently we have outreaches in both Korean and Spanish. May God expand our horizons!

¹²³ Richard Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 47.

II. The **Culture** of the New Heaven and Earth.

Fantastic Culture

Can you imagine the fantastic culture on the New Heaven and Earth? The eternal Heaven, on the New Earth, will be a physical environment with physical people who work, eat, converse, and hold positions of authority. We will travel across the New Earth. We will worship together. Leaders of nations will bring the splendor of different cultures into the New Earth where Jesus Christ reigns on His throne.

Just imagine the most beautiful of art, the most brilliant music, and the most reasoned literature, crafts of every kind, technology, clothing, jewelry, education, and even various kinds of foods from every culture—all these things will have a part of society and culture in the New Earth.

In eternity, we will continue to function as God's image-bearers. As the new humanity in Christ we will continue to reflect our Lord and God by serving him with our body and mind and our imaginations. Creativity will not diminish but increase!

The greatest art remembered on this earth will have an amateur feel in the New Earth. Cities will be built and governments will be established under King Jesus.

Our Language in the New Heaven and Earth?

What language will we speak in the New Earth? Will there be one central language in Heaven, a language we'll all speak and understand? (Todos sabemos que Español es el idioma celestial! —*"We all know Spanish is the heavenly language!"*) Scripture says of those with different languages, "They cried out in a loud voice" (Revelation 7:10). This singular "voice" implies a shared language.

God says of many different nations, "You have made them to be a kingdom" (Revelation 5:10). One kingdom, one world, one government. This may imply one shared central language.

The Tower of Babel Reversed

God could allow us to understand all languages even if we can't speak them. But Scripture seems to suggest more. The Babel account offers clues as to the importance of shared language in an ideal society. "Now the whole earth had one language and the same words... 4 Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.'... 6 And the Lord said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will

do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” (Genesis 11:1, 4, 6).

God then confused their language and dispersed them, so their great city went unfinished. Notice that all people originally shared one language, which empowered them to cooperate together in great achievements. But because they were united in self-glorification rather than God-glorification, they used their united language for rebellion and self-destruction. Because the people weren’t united around their God-designed purpose to rule the earth for his glory, God removed their shared language.

In reversing the Curse, **God will reverse Babel**. Instead of people building a city for **their** own glory, God will build a city for them, uniting them for **His** glory. In Genesis 11 the people attempted to connect Earth to Heaven with their city, making Heaven one with Earth. In Revelation 21 God brings Heaven down to Earth, making Earth one with Heaven.

We May Also Keep Our Languages

Nonetheless, it seems likely that in addition to our common language, we will maintain our current languages. Although the confusion of languages at Babel was originally a curse, the gatherings in Heaven of people of every nation, tribe, and language show that God will unite forever the people divided at Babel—not by eliminating their differences, but by eliminating sin, suspicion, and hostility.

Our Diversity Will Serve Everyone’s Good

Tribes, peoples, and nations will all make their own particular contribution to the enrichment of life in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 21:24-26). Daniel prophesied that the Messiah would be “given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Daniel 7:14). Just as the church’s diversity of gifts serves the good of others (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), so our diversity will serve everyone’s good in the new universe.

III. The Landscape of the New Heaven and Earth.

Earthly Beauty will be Even Deeper

Next week we will see how the new creation is in direct fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant and all the land promises of the Old Testament. I can’t wait to see the new creation. What will it be like?

The earthly beauty we now see won’t be lost. We won’t trade Earth’s beauty for Heaven’s but retain Earth’s beauty and gain even deeper beauty.

As we will live forever with the people of this world—redeemed—we will enjoy forever the beauties of this world—redeemed.

C.S. Lewis rightly said, “In the truest sense, Christian pilgrims have the best of both worlds. We have joy whenever this world reminds us of the next, and we take solace whenever it does not.”

The Continuity of the Earth

In becoming new, will the old Earth retain much of what it once was? Yes! Theologians call this the idea of “continuity.”

The New Earth in Scripture is pictured to be very much like the old Earth, yet completely redeemed. One theologian put it this way: “The world into which we shall enter in at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is... not *another* world [entirely]; it is this world [renewed], this heaven, this earth; both, however, passed away and renewed. It is these forests, these fields, these cities, these streets, these people, that will be the scene of redemption.”¹²⁴ You see our current world is just the broken “shadowlands” of what we once had in Eden.

The Beasts Are Now Gentle

We get a picture of the New Earth in Isaiah 11 where the beasts lose their beastliness. The wolf and the lion lie down in peace together. Look at **Isaiah 11:6-9**,

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,

and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,

and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;

and a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze;

their young shall lie down together;

and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,

and the **weaned child** shall put his hand on the adder's den.

9 They shall not hurt or destroy

in all my holy mountain;

for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

Children and Animals

People often ask me whether animals will be in Heaven? Their second question, is whether they'll ever see their pets again. To some people, these are merely sentimental questions. To others, they are very important.

¹²⁴ Edward Thurneysen, quoted in J. A. Schep, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 218–19.

Children especially want to know the answers. What do we tell them when they ask?

First of all, mankind and animals will enjoy the New Earth in perfect harmony and submission to God, and man will once again have dominion over the earth. It seems that perhaps we may even be raising the infant children that died so young here on earth. Perhaps our pets will be there. God is so infinitely merciful that it is not beyond consideration.

And now mankind will have such dominion over the earth that even a child that is barely weaned from his mother will be able to demonstrate that dominion by playing in the dens of snakes and not being harmed!

Cities in the New Earth

And of course there will be cities in the New Earth. We've already spoken of the New Jerusalem, but there will be local governments and cities as well. We read in **Revelation 2:26**, "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations." And in **Luke 19:17**, Jesus says to some on the Last Day, "Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities."

And so it seems that there will be cities, populations, and architecture throughout the New Earth. Perhaps you are a city dweller, or perhaps you are from the country. Both will be featured in the New Earth.

Conclusion

What a joy that this week we had two couples get engaged in our congregation. When that groom is shaking up here at the front he will see the most beautiful earthly vision of a woman he'll ever see coming down that aisle. The only sight that supersedes that sight is the sight of Jesus. On that day, when heaven descends from to earth, we will have a perfect Bridegroom and He will have a radiant, spotless Bride!

APPENDIX 1

STUDY GUIDES



*"Oh how I love your law! It is my
meditation all the day."*

PSALM 119:97



Study Guide for Test 1

(based on chapters 1 and 2)

1. There are at least 17 qualifications listed in the New Testament for godly ministers. Be familiar with these qualifications and that they apply to all Christians, not just leaders in the church.
2. Be ready to define **eisegesis** as reading one's own ideas into the text of Scripture.
3. Know the advantages of consecutive expository preaching...
 - You and your hearers grasp the message of a book as a whole
 - You will understand passages in their context
 - Your preaching will have balance - covering the whole counsel of God
 - You will be helped in avoiding hobby horses
 - You can address delicate subjects more naturally
 - You will teach your hearers how to handle the text for themselves
4. Know the seven rules of Bible interpretation.
 - 1.) The Grammatical - Historical Method (Plain Reading of Scripture)
 - 2.) Christ is the Focal Point of Scripture
 - 3.) The Need for the Holy Spirit in Interpretation
 - 4.) Always Interpret in Context
 - 5.) The Clear Interprets the Unclear

- 6.) The New Testament Interprets the Old
- 7.) Jesus is the Final Interpreter

5. Give several examples from Scripture of a “**simile**”.
6. Know word for word that **hyperbole** is an exaggeration to make or reinforce a point
7. Know word for word that **anthropomorphism** is a figure of speech in which God describes himself as a man or even an animal in order to convey a truth about himself.
8. Give an example from Scripture of an **anthropomorphism**.
9. Know word for word that **anthropopathism** is used to refer to God's emotions. And even though God never changes and is not contingent, He is painted poetically as having emotions like mankind.
10. Give several examples from Scripture of an **anthropopathism**.
11. Be ready to name several mysteries in the Bible such as...
 - Man's Responsibility vs. Election / Predestination
 - The Bible's Divine and Human Authorship
 - The Union of Christ's Two Natures

- The Trinity

12. You don't need to know all the below references, but be ready to list several Scripture references that mandates a Christ-centered interpretation of the Bible.

- “And He took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished’” (Luke 18:31).
- “And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27).
- “Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’” (Luke 24:44).
- “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’” (John 1:45).
- “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me” (John 5:46).
- “And so, because he [David] was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his

throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay” (Acts 2:30-31).

- “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18).
- “Of Him all the prophets bear witness . . .” (Acts 10:43).
- “And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ” (Acts 17:2-3).
- “And all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4).
- “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of

Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (1 Peter 1:10-11).

13. What is the difference between allegory in the Bible and allegorical interpretation of the Bible? *Paul uses allegory in the Bible in order to illustrate truth, but allegorical interpretation is not a legitimate model of interpretation because it brings one's own fanciful ideas to the text of Scripture*
14. Be ready to list several legitimate uses of typology in the Bible.
 - Historical types
 - Legal types
 - Prophetic types
15. How is Adam a type of Christ in the Bible? (hint – the answer is found in Romans 5) *According to Romans 5, Adam is the federal head of the fallen human race, but Christ is the federal head of the “new humanity.”*
16. Be ready to explain what the principle of the “analogy of faith” means. (The Bible in all its parts is completely analogous and therefore the Bible is the best interpreter of the Bible)
17. Be ready to define (word for word) that the idea of Progressive Revelation means God has revealed himself and his will through the Scriptures with an

increasing clarity as more and more of the Scriptures were written.

18. Essay question (choose only one below and answer it):
- a. Explain how to interpret an unclear passage like Hebrews 6 with other clear passages in the Bible.
 - b. How does the “analogy of faith” work when comparing the seeming contradictory views of justification between the Apostle Paul and the Apostle James?
 - c. List three examples of typology in the Bible and explain how they point to Christ.

APPENDIX 2

CLASS SERMON PRESENTATION



“The source of my authority in this pulpit is not...my wisdom; nor is it a private revelation granted to me beyond the revelation of Scripture. My words have authority only insofar as they are the repetition, unfolding and proper application of the words of Scripture. I have authority only when I stand under authority. And our corporate symbol of that truth is the sound of your Bibles opening to the text. My deep conviction about preaching is that a pastor must show the people that what he is saying was already said or implied in the Bible. If it cannot be shown it has no special authority”

JOHN PIPER¹²⁵



¹²⁵ The Wisdom of Men and the Power of God, 1 Corinthians 2:1--5, July 13, 1980. www.desiringGod.org,

Criteria for Class Sermon Presentation

Sermon Presentation Guidelines

- 1.) The sermon will be an expository sermon.
- 2.) The sermon will begin with an introduction that creates interest, identifies a need and leads into the text and topic.
- 3.) The sermon will contain a main idea, thought or proposition that can be clearly stated in a single sentence. (This must be identified in the manuscript)
- 4.) The sermon must contain a clear outline that includes main points expressed in complete sentence statements.
- 5.) Each main point must be clearly demonstrated as derived from the text and must be clearly developed in the exposition.
- 6.) Each main point must be developed, illustrated and applied. The exposition must display thoughtful study of the Scripture that is faithful to the text.
- 7.) The illustrations must be well chosen and appropriate.
- 8.) The application must be biblical, clear, culturally relevant, and Christ- centered.
- 9.) The conclusion of the sermon must be crafted to bring the sermon to a purposeful ending.
- 10.) The sermon delivery must demonstrate good delivery values and skills, such as dependence on the Holy Spirit, heartfelt passion, and the ability to engage with the listeners in a meaningful way.

Sermon Form Guidelines

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

- ✓ Scripture Announcement
- ✓ Scripture Introduction
- ✓ Scripture Re-announcement
- ✓ Scripture Reading
- ✓ Prayer for Illumination

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

- ✓ Arouse Interest
- ✓ Intro into the subject (prepare for proposition's concept and terms)
- ✓ Make it Personal (reason for sermon, FCF, universal need)
- ✓ Link to the Scripture Text
- ✓ Attach the proposition

MAIN BODY:

- Main Points
 - Explanation
 - ❖ Summary statement (*“so we see from this text that...”*)
 - Illustration
 - ❖ Summary statement (*“we too...even as...in the same manner”*)
 - Application
 - ❖ Transition statement (connect your points)

CONCLUSION:

- ✓ Summarize

- ✓ Focused Response: *“What do you want me to do now?”*
- ✓ Climax
- ✓ Restate the “big idea”

Preachers should strive for sermons that are TRANSFORMATIONAL not just INFORMATIONAL. How does this story affect...

- Thinking?
- Desires?
- Actions?

Critical Interactions and Discussions

After preaching each time in class you will receive critical feedback from the instructor and your fellow students. You will then receive direction from the instructor to help you formulate a strategy for improving a selected portion of the sermon or preaching component. There may be multiple brief assignments throughout the course as you work on various sermon components and skills.

As part of the class you may be required to listen to, critique and discuss sermons from outside preachers. This will be done during class time. You will also be required to interact critically, but constructively with each student’s preaching.

SERMON EVALUATION FORM

Preacher: _____ Date _____

Sermon Title: _____

Scripture: _____

Take sermon notes on the back to finish statements & questions below

Needs Work.....Excellent

I. Textual Faithfulness	1	2	3	4
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A. Overall, was the sermon faithful to the text?

B. What was the main point of the sermon?

II. Instruction	1	2	3	4
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A. How did this sermon engage your mind?

B. Were you persuaded by the sermon's main point?

C. Was the passage adequately explained?

III. Gospel Tone	1	2	3	4
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A. Was Christ preached in this sermon?

B. Was the Gospel made clear as a challenge to unbelievers?

C. Were the Gospel and its benefits preached to challenge, comfort, and encourage Christians?

IV. Communication**A. Movement**

- | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Introduction got my attention | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Introduction laid foundation
for the sermon | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Did sermon have clear outline? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Sense of momentum? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

B. Order and Unity

- | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Main headings developed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Organized progression to sermon | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Illustrations subservient to truth | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Imperatives were specific | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. Transitions were clear | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. Was the sermon unified? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Length of sermon | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

C. Point

- | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Did the sermon affect you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Was the sermon compelling? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

D. Delivery

- | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Language and vocabulary | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Voice inflection/volume/clarity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Eye contact | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Pulpit presence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

V. Overall Evaluation of sermon

I offer the following advice and suggestions to the preacher that he might continue to grow in effectiveness as a preacher: _____

[illegible]