

# **EARS TO HEAR**

**A GUIDE FOR THE INTERPRETATION  
OF THE BIBLE**

**William H. Lawson**

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## PREFACE

Christians often struggle to hear God speak through the Bible. Even Christian ministers often do not understand the message of the Bible and the message that they proclaim sometimes has little relationship to the actual message of the Bible. The problem in part is that sound principles and methods for interpreting the Bible are not known or practiced. Instead, everyone does what is right in their own eyes. The purpose of this guide is to provide principles, methods, and procedures for Christians as they seek to hear God speak through the Bible and ministers as they study the Bible, apply the message of the Bible to the modern context, and communicate the message of the Bible to those who need a word from God.

This guide is primarily an introductory textbook to biblical interpretation. However, this guide serves two other functions as well. It is a handbook to the tasks of biblical interpretation. Use this guide as a reference whenever you are uncertain about a method or procedure. It can also be used as a teacher's guide for instructing others how to interpret the Bible.

Unit one provides some guidance for preparing to do biblical interpretation. Units two through four introduce methods and procedures for studying the Bible and determining its original message. Unit five introduces a method and procedures for applying the message of the Bible to contemporary situations. Unit six introduces a method and procedures for preparing sermons and Bible studies that effectively communicate the message of the Bible to modern audiences.

Other books are also available that provide fuller illustration of the methodologies introduced in this guide, including [The Lion Roars from Zion: A Guide for the Interpretation of the Book of Amos](#) and [Obedient to Death: A Guide for the Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians](#).

These guides are available online from the Institute for Biblical Interpretation through Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary at their website [www.mbts.org.my](http://www.mbts.org.my).

My earnest desire is that your reading and study of God's word would be enhanced by applying the methodologies introduced in this guide for the interpretation of the Bible.

William H. Lawson

# Unit One

## PREPARING TO INTERPRET

The Bible in some ways is like other books and can be understood to an extent like other books. In other ways, however, the Bible is a unique book that requires special preparation if it is to be understood. If interpreters are to understand fully the message of the Bible they must have a regenerated nature and essential attitudes; background knowledge, reference tools, a good translation and study Bible; and a balanced approach and sound methodologies. In this unit, I seek to provide some guidance in these areas so that you will be better prepared to interpret the Bible. A review is included at the end of the unit to encourage you to be aware of what is required for interpreting the Bible.

# Lesson One

## Regeneration and Interpretation

Though everyone to an extent can understand the Bible, those people whose natures are in tune with God and the ways that he communicates with people are better able to understand the message he reveals through the Bible. How do humans perceive God speaking to them and what can be done to facilitate divine communication? In the past some scholars have explored this issue from the perspective of psychology or philosophy. In this lesson I explore this issue from the biblical perspective of human environment and nature, the corruption of that nature through satanic influence, and the regeneration of that nature through Jesus Christ, and draw implications for biblical interpretation.

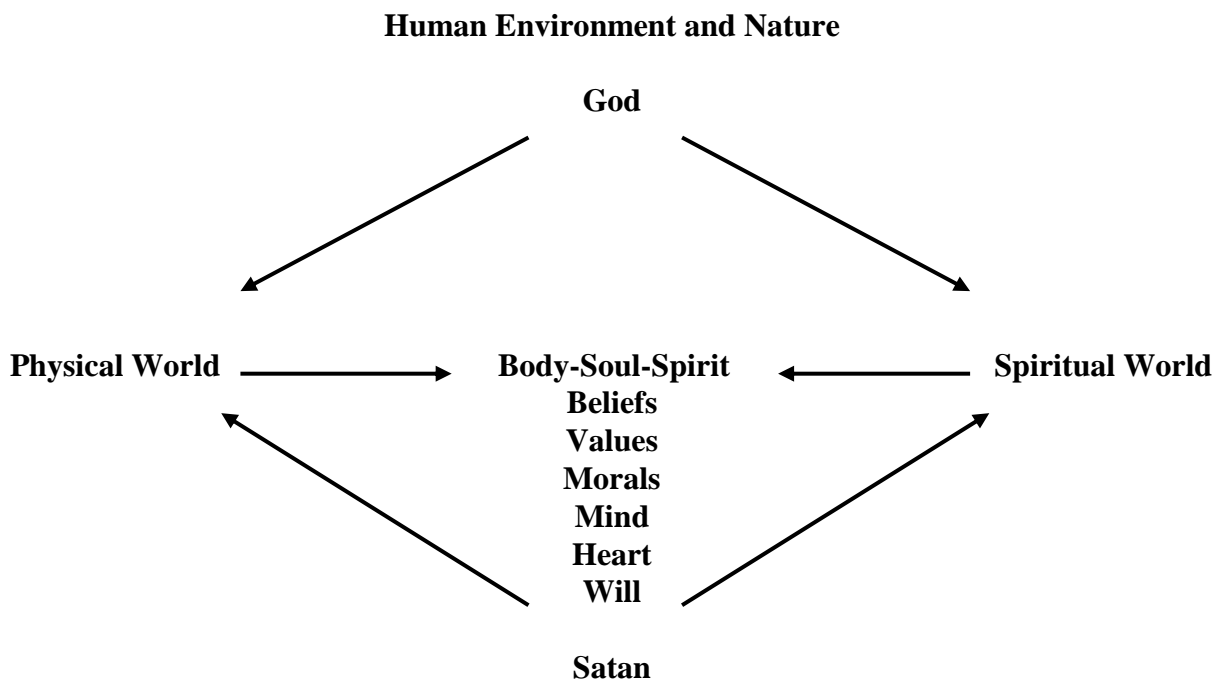
### **Human Environment and Nature**

The perspective on the human environment revealed in the Bible is complex, but has at its core a basic understanding of the nature of the world and the cosmic forces at work in the world. The world has both a physical and a spiritual dimension. Both God and Satan are at work in this two-dimensional world. Humans find themselves in an environment in which they are caught in the cosmic struggle between God and Satan and must choose who will be their Lord.

The perspective on human nature revealed in the Bible is also complex and admittedly the portrayal that follows is an immense oversimplification; however, it provides helpful insight into how people assimilate information and experience change. The Bible generally regards humans as having a body, soul, and spirit. These aspects of human nature enable humans to relate to the world and be influenced by the cosmic forces at work in the world. The body is the part of human nature that allows people to relate to the physical dimension of the world. Through the body, God speaks to people in the physical dimension of the world through the majesty of his creation, the divine ordering of events, godly people, etc. He also speaks to people in the physical world through the Bible. However, Satan also speaks through the body to people in the physical dimension of the world through the destruction of creation, the chaos of events, wicked people, etc. Satan is even able to speak by distorting the message of the Bible. The spirit is the part of human nature that enables people to relate to the spiritual dimension of the world. Though the spiritual dimension of the world and the

human spirit are more difficult to describe, both God and Satan speak to people in the spiritual dimension of the world through the human spirit.

The soul is that part of human nature that is the essence of who people are and consists of beliefs, values, morals, mind, heart, and will. Beliefs are those ideas that humans have come to accept as true. Values are those things that humans have come to perceive as valuable. Morals are the behavior that humans have come to acknowledge as appropriate. Mind refers to the thought processes by which humans evaluate new information received from the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world through their bodies and spirits. Heart refers to the emotional responses through which humans filter new information received from the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world through their bodies and spirits. Will refers to the ability of humans to make decisions about what is true, valuable, and right and act on those decisions. The character of the soul is shaped by influences from the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world through the body and spirit. On the one hand, God influences human beings by revealing himself in the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world. On the other hand, Satan influences human beings by distorting God’s revelation in the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world.



### **Corruption through Satanic Influence**

The judgment of the Bible is that human beings have become universally corrupt through satanic influence. They have not heeded God’s revelation of himself in the physical or spiritual dimensions of the world, but have instead allowed themselves to be influenced by Satan. As a result, their ability to perceive God’s revelation in the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world through their bodies and spirits has been damaged. In addition, their souls have been so thoroughly corrupted by satanic influence that it is difficult for them to accept God’s revelation even when they are able to perceive it. Their beliefs, values, and morals, are so different from that which God reveals to be true, valuable, and right that they have difficulty accepting God’s revelation. Their minds and hearts have been so corrupted by Satan that God’s revelation does not make sense and arouses an antagonistic emotional re-

sponse. Their wills are so accustomed to submitting to the will of Satan that it is difficult for them to decide instead to submit to God.

### **Regeneration through Jesus Christ**

Though human beings are universally corrupt through satanic influence, God has worked in a decisive way to regenerate people through Jesus Christ. Jesus came into the world so that people could perceive unequivocally through their physical nature the truth, value, and rightness of God's revelation. This revelation is confirmed to people by the testimony of the Spirit of Jesus Christ through their spirits. Through this double-witness God forces people to reevaluate their understanding of what is true, valuable, and right. Those who are humble about what they think they know and whose minds and hearts are open to God are enabled to respond to him with an act of the will—repentance and faith. As a result their lives are transformed—body, soul, and spirit. They are no longer trapped in a cycle of life characterized by ever increasing corruption of the soul by satanic influence in the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world through the body and spirit. Instead, they are freed so that they can enter a cycle of life characterized by ever increasing renewal of the soul by divine influence in the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world through the body and spirit.

### **Implications for Biblical Interpretation**

The Bible is one of the ways that God reveals himself to people. God uses the Bible along with other confirming testimony in the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world to break through the stranglehold that Satan has on the lives of people and enable them to commit their lives in faith to him and experience a new life focused on him. However, Satan is still active in the physical and spiritual world and Christians are all too susceptible to his influence. This influence diminishes the ability of Christians to hear God speak through the Bible.

Based on the biblical understanding of human environment and nature, you can do three things to enhance your ability to hear God speak through the Bible. First, you need to submit your body to God. Christians live in a world that is heavily influenced by Satan. They are challenged by God to be an influence on that world. However, they are often more influenced by the world than they are an effective influence on that world. You can submit your body to God by avoiding satanic influence in the physical world and being open to the ways that God reveals himself in the physical world. Second, you need submit your spirit to God. Pray for God to protect you from satanic influence and to enable you to understand his revelation in the Bible. Be alert for satanic influence and reject it. Third, you need to submit your soul to God by allowing God to transform your beliefs, values, morals, mind, heart, and will. As you read the Bible, you will at times encounter elements of God's revelation that contradict your understanding of what is true, valuable, and right. Your beliefs, values, and morals may hinder you from hearing God speak. If you are to hear God speak you must submit your beliefs, values, and morals to God's revelation of what is true, valuable, and right in the Bible. As you read the Bible, you will at times think that God's revelation does not make sense. Your mind may hinder you from hearing God speak. If you are to hear God speak you must submit your mind to God. As you read the Bible, you will at times feel antagonistic to what God is saying. Your heart may hinder you from hearing God speak. If you are to hear God speak you must submit your heart to God. As you read the Bible, you will be confronted with



choices that are uncomfortable because Satan has perverted your will. If you are to hear God speak, you must submit your will to God.

# Lesson Two

## Essential Attitudes for Interpretation

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) contain similar accounts of the life of Jesus. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus reveals the good news of salvation. Some people understood Jesus and responded to his message. However, others could not understand Jesus and rejected his message. Through Jesus' teaching and the examples of the ones who were able to understand Jesus and respond to his message or were not able to understand Jesus and rejected his message, the essential attitudes for responding positively to the gospel are revealed. These same attitudes remain essential as God continues to speak through the Bible. Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." In this lesson I examine the Synoptic Gospels to determine what it means to have "ears to hear."

### Openness to God and his Word

The first and most basic essential attitude for interpreting the Bible found in the Synoptic Gospels is openness to God and what he says in the Bible. People are often closed to God and his revelation and as a result find it difficult to hear God speak through the Bible. In the parable of the soils, Jesus tells about a farmer who scattered seed (Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; and Luke 8:1-15). The fruitfulness of the seed was dependent upon the nature of the soil where it landed. Some of the seed fell along the path and was eaten by birds. Some of the seed fell on rocky places where it sprang up, but eventually withered because it had no root. Some of the seed fell among thorns that hindered the development of the plants so they did not bear fruit. Nonetheless, some of the seed did fall on good soil and produced a bountiful crop. The simple point of this parable as Jesus reveals in his own interpretation is that the ability of people to hear God speak through him and the gospel is dependent upon the degree of their openness to God and his revelation. Some people are like the hard packed soil of the path. They have closed their hearts and minds to Jesus and are totally incapable of responding to the gospel. Others are like the rocky or thorny soil. They have some capacity for hearing Jesus and have accepted the gospel in a superficial way. However, they have not allowed Jesus' words to fully impact their lives and as a result they forsake the gospel when they experience difficulty or are lured away by their desire for a comfortable life. Nonetheless, others are like the good soil. They wholeheartedly accept Jesus and the gospel and as a result are radically transformed. In the same way, you will have difficulty hearing God speak through the Bible if you are closed to him and his revelation like the hardened soil of the path, the rocky soil, or the soil infested with thorns. Instead, you need to be totally open to God and his revelation in the Bible like the good soil. Having "ears to hear" means that you are open to God and his revelation in the Bible.

### A Humble Need to Hear God Speak

The second essential attitude for interpreting the Bible found in the Synoptic Gospels is a humble recognition of the need to hear God speak through the Bible. People often experience difficulty hearing God speak through the Bible because they believe that they are al-

ready upright and don't feel like they need to hear God speak. The Synoptic Gospels reveal that people who were most responsive to Jesus were those who clearly recognized their need like the sick and sinful. The people who were least responsive to Jesus and the gospel were the rich and religious. Jesus associated with sinners, healed the sick, and blessed the "poor in spirit." The religious leaders, however, were frequently admonished because of their proud assumption that they did not need to listen to Jesus and the gospel. A clear expression of the importance of a humble recognition of need to hear God speak through Jesus and the gospel is found in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). Jesus addressed this parable "to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else." The Pharisee went to the temple, stood, and thanked God that he was not like other people because of his fasting and tithing. The tax collector stood at a distance, would not even look to heaven, beat his breast, and cried out to God for mercy. Jesus concludes, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Similarly, you must not be like the rich and religious and this Pharisee if you are to hear God speak through the Bible. You must avoid any notion that you are already upright and do not need to hear God speak through the Bible. You must be like the sick and sinful and this tax collector. You must humbly recognize your urgent need to hear God speak through the Bible. Having "ears to hear" means humbly recognizing your need to hear God speak through the Bible.

### **Placing a Priority on Hearing God Speak**

The third essential attitude for interpreting the Bible found in the Synoptic Gospels is placing a priority on hearing God speak through the Bible. Many Christians are so busy that they have little time for reading the Bible and hearing God speak. However, in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the appropriate priorities, especially a right relationship with God through responding to the gospel. In Mark 4:24-25 Jesus says, "Consider carefully what you hear . . . With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. He who has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." In this context Jesus is certainly encouraging disciples to place a priority on hearing and heeding the gospel. They will only benefit from the gospel to the extent that they devote themselves to the gospel. Jesus blesses those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" and who are "pure in heart" (Matthew 5:3-12). Those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" should probably be understood as those who have a primary desire for a right relationship with God that takes precedence over all other desires. Those who are "pure in heart" should probably be understood as those who have a genuine desire for God that is uncontaminated by other devotions. Jesus' twin parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl emphasize the priority of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13:44-46). In these parables Jesus describes the kingdom of God as a treasure and a pearl. The man who found treasure in a field "sold all he had" so that he could buy the field. The man who found the pearl "sold everything he had" so that he could buy the pearl. Nowhere is the priority of hearing the gospel and ignoring competing concerns more dramatically stated by Jesus than in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple." Though Jesus was certainly employing hyperbole, his emphasis should not be diluted. If you want to hear God speak through the Bible, you need to hunger and thirst for his word, have a pure desire to encounter God through his word, and be willing to pay the price for hearing God speak through

his word. Having “ears to hear” means that you place a priority on hearing God speak through the Bible.

### **Faith in the Truth and Authority of God’s Word**

The fourth essential attitude for interpreting the Bible found in the Synoptic Gospels is faith in the truth and authority of God’s word. We live in a very skeptical age in which people doubt anything that cannot be proven empirically. This skepticism often hinders people from taking the Bible and its message seriously. The Synoptic Gospels emphasize repeatedly the need for faith in Jesus and his words in order to experience the power of the kingdom. An example of the positive results of faith in Jesus is the account of the resolute faith of blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43). He kept calling out to Jesus and requesting that his sight be restored even though many rebuked him. As a result Jesus healed him, attributing the healing directly to his faith, “Go, your faith has healed you.” An example of the negative results of skepticism is the account of Jesus’ ministry in Nazareth, his hometown (Matthew 13:53-58 and Mark 6:1-6). The people of Nazareth were skeptical about Jesus and his message because of their familiarity with him and his family. As a result, Jesus was unable to perform many miracles there. Similarly, you must have faith in the truth and authority of the Bible like Bartimaeus had faith in Jesus if God’s word is to powerfully impact your life. If you are skeptical about the Bible like the people of Nazareth were skeptical about Jesus, you will not experience the power of God’s word to transform your life. Having “ears to hear” means that you trust in the truth and authority of the Bible.

### **Willingness to Reevaluate Presuppositions**

The fifth essential attitude for interpreting the Bible found in the Synoptic Gospels is willingness to reevaluate presuppositions based on God’s word. We all operate with a working understanding of what is true, valuable, and right. However, these presuppositions often become so fixed that they can hinder our ability to hear God speak. We are so certain that what we understand is correct that we reject everything that doesn’t fit our presuppositions. The Synoptic Gospels contain many examples of people who were unable to understand Jesus and respond to the gospel because of their inability to reevaluate their presuppositions. The religious leaders especially had difficulty overcoming their presuppositions, but even John the Baptist’s disciples questioned Jesus about the failure of his disciples to fast (Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; and Luke 5:33-39). Their question was based on the commonly held presupposition that fasting was a normal part of religious piety. In response, Jesus seems to agree generally with the presupposition while he maintained that his presence in the world justified a temporary suspension of fasting. He then employed two analogies to warn them of the danger of presuppositions and encourage them to be willing to reevaluate their presuppositions. Jesus did not fit exactly the expectations that people had for the Messiah. The answer was not to force him into their presuppositions, which would be as disastrous as using unshrunk cloth to patch an old garment and pouring new wine into old wineskins. The garment would be destroyed when the patch shrank and the wine would be lost when it expanded and burst the wineskin. Instead, they needed to allow what God was revealing in Jesus to be the basis for a new understanding of truth and the way to life. They needed to use new cloth to make a new garment and pour new wine into new wineskins. In the same way, you should not try to force the message of the Bible into your presuppositions, but use the biblical message as the basis for a new understanding of what is true, valuable, and right. Having “ears to

hear” means being willing to reevaluate your presuppositions based on the message of the Bible.

### **Spiritual Sensitivity and Discernment**

The sixth essential attitude for interpreting the Bible found in the Synoptic Gospels is spiritual sensitivity and discernment. We live in a world that emphasizes the physical and material; and the spiritual is often ignored. You have probably been infected to one degree or another with this materialistic perspective. Because of this materialistic perspective we often neglect the spiritual resources that God provides to enhance our ability to hear him speak through the Bible and are oblivious to the diabolical spiritual forces that are at work to hinder or distort God’s revelation. In the Synoptic Gospels spiritual forces abound and they have a profound effect on the ability of people to hear God when he speaks. God employed spiritual means to enable people to hear him speak through Jesus. A good example is Peter (Matthew 16:13-20; see also Mark 8:27-30 and Luke 9:18-21). Peter came to the conclusion and confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus clearly reveals the source of this insight when he says, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” Satan also employed spiritual means to hinder and corrupt God’s revelation through Jesus. Peter is again a good example (Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-9:1; and Luke 9:22-27). Not long after Peter confessed his faith in Jesus, Jesus harshly rebuked him for his rejection of the teaching that Jesus must die. Jesus clearly reveals the source of Peter’s rejection of Jesus’ teaching in his rebuke, “Get behind me Satan!” Distinguishing between the influence of God and the influence of Satan is not always easy. On one occasion, the Pharisees attributed Jesus’ exorcism of a demon-possessed man who was both blind and mute to satanic power (Matthew 12:22-37; see also Mark 3:23-27 and Luke 11:17-22). In response, Jesus encouraged the Pharisees to examine the results of this manifestation of spiritual power and determine whether it was the work of God or the work of Satan by whether it promoted the Kingdom of God or Satan. Similarly, you should be spiritually sensitive to God, avoid Satan’s spiritual influence, and discern carefully between that which is revealed by God and Satan so that you can hear God speak through the Bible. Having “ears to hear” means that you are spiritually sensitive and discerning as you seek to understand God’s word.

### **Caution in Choosing Guides**

The seventh essential attitude for interpreting the Bible found in the Synoptic Gospels is caution in choosing guides to God’s word. Christians often assume that those who are in positions of leadership in the church or who have a high level of theological training are the best guides to the meaning of the Bible. Though this assumption may be generally valid, the Synoptic Gospels indicate that this assumption need not necessarily be true. The Pharisees were respected as the leaders of the most dominant and zealous religious movement within Judaism. The teachers of the law were revered for their expertise in the content of the Jewish Scriptures. From the perspective of most people in Jesus’ time these men were the best guides to understanding the meaning of God’s revelation. However, Jesus repeatedly warns people in the Synoptic Gospels of the danger of being influenced by the Pharisees and teachers of the law despite their religious and academic qualifications. In addition, Jesus warns of the dangerous influence of ungodly people within the church. In Jesus’ parable of the weeds, Jesus warns disciples of the threat of people within the church who, like weeds among the wheat, seek to choke the life out of Christians (Matthew 13:24-30). In Matthew 7:15-23 Je-

Jesus warns disciples of the danger of false prophets, likening them to ferocious wolves disguised as sheep, and encourages disciples to examine their fruit to determine their true nature. In the same way, you should need to be aware that there are many who claim to have insight into the Bible who do not understand it and in fact have perverted its message. You should evaluate their lives and teaching carefully. In our day and time it is important to be cautious about what is available on the media and especially the internet. Having “ears to hear” means exercising caution in choosing guides to God’s word.

### **Readiness to Submit**

The eighth essential attitude for interpreting the Bible found in the Synoptic Gospels is readiness to submit to God and what he says. People often do not hear completely what God is saying because they don’t want to submit. Instead, they consciously or subconsciously limit their understanding of the message so that they will not be required to change. In the Synoptic Gospels the connection between hearing and obedience is emphasized in both the preaching of John the Baptist as well as Jesus. When some of the religious leaders came to John the Baptist, he called them a brood of vipers and warned them to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:1-12 and Luke 3:1-17). Jesus also repeatedly emphasized in his preaching the need to repent and bear fruit. In the New Testament, repentance is turning away from a life focused on self and controlled by Satan to a life focused on God and controlled by him. This radical change of focus and control results in bearing fruit. In the New Testament, bearing fruit is a radical transformation of character and lifestyle that enables people to positively impact the lives of others. God continues to call people to repent and bear fruit through the Bible. However, people and even Christians remain focused on self and controlled by Satan to one degree or another. As a result they are sometimes reluctant to respond to God’s revelation in the Bible and consciously or subconsciously limit their own ability to understand its message. If you are going to hear God speak through the Bible, you must be willing to repent and bear fruit. Having “ears to hear” means that you are ready to submit to what God says in the Bible.

# Lesson Three

## **Background Knowledge for Interpretation**

The Bible is difficult for many to understand in part because it is written from the perspective of the cultural and historical contexts in which God chose to reveal himself. What was relatively easy for those who first received God’s revelation to understand, can be extremely difficult for people to understand today because of this great gulf in time and culture. Therefore, it is necessary for you to develop some background knowledge about the Bible and its world in order to hear God speak through the Bible. The biblical world is like a foreign country to modern readers of the Bible. Just as visitors to a foreign country often find the country unintelligible because of differences in language and culture, readers of the Bible often have difficulty understanding the Bible’s message because the biblical world is so strange. Just as it is advisable for visitors to a foreign country to prepare for their visit by familiarizing themselves with the country they plan to visit, it is advisable for interpreters of the Bible to familiarize themselves with the biblical world. In this lesson I suggest strategies for developing familiarity with the biblical world through taking advantage of study opportunities,

through reading about the Bible and its world, and through immersion in the Bible and its world.

### **Taking Advantage of Study Opportunities**

One way to develop background knowledge about the Bible and its world is to take advantage of study opportunities. When I was preparing to serve in Southeast Asia I was required to attend the International Learning Center where I learned about the cultures and religions of the region. I was glad of the training I received there when I arrived in the Philippines. Without that training I would have been overwhelmed by the differences of that culture and probably ineffective in my service. Similarly, taking advantage of study opportunities can prepare you for the differences between the biblical world and your own world.

Most churches have regular Bible study opportunities. Bible colleges and seminaries offer classes introducing the Bible, surveying the contents of the Old and New Testaments, teaching methods and skills for interpretation, and interpreting specific books. Special seminars on the Bible are occasionally offered. Many study opportunities can be found online. You should take advantage of the study opportunities that are available to you to develop your knowledge of the Bible and its world. However, some caution should be exercised in choosing study opportunities. The churches, schools, websites and instructors should be examined to determine if their teaching is sound. In addition, you should use critical judgment when attending these study opportunities and not simply accept whatever is said as right and helpful.

### **Reading about the Bible and its World**

Another way to develop background knowledge about the Bible and its world is to read in the area of biblical backgrounds. I have traveled throughout the world over the last 30 years and visited many countries. In my travels I have been greatly aided by the many travel guides that are commonly available in bookstores. These travel guides provide a great deal of valuable information that makes visiting a foreign country more enjoyable. Similarly, there are many good books about the Bible and its world.

A good place to start is with a general introduction to the Bible or a Bible handbook. These books supply general information about the Bible and its world. A good second step is to read an introduction or survey of the Old and New Testaments. These books supply detailed introductions to the background and contents of the books of the Old and New Testaments. In addition, other books are also available on specific aspects of the Bible and its world such as biblical history, chronology, culture, society, religion, language, literature, and geography. Many books that supply general information as well as information on specific aspects of the Bible are available in print or online. Again, caution should be exercised in choosing books about the Bible and its world. Not everything that is written about the Bible is accurate and valuable. It's a good idea to examine the preface of a book and scan its contents to determine if the material found in the book is sound before purchasing it. Read the book critically and don't simply assume that whatever it says is correct and edifying.

### **Immersion in the Bible and its World**

An often-neglected source of background knowledge about the Bible and its world is the Bible itself. Even though you can learn about a foreign country by studying or reading

about that country, the best way to really understand a country is living in that country and exposing yourself to its distinctiveness. I studied and read a great deal about Southeast Asia before I ever set foot in the region. Nonetheless, I am not sure I learned all that much about Southeast Asia until I lived in the region for many years. Similarly, understanding the biblical world requires firsthand experience. Much of the background knowledge that you need for hearing God speak through the Bible can be absorbed through reading the Bible and immersing yourself in the world of the Bible. You should read the Bible regularly, not only for spiritual edification but also to develop background knowledge of the Bible and its world. As you read, you should seek to enter into the world of the Bible and become familiar with the cultural, social, economic, religious, linguistic, literary, political, and geographical environment.

Experience the Old Testament world by reading the Old Testament. Read the Pentateuch and enter into the lives of the Patriarchs and experience the deliverance from Egypt as well as the formative years of the nation in the wilderness. Read the Historical Books and experience the conquest of the land of promise, the chaos of the early years of loose confederacy, the glory of the nation under David and Solomon, the tragic disintegration of the nation, the trials and difficulties of the exile, and the struggle for survival after the exile. Read the Wisdom and Worship books and discover the wisdom of Israel's sages and join in the devout worship of pious Israelites. Read the Prophets and hear God's prophetic warning to the rebellious and assurance to the faithful.

Experience the New Testament world by reading the New Testament. Read the Gospels and experience the life of a disciple of Jesus as you follow him on the way to the cross. Read the Book of Acts and share the victories of the early church as Christians submitted to God and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. Read the Epistles and enter into the struggle of the early church with concrete issues and take in the practical instruction of early church leaders.

# Lesson Four

## Reference Tools for Interpretation

Biblical interpretation can be compared in some ways to a craft. Like most crafts, tools have been developed to aid the interpreter in understanding the Bible and its message. A reference tool is normally a book that provides help in times of specific need. A number of reference books are available that can help you understand the Bible and you should begin to develop a personal library of these tools for interpretation. In this lesson I try to identify the most useful kinds of general reference tools for biblical interpretation. Other reference tools will be introduced at the point in the method where they become important.

### General Books on the Bible and its World

In the previous lesson, I introduced handbooks and introductions to the Bible, introductions and surveys of the Old and New Testaments, as well as other books that provide background knowledge about the Bible and its world. These books can also be valuable reference tools. Bible introductions and handbooks are usually arranged in a topical format and

information on a particular topic can be accessed through the table of contents or the index. Old and New Testament introductions and surveys are arranged in the order of the biblical text and information on a particular book can be accessed in much the same way that you would look up a book in the Bible. However, some Old Testament surveys are arranged in Hebrew canonical order that varies significantly from the order of your English Bible. Books on more specific aspects of the Bible and its world are arranged in a variety of ways. Usually the best access to these books as reference tools is through the table of contents and index. Many of these general books on the Bible and its world are available on DVDs or can be downloaded from the internet.

### **Bible Dictionaries, Atlases, and Concordances**

In addition, other books are valuable as reference tools for biblical interpretation. Among the most helpful general reference tools are Bible dictionaries, atlases, and concordances. Bible dictionaries contain numerous articles that have helpful information about the Bible in general, specific books of the Bible, precise topics relative to the Bible and its interpretation, and even particular words used in the Bible. These articles are easily accessed because they are listed like a dictionary in alphabetical order. These dictionaries are available in single-volume and in multi-volume sets. A single-volume dictionary is cheaper, but the multi-volume dictionaries have much more information.

Atlases contain maps that provide helpful information about the geography of Bible lands, the political divisions that existed at different periods of the history of Israel and the early church, and the movements of God's people. These atlases are normally arranged in chronological order and can be accessed by simply searching for those maps that relate to the location and relevant period for your study

Concordances contain lists of the occurrences of words used in the Bible with a brief portion of the passage quoted to provide some basis for understanding the context in which the word is used. Concordances are valuable for finding what the Bible itself has to say on different topics as well as for determining the background and significance of particular biblical words. You should obtain a concordance that is exhaustive, meaning that it lists every occurrence of every word in the Bible. The Bibles that are available as downloads normally have a search function. However, you may want to consider acquiring a Bible program that provides you with some access to the original languages if you have some facility with Hebrew and Greek and intend to do word studies. Hebrew and Greek concordances will be introduced later in this guide (Unit Four, Lesson Seven, Important Words). If you want to research a topic, simply look up the word or words in the alphabetical listing and examine what the Bible says on that topic by scanning through the verses and looking up those that are pertinent to your interest in the Bible. More detailed help will be provided later in this guide for using a concordance for word studies (Unit Four, Lesson Seven, Important Words).

### **Bible Commentaries**

Bible commentaries are the most specific kind of reference tool available to the interpreter. Commentaries normally introduce the biblical book and provide specific commentary on the material in the book following the order of the biblical text. Commentaries can be extremely valuable for interpretation because they are usually written by well-qualified scholars



with a great deal of skill and experience in interpreting the Bible. These scholars can help you supplement your knowledge and correct your errors. Consulting the experts is an integral part of the method for Bible study introduced in units two through four. However, you should avoid the common tendency of equating the reading of commentaries with Bible study. It is much better to hear God speak directly through the Bible than to read what someone else has found in the Bible.

You should be careful when you select commentaries to choose the best commentaries available. First, use more than one commentary so that you are exposed to different approaches to the biblical book and passage. Second, select the newest commentaries so that you can have the benefit of recent discoveries, but do not neglect the classical commentaries that have proven their worth over time. Third, you should choose commentaries that address the important issues like those raised in this guide.

You should also be careful when you use commentaries. First, respect commentaries and allow them to help you recognize the things in the book or passage that you missed and understand the things that you previously misunderstood. Second, read commentaries critically and don't simply assume that they are correct. Biblical scholars are human too and they are often guided by theological and methodological presuppositions that differ greatly from your own. Third, take notes on insights into the book or passage that the commentaries have helped you to recognize and areas where they have changed your understanding of the book, passage, or detail.

# Lesson Five

## **Bible Translations and Study Bibles**

Obviously, you will need to have a Bible if you are going to do biblical interpretation. Since you probably are not proficient in the biblical languages, your Bible will necessarily be a translation. However, I recommend that you acquire the necessary skills in the biblical languages so that you can translate the Bible yourself. In addition, study Bibles are available that contain supplementary material to help you interpret the Bible. In this lesson, I seek to provide you with some general guidance for selecting and using Bible translations and study Bibles.

### **Bible Translations**

Numerous Bible translations are available in English and choosing a Bible translation is a difficult decision. There are three general kinds of Bible translations—literal, free, and dynamic equivalent. Literal translations have the advantage of reflecting the actual content of the biblical text in the original languages. However, literal translations are often difficult for modern readers to understand. Free translations have the advantage of being easy for modern readers to understand. However, free translations often do not reflect the actual content of the biblical text in the original languages. Dynamic equivalent translations are translations that claim to reflect the actual content of the biblical text in the original languages while expressing that content in a way that is easy for modern readers to understand. Actually, dynamic equivalent translations are diverse, falling on a broad spectrum between literal and free depending on the translators' understanding of dynamic equivalency.

I recommend that you choose one of the dynamic equivalent translations as the Bible that you use for interpretation. These translations are more balanced between accuracy and readability. However, I suggest that you choose one of the dynamic equivalent translations that is fairly literal like the New American Standard Bible (NASB). Especially when you are studying the Bible you will want to have as accurate an understanding of the actual content of the biblical text in the original languages as possible. In addition, it would be a good idea to have several translations available along the entire spectrum between literal and free. Sometimes the biblical text in the original languages is difficult to translate and multiple translations may give you greater insight into the meaning of the original. It is also good to remember that though most translations are reasonable accurate, even the most literal translations are necessarily interpretations of the original biblical text.

### **Study Bibles**

A recent development has been the publication of study Bibles that supplement the translation with a variety of helps for interpretation. Study Bibles normally contain a small atlas and a concordance as well as a cross-referencing system and footnotes. The cross-referencing system identifies related passages in the Bible. The footnotes identify variant readings, alternate translations, and the source of biblical quotations. In addition, study Bibles frequently contain introductory articles of a general nature on the Bible, the world of the Bible, and the interpretation of the Bible; introductions to the books of the Bible; and notes on the interpretation of the Bible. Furthermore, study Bibles sometimes contain special help relative to the specific purpose of the study Bible. Read the introduction of the study Bible carefully to familiarize yourself with the help that it provides so that you can choose and use your study Bible wisely. Study Bibles can be extremely helpful, especially for those who do not have access to other reference tools. However, the abridgment of these tools often limits their effectiveness. In addition, it should be kept in mind that putting these helps in the same cover as the Bible does not give them the authority of the biblical text. The guidelines for using commentaries should be applied especially to introductions to the books of the Bible and notes on the interpretation of the Bible.

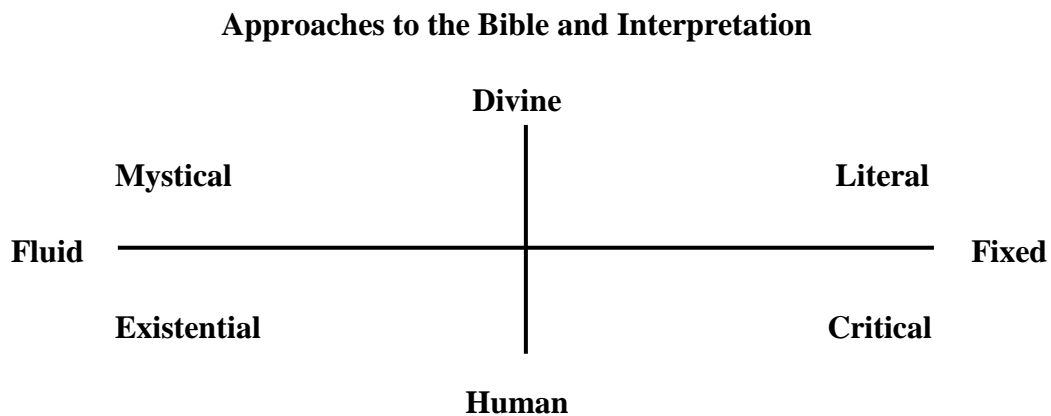
# Lesson Six

## **A Balanced Approach to Interpretation**

Through the history of the church the Bible has been interpreted in many different ways. The question naturally arises, “Which approach is the best approach for interpreting the Bible?” Below I introduce four general approaches to the Bible and its interpretation; present the case for a balanced understanding of the Bible; evaluate the four approaches; and propose a balanced approach to the interpretation of the Bible. My contention is that each of these four approaches has a partial understanding of the nature of the Bible and its message; there are strengths and weaknesses to each approach; and what is needed is a balanced approach to biblical interpretation that incorporates the strengths and avoids the weaknesses of each approach.

## Four Approaches to the Bible and its Interpretation

Though the approaches to the Bible and its interpretation are diverse, they can be placed into four general categories—literal, critical, existential, and mystical. Each of these approaches has a distinct understanding of the nature of the Bible and its message. The key issues with regard to the nature of the Bible and its message seem to be whether the Bible is divine or human and whether the message of the Bible is fixed or fluid.



**The Literal Approach.** Literal interpreters believe that the Bible is divine and its message is fixed. As a result they insist that the Bible is literally true in everything it says and that its message is valid for all times. Fundamentalist and evangelical interpreters commonly practice the literal approach.

**The Critical Approach.** Critical interpreters believe the Bible is human and its message is fixed. As a result they diligently probe the historical background of the biblical text so that they can understand its message in its historical context. This approach to biblical interpretation was until recently the dominant approach of the Christian academic community and is still quite influential in some academic circles and denominations.

**The Existential Approach.** Existential interpreters believe that the Bible is human and its message is fluid. As a result they stress the existential encounter of the interpreter with the biblical text as a means for personal enlightenment. This approach has always been in common practice within the church, but is the new paradigm for interpretation of the Christian academic community. This approach is especially noticeable in the diverse forms of the new literary criticism and liberation and feminist theologies.

**The Mystical Approach.** Mystical interpreters believe the Bible is divine and its message is fluid. As a result they emphasize a spiritual encounter with God and seek to hear God speak directly to them through the Bible. Catholic and charismatic interpreters are often heavily influenced by the mystical approach.

## **A Balanced Understanding of the Bible**

The character of these approaches to the interpretation of the Bible is determined to a great extent by the perspective of the approach with regard to the nature of the Bible and its message. Is the Bible divine or human in nature? Is the message of the Bible fixed or fluid in nature? Each of these approaches takes a stand for either the divine or human nature of the Bible and the fixed or fluid nature of its message. However, the Bible seems to present a balanced understanding of itself that includes both its divine and human nature as well as the fixed and fluid nature of its message. The Bible unabashedly claims to be the word of God. However, God has spoken in the Bible in ways that human beings could understand. God has revealed himself in this world historical contexts, using human languages, reflecting human cultural patterns, employing contemporary literary conventions, and utilizing human reasoning mechanisms. As a result, the Bible is both divine and human in nature. The message of the Bible is clearly fixed in nature since later biblical writers appeal to God's earlier revelation in an authoritative manner. However, these same writers sometimes appeal to God's earlier revelation in ways that sometimes transcend the original message. Therefore, the message of the Bible is both fixed and fluid.

## **An Evaluation of the Four Approaches**

Since the nature of the Bible is both divine and human and the nature of its message is both fixed and fluid, each of the four approaches is partially correct in its understanding of the nature of the Bible and its message. However, each of the four approaches is also unbalanced in its understanding of the nature of the Bible and its message. As a result, each of the four approaches has value for biblical interpretation, but each also can be hazardous when carried to extremes.

**The Literal Approach.** The value of the literal approach is that it takes seriously what God has revealed in history and its implications for people today. The hazard of the literal approach is that it often does not allow for changing situations in the modern context. Therefore, the literal approach needs to be balanced by approaches that recognize that the Bible is also human and its message is also fluid.

**The Critical Approach.** The value of the critical approach is that it takes seriously the distinctiveness of the historical situation of biblical revelation as a context for interpretation. The hazard of the critical approach is that it often regards the Bible as an artifact of human history with little relevance for the modern situation. Therefore, the critical approach needs to be balanced by approaches that recognize that the Bible is also divine and its message is fluid.

**The Existential Approach.** The value of the existential approach is that it emphasizes the personal encounter of the interpreter with the Bible and its message. The hazard of the existential approach is that the interpreter often determines the message of the Bible rather than really being confronted by God or his biblical revelation. Therefore, the existential approach needs to be balanced by approaches that recognize that the Bible is divine and its message is fixed.

**The Mystical Approach.** The value of the mystical approach is that it emphasizes the personal encounter of the interpreter with God through the Bible. The hazard of the mys-

tical approach is that the interpreter is easily influenced by forces other than God and is not truly confronted by God and his biblical revelation. Therefore, the mystical approach needs to be balanced by approaches that recognize that the Bible is human and its message is fixed.

### **A Balanced Approach to Biblical Interpretation**

The balanced nature of the Bible requires a balanced approach to biblical interpretation. Interpreters should take seriously what God has revealed in history and its implications for today in accordance with the literal approach. Interpreters should consider carefully the historical situation of biblical revelation as a context for interpretation in accordance with the critical approach. Interpreters should seek to have a personal encounter with the Bible and its message in accordance with the existential approach. Interpreters should seek a personal encounter with God through the Bible in accordance with the mystical approach. However, interpreters should avoid the hazards of each of these approaches by correcting the excesses of each approach with the balancing perspectives of the other approaches. Interpreters should avoid a literal approach that robs the Bible and its message of life and seek to hear God speak to them personally through the living words of the Bible. Interpreters should avoid a critical approach that imprisons the Bible and its message in the ancient past and seek to hear God speak to them personally in their contemporary situations. Interpreters should avoid an existential approach that simply enables them to affirm their personal perspective and lifestyle and seek to hear God speak to them authoritatively through his immutable revelation in the Bible. Interpreters should avoid a mystical approach that is so subjective that the Bible is the medium for diverse and sometimes diabolical influences and seek to truly hear God speak to them authoritatively through his immutable revelation in the Bible.

Having presented the case for a balanced approach to interpretation, I have to add that the approach that I take to biblical interpretation is not perfectly balanced. Even though the Bible is both divine and human, from my perspective its divine character takes precedence over its human character. Similarly, even though the message of the Bible is both fixed and fluid, from my perspective its message is more fixed than fluid. This perspective is reflected in the methodology that follows which focusses on understanding the message intended within the original context.

# Lesson Seven

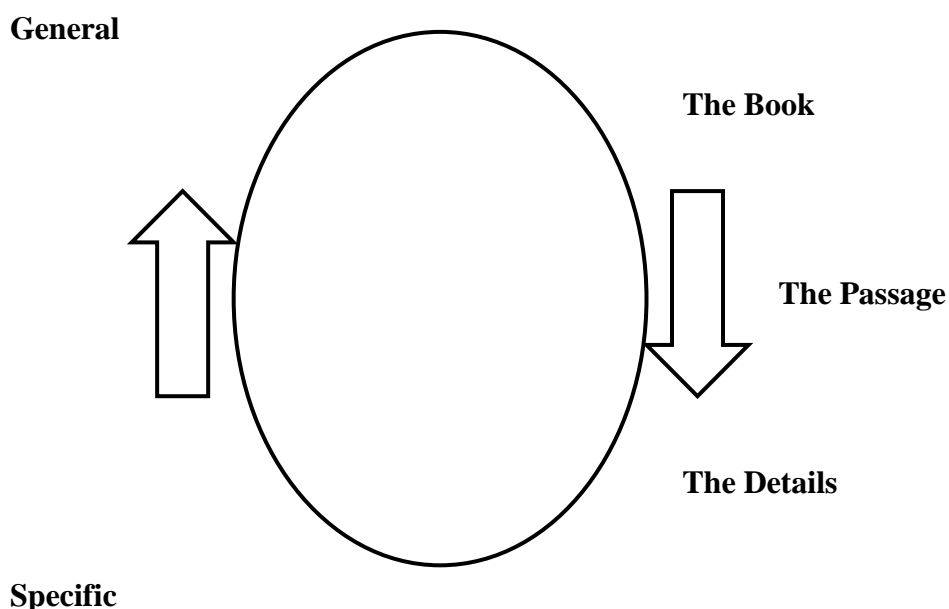
## **Sound Methodologies for Interpretation**

One of the primary reasons that people have difficulty interpreting the Bible is that they do not know how. Providing some sound methodologies for biblical interpretation is the primary purpose of this guide. Interpreters of the Bible have three distinct tasks. In this lesson I introduce the methodologies for studying, applying, and communicating the message of the Bible that will be explained and developed in the remainder of this guide.

### **Studying the Bible**

The first task of biblical interpretation is studying the Bible. Studying the Bible is concerned with understanding what God has said in the original context of his revelation. In

## The Movement of Bible Study



units two through four I introduce methods for studying the Bible at three levels: the book, the passage, and the details. The methods for studying the Bible introduced in this guide logically move from the general to the specific. In this way what is discovered about the book can provide help for understanding the passage and what is discovered about the passage can provide help for understanding the details. However, you should also reevaluate earlier decisions based on new information gained at later, more specific, levels of study. You should keep working through this procedure in a circular manner until your conclusions are consistent. This consistency will help to assure that your conclusions are valid.

**Studying the Book and Passage.** Methods for studying a biblical book and passage are explained and developed in units two and three. The methods introduced in these units provide perspectives for examining the book and passage that are based on common sense and basic principles of communication. When I was a child I remember reading a fable about six blind men who examined an elephant. Each of the blind men examined only part of the elephant—the side, tusk, trunk, leg, ear, and tail. As a result they all came to erroneous conclusions about the nature of an elephant based on the part of the elephant they examined—a wall, a spear, a serpent, a tree, a fan, and a rope. A clear understanding of the nature of an elephant would have been attained if they had only examined the elephant from several different perspectives. Similarly, people often misunderstand the Bible because they examine it from only one perspective. Instead, the Bible should be examined from different perspectives. The perspectives for examining a biblical book include background and purpose, biblical context and role, genre and function, strategy and structure, message or messages, and consultation and conclusion. The perspectives for studying a biblical passage include selection and limitation, translation and text, situation and purpose, literary context and role, form and function, strategy and structure, message or messages, and consultation and conclusion.

**Studying the Details.** A method for studying the details is explained and developed in unit four. This method provides guidance for discovering the background and nature of a detail and understanding its significance in relation to what is already known about the passage in which it is found. In addition, guidance is provided for understanding the significance

of seven specific kinds of details including historical allusions, literary quotations and allusions, geographical references, sociological features, figures of speech, important words, and grammatical emphases.

### **Applying the Message of the Bible**

The second task of biblical interpretation is applying the message of the Bible. Application is concerned with what God is saying in the modern context. A method for applying the message of a biblical passage is explained and developed in unit five. This method is based on the understanding that what God has said in the original context remains relevant for the modern context, but that the differences between then and now sometimes require that the message be limited or adjusted. The method provides guidance for affirming the message of the passage in its original context and overcoming the contextual gap between then and now by determining the correspondence between the original and modern situations, distinguishing that which is contextualized, and limiting and adjusting the message appropriately.

### **Communicating the Message of the Bible**

The third task of biblical interpretation is communicating the message of the Bible. There are many ways to communicate the message of the Bible, but proclamation and teaching are the most fundamental. There are many ways to proclaim and teach the message of the Bible, but expository sermons and Bible studies are the most basic. In expository sermons and Bible studies, a passage of the Bible provides the basis for the purpose, message, and development. A method for preparing expository sermons and Bible studies is explained and developed in unit six. This method provides guidance for stating the objective and proposition, developing the strategy, preparing the introduction and conclusion, supplementing the plan, incorporating creative techniques, assigning the title, and assembling the plan.

## **Unit Review**

1. List three things you can do to enhance your ability to hear God speak through the Bible based on the biblical understanding of human environment and nature.
2. List eight essential attitudes for hearing God speak through the Bible from the Synoptic Gospels.
3. Identify three strategies for developing background knowledge on the Bible and its world.
4. List four kinds of reference books that can be valuable tools for biblical interpretation.
5. Enumerate three guidelines for choosing commentaries.
6. Enumerate three guidelines for using commentaries.
7. Name three kinds of Bible translations.
8. Why is a fairly literal dynamic equivalent translation the best choice for a Bible that will be used as the basis for interpretation?
9. Identify four general approaches to biblical interpretation.
10. Describe a balanced approach to biblical interpretation.
11. Name the three tasks of biblical interpretation.
12. Identify the three levels of studying the Bible.

# Unit Two

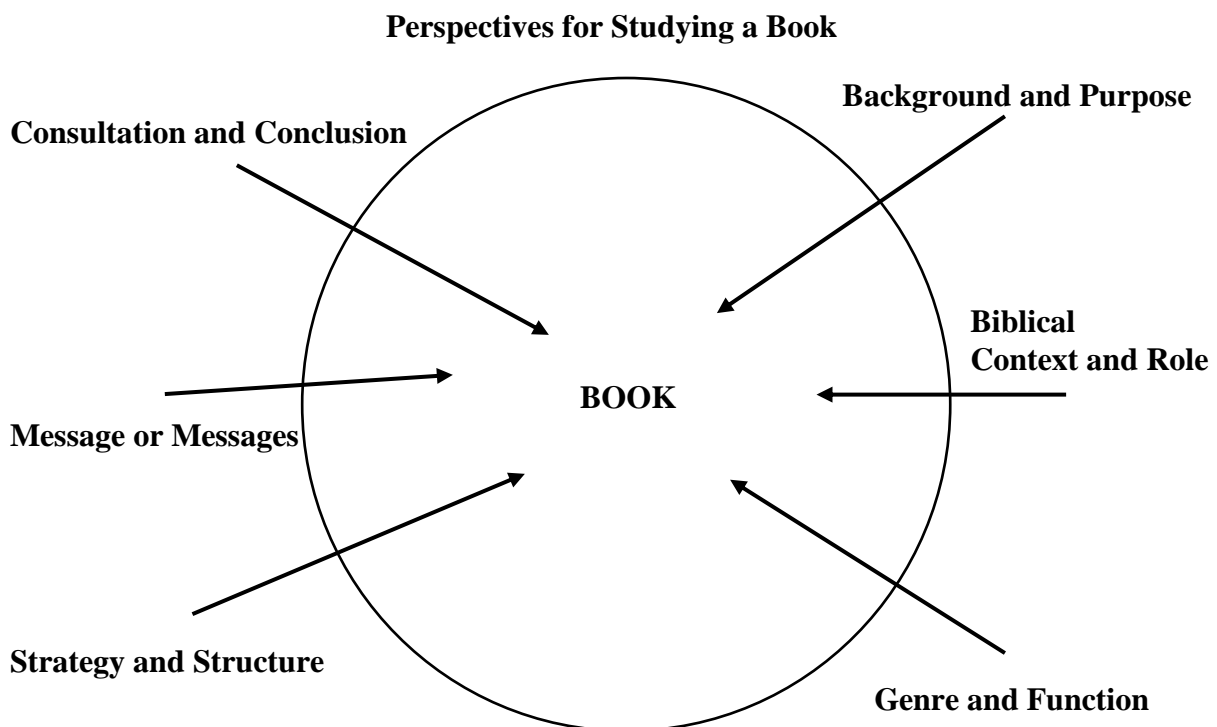
## STUDYING A BOOK

The first level of studying the Bible is studying a book. Understanding an individual passage is extremely difficult without having at least a general understanding of the book in which that passage is found. In this unit I introduce a method for studying a biblical book by examining the book from different perspectives and develop procedures for examining the book from each of these different perspectives. I will also model the method and procedures using the Book of Amos. You will be given opportunities to practice the method and procedures as you work through the lessons and a basis for evaluating and learning from your practice at the end of the unit. A review is also included at the end of the unit to encourage you to master the method and procedures.

# Lesson One

## A Basic Method

The method introduced in this unit provides a means for understanding a biblical book through examining the book from six different but interrelated perspectives: background and purpose; biblical context and role; genre and function; strategy and structure; message or messages; and consultation and conclusion.



The premise underlying this approach is that anything can be better understood by looking at it from different perspectives. The perspectives on the book provided in the method are based on common sense and basic principles of communication. You may have some difficulty at



first examining a biblical book from these different perspectives. The tendency will be for you to blend these perspectives together because you are not used to distinguishing between them. When you examine anything from different perspectives there is some overlap in the view you have from the different perspectives. Similarly, there is some overlap in these perspectives on the biblical book. The overlapping of these perspectives sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish the different views. Nonetheless, you should try to keep the perspectives as distinct as possible because your inability to focus will often lead to blurred vision and difficulty understanding the biblical book.

# Lesson Two

## Background and Purpose

The first perspective from which a biblical book should be examined is the perspective of background and purpose. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of background and purpose; outline the procedure for examining a biblical book from this perspective; model the procedure on the Book of Amos; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

Background refers to the situation that existed in the original context and led to the revelation of God and the writing of the book. A study of the background of a biblical book normally involves a consideration of authorship, place and date of writing, and the recipients and their situation. However, the primary consideration should be the recipients and their situation. Authorship and place and date of writing are important primarily for the additional insights they provide for understanding the recipients and their situation. Purpose refers to the actual reason or reasons for the revelation and writing the book and the intended response of those who were addressed. It is very difficult to understand a biblical book and its message without at least a general knowledge of the situation that the book addressed and the purpose it was intended to achieve. Understanding the background and purpose of a biblical book is important because it provides a perspective for understanding the book. In addition, it provides a basis for understanding the situation and purpose of individual passages within the book.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the background and purpose of a biblical book.

1. First, read the biblical book, making notes on information that the book provides for determining the author, place and date of writing, and the recipients and their situation. Sometimes the book provides specific information on these issues. However, in many cases the book only provides clues. This step is like listening to one end of a telephone conversation and trying to determine who is on the other end of the telephone line and what they are talking about.
2. Second, supplement the information provided by the book with other biblical books that describe the period under consideration, your own knowledge of Old or New Testament history, and books on the history of Israel or the New Testament church if your knowledge of the period under consideration is weak.

3. Third, evaluate the evidence and state your conclusions with regard to authorship, place and date of writing, and the recipients and their situation, explaining simply the reasons for your decisions.
4. Finally, deduce from your understanding of the recipients and their situation and the author's response the purpose for God's revelation and the writing of the book.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

**Authorship.** The words recorded in the Book of Amos are identified as the words of Amos in the very first verse. Little is known about Amos apart from what is revealed in the first verse and chapter seven of the book that bears his name. Amos was not a part of the prophetic establishment, but was especially called by God from being a shepherd and tender of sycamore fig trees.

**Place and Date of Writing.** The place of Amos' prophetic ministry is identified in the first verse as Israel, probably meaning the Northern Kingdom since the prophecies that follow are predominantly addressed to that nation. The date of Amos' ministry is indicated in the first verse as coinciding with the reigns of Uzziah in Judah (791-740 BC) and Jeroboam (793-753 BC) in Israel. The date of Amos' vision is more specifically defined as occurring two years before the earthquake, but the date of the earthquake is uncertain. The actual writing of Amos' prophetic messages and compiling them into the Book of Amos is impossible to establish with any certainty based on the evidence.

**The Recipients and Their Situation.** The first verse of the Book of Amos identifies the recipients as Israel. However, a closer examination of the content of the Book of Amos clarifies that his prophecies are predominantly addressed to affluent Israelites in the Northern Kingdom. These affluent Israelites are characterized in the Book of Amos as oppressing the poor and perverting the courts. In addition, they are described as confident in their religion, wealth, and might; unaware of their danger; and unresponsive to God's warnings. A few passages in the Book of Amos seem to indicate that their worship had been corrupted not only by their oppression and injustice, but also by influence from paganism and politics (5:18-27; 7:10-17). Hosea's prophetic ministry against the Northern Kingdom was nearly contemporary with that of Amos and Hosea describes the extent to which the worship of Israel had been corrupted by the fertility cults of the Canaanites.

**Purpose.** The primary purpose of the prophecies of Amos seems to have been to announce God's judgment on the Northern Kingdom since these announcements of judgment dominate the book. However, the occasional appeals for the people of Israel to repent and the allowance for some hope suggests that the ultimate purpose of the book is that the people of Israel learn from God's discipline to repent of their sinfulness and corruption and seek God and live righteously for him.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

# Lesson Three

## Biblical Context and Role

The second perspective from which a biblical book should be examined is the perspective of biblical context and role. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of biblical context and role; outline the procedure for examining a biblical book from this perspective; model the procedure on the Book of Amos; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

Biblical context refers to the place of the book within the overall strategy of the Bible and the interrelationship of the book with other books of the Bible. Role refers to the distinctive contribution of the book within the strategy of the Bible. The books of the Bible do not stand in isolation, but are a part of an inspired library of books that God has revealed so that human beings can know him and his will. These books are related generally to one another as part of the Bible and more specifically related to other books in the division of the Bible in which they are found. The Bible is divided into the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is divided into the Pentateuch, Historical Books, Wisdom and Worship Books, and Prophetic Books. The New Testament is divided into the Gospels, the Book of Acts (history), the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation (apocalypse). Though the divisions of both the Old and New Testaments are based in part on the nature of the material (genre), each of these divisions has a role within the overall strategy of the Bible.

In addition, some books have special relationships of various kinds to other books in the Bible. Frequently the relationship is that of dependence. Either the book you are studying quotes from or alludes to an earlier biblical book or a later book quotes from or alludes to the book you are studying. Awareness of relationships of dependence of the book you are studying with earlier biblical books helps you to be alert for quotations and allusions (see Unit Four, Lesson Three, Literary Quotations and Allusions). Awareness of relationships of dependence of later biblical books with the book you are studying may provide some guidance for application (see Unit Five, Applying the Message). Another common relationship between biblical books is when they contain parallel versions of the same material. The identification of these parallels is helpful for because the parallel may provide additional material that will result in added insight. In addition, the particular emphasis of the book you are studying may be clarified by contrasting it with that of the parallel. Other special relationships also occur between biblical books. For example, other books may address a similar situation, come from the same historical period, or have a like genre. Understanding the biblical context and role of a book is important because it provides another perspective for understanding the book and the individual passages within the book.

### The Procedure Outlined

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the biblical context and role of a book.

1. First, evaluate the general placement of the book you are studying within the strategy of the Old or New Testament. Analyze the general strategy of the Old or New Testa-

- ment; consider the relationship of the division in which the book you are studying is found within the overall strategy of the Old or New Testament; and determine the contribution of the book as part of that division.
2. Second, evaluate the specific placement of the book you are studying within the strategy of the division of the Old or New Testament in which it is found. Evaluate the strategy of the division in which the book you are studying is found and consider the relationship of the book you are studying to the strategy of the division.
  3. Third, evaluate any special relationships between the book you are studying and other biblical books. Especially be on the alert for relationships of dependence and parallel accounts. You can normally determine dependence by the cross-referencing system and footnotes of a study Bible. The presence of parallel material is normally indicated in a study Bible by identifying the location of the parallel in parenthesis with the heading of a section. Identify any special relationship; determine the nature of the relationship; and consider the significance of the relationship.
  4. Finally, examine how the division is used within the Old or New Testament and deduce its role within the Old or New Testament. More specifically, examine how the book is used within the division and deduce its role within the division. Also note any special relationships between the book and other biblical books and indicate the nature of the relationship.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

The Book of Amos is found within the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament. The Christian canon of the Old Testament is divided into the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, the Wisdom and Worship Books, and the Prophetic Books. The Prophetic Books are placed last in the Christian canon of the Old Testament. The Pentateuch provides the basis and requirements of God's covenant relationship with the people of Israel. The Historical Books describe how that covenant relationship worked out in history, providing lessons for living in covenant relationship with God through the successes and failures of the people of Israel. The Wisdom and Worship Books provide additional teaching to supplement the basic message of the Old Testament and help the people of Israel deal with the complexities of life; and supply models for authentic worship of God. The Prophetic Books record God's word to the people of Israel as they lived in covenant relationship with him, warning the sinners of his judgment and assuring the faithful of his faithfulness.

The Book of Amos generally reinforces the warning of God's judgment within the Prophetic Books. However, the Book of Amos also reinforces to a limited degree the assurance of God's faithfulness to the faithful found in the Prophetic Books. The distinctive contribution of the Book of Amos is its emphasis on the need for social justice. The Book of Amos frequently alludes to the Pentateuch. In addition, the Book of Amos is related generally to Isaiah 1-39 and Hosea because they address the same historical situation.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

# Lesson Four

## Genre and Function

The third perspective from which a biblical book should be examined is the perspective of biblical genre and function. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of genre and function; outline the procedure for examining a biblical book from this perspective; model the procedure on the Book of Amos; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

Genre refers to the general kind of literature in which the biblical book is composed. The Bible contains many different kinds of literature including narrative, law, liturgy, wisdom, prophecy, epistle, and apocalypse. In addition, many of these general kinds of literature have significant variations. For example, the narrative in the historical books of the Old Testament is different than the narrative in the gospels. Furthermore, many biblical books contain a mixture of genres. For example, the Book of Exodus is primarily narrative, but contains a significant amount of law. Function refers to the way a particular kind of literature works to communicate a message. Each of the general kinds of biblical literature listed above works in a different way to communicate a message. It is extremely difficult to understand the message of a biblical book unless you know how the kind of literature of the book works to communicate the message. Therefore, understanding the genre and function of a biblical book is essential for understanding the message of the book. In addition, understanding the genre and function of the book provides a basis for understanding the form and function of individual passages within the book.

### The Procedure Outlined

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the genre and function of a biblical book.

1. First, read the book with sensitivity to its literary character and how it works to communicate a message. You read different types of literature all the time and are able to discern how they work to communicate. Apply the same type of common sense to the biblical book.
2. Second, identify the general type of literature employed in the book with commonly used designations for those genres. The commonly used genre designations for biblical literature include narrative, law, psalms, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, epistles, and apocalypse.
3. Third, research the nature of that literary genre by examining biblical books from the same genre and reading descriptions of the genre in Bible introductions and handbooks, Old and New Testament introductions and surveys, Bible dictionaries, literary guides to the Bible, etc.
4. Finally, evaluate the information that you have obtained from the book itself and from other sources and describe the kind of literature found in the biblical book you are studying and explain how it works to communicate a message. Be alert for the distinctive literary characteristics of the book you are studying and the combination of distinct genres within the book.

## **The Procedure Illustrated**

The Book of Amos can be generally classified as prophetic literature. There is a considerable amount of diversity in prophetic literature; however, the basic form is prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments for obedience. In prophetic exhortation commands or prohibitions indicate the appropriate response in many cases. However, in other cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments for obedience are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. These same messages are sometimes conveyed through the use of visions, allegories, actions, and narratives. These means illustrate the prophetic message and require that you be sensitive to the underlying meaning of that which is portrayed in these ways.

Prophetic exhortations and visions of warning dominate the Book of Amos. The readers are intended to heed the warnings and visions of God's judgment and repent. Sometimes more specific responses are either implied or commanded. In addition, Amos 7:10-27 contains a word of judgment placed within an historical narrative. The events narrated serve to illustrate the exhortation and warning found in this passage. Furthermore, the Book of Amos contains scattered assurances and a vision of assurance at the end. The readers are intended to be encouraged by these words and vision of assurance and strive for faithfulness.

## **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

# Lesson Five

## **Strategy and Structure**

The fourth perspective from which a biblical book should be examined is the perspective of strategy and structure. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of strategy and structure; outline the procedure for examining a biblical book from this perspective; model the procedure on the Book of Amos; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

Strategy refers to the plan of the author as he wrote the biblical book to communicate a message. Structure refers to an analysis of the strategy of a book and usually takes the form of an outline. Admittedly, some biblical books do not have a clear strategy and other biblical books are strategically arranged in a way that often puzzles modern readers. However, most biblical books have some organizational plan that unites the individual parts into a coherent whole. Understanding the strategy and structure of a biblical book is important since the message of the book is often communicated through the cumulative impact of all the parts of the book as they are arranged strategically. In addition, understanding the strategy and structure of the book provides a framework for understanding the literary context and role of individual passages.

There is normally a close relationship between the genre and function of the book and the strategy and structure of the book. Therefore, your analysis of the genre and function of the book provides the beginning point for your examination of the strategy and structure of the book. The most common error when analyzing the strategy and structure of a book is to impose a strategy and structure on the book that is not present. You are trying to understand the strategic arrangement of the book. Imposing a strategy that is foreign to the book will only distort your understanding of the book.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the strategy and structure of a biblical book.

1. First, determine the organizational principle of the book. Biblical books are organized in many different ways including the chronological order of events, different topics or issues, various types of material, etc. There is often a close relationship between the genre of a book and the organizational principle. Therefore, it is often helpful to review your study of the genre of the book so that you are familiar with how that genre is normally structured.
2. Second, try to identify the major divisions of the book and make these the major points of your outline. These major divisions should contain logically related materials following the organizational principle of the book.
3. Third, examine each of these major divisions and identify further levels of logically related materials and make these the sub-points of your outline. Continue with this procedure until you have outlined the book to the point that you identify individual passages that are relatively cohesive in content and a suitable size for study. Be careful to give each point in the outline a heading that clearly indicates its place in the strategy of the book.
4. Finally, consider the structure of the book using your outline and write a brief paragraph that describes the overall strategy of the book. Be careful not to impose a strategy on the book that is not actually present.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

The Book of Amos can be divided roughly into two halves based on the nature of the material. The first half of the book contains prophetic words (chapters 1-6), whereas the second half is dominated by prophetic visions (chapters 7-9). These prophetic words and visions for the most part address various aspects of the general situation and warn the people of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping of both situations addressed and warnings of judgment. The impact of this strategy seems to be to reinforce the warning through repetition. In addition, the Book of Amos seems to be strategically structured to provide some hope for the future without minimizing the warning of judgment. A glimpse of hope is given at the midpoint of the Book of Amos and a fully developed assurance of God's faithfulness to his people is included at the end.

Preface (1:1-2)

#### **I. Prophetic Words**

- A. "For three sins . . . even for four"—A Prophetic Exhortation for the Oppressive and Complacent (1:3-2:16)

- B. “You have I chosen . . . therefore I will punish you”—A Prophetic Exhortation for the Oppressive and Complacent (3:1-15)
  - C. “You cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria”—A Prophetic Exhortation for Oppressive and Complacent Wives (4:1-3)
  - D. “Go to Bethel and Sin!”—A Prophetic Exhortation for the Complacent (4:4-13)
  - E. “Seek the Lord and live”—A Prophetic Exhortation for the Oppressive and Complacent (5:1-17)
  - F. “Woe to You Who Long for the Day of the Lord”—A Prophetic Exhortation for the Oppressive, Complacent, and Idolatrous (5:18-27)
  - G. “Woe to you who are complacent in Zion”—A Prophetic Exhortation for the Complacent and Irresponsible (6:1-7)
  - H. “I Abhor the Pride of Jacob”—A Prophetic Exhortation for the Oppressive and Complacent (6:8-14)
- II. Prophetic Visions
- A. “I will not spare them again” Part I—A Vision/Dialogue Warning the Complacent (7:1-9)
  - B. “Get out you Seer”—A Narrative/Exhortation Warning the Complacent (7:10-17)
  - C. “I will not spare them again” Part II—A Vision/Exhortation Warning the Oppressive and Complacent (8:1-14)
  - D. “I will shake the house of Israel”—A Vision/Exhortation Warning Sinners and Encouraging the Faithful (9:1-15)

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians.

# Lesson Six

## Message or Messages

The fifth perspective from which a biblical book should be examined is the perspective of message or messages. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of message or messages; outline the procedure for examining a biblical book from this perspective; model the procedure on the Book of Amos; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians.

Message refers to the revelation of what is true, valuable, right, and its implications for those addressed by the book. Biblical books normally have numerous messages. However, these messages are usually related and can sometimes be generalized into an overall statement of the message. Understanding the message of a biblical book can be important because it provides another perspective for understanding the book and the individual passages of the book. Specifically, understanding the message or messages of a biblical book provides



a basis for understanding the message of individual passages within the book. The placement of this perspective near the end of the study of the book is intentional. Many students of the Bible want to consider the message of a biblical book before they have examined the book from any other perspective. The result is that they are normally confused and unable to clearly determine the message of the book. Examining the book from other perspectives provides the basis for a clearer understanding of the message of the book.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the message or messages of a biblical book.

1. First, review all that you have learned about the book to this point from the perspectives of background and purpose, biblical context and role, genre and function, and strategy and structure. The knowledge that you have from these perspectives enables you to have a clearer understanding of the message or messages of the book.
2. Second, read the book through with sensitivity to the message of the book and make a list of statements of the most apparent messages that you find. Avoid becoming distracted by the specifics of the book and concentrate on identifying and stating general messages.
3. Third, examine your list of messages and try to consolidate the list into a few statements that express the essential core of the message of the book.
4. Finally, if possible try to formulate one statement that expresses the overall message of the book.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

The Book of Amos contains a number of messages. First, Israel should repent rather than remain complacent because they are more unrighteous than their neighbors due to their sinfulness and neglected privileges and will certainly be judged (1:3-2:16). Second, Israel should repent rather than remain complacent because neither their religion, might, or wealth will save them from God's judgment (3:1-15). Third, Israel should repent rather than remain complacent because their proud worship is sin and insensitivity to God's correction is foolish, and they will encounter him in judgment (4:4-12). Fourth, the Israelites should repent and seek God because he is the source of judgment and life and if they do not they will regret their decision (5:1-17). Fifth, the Israelites should repent and live justly and righteously because the Day of the Lord will be disastrous for them due to their sin and corruption (5:18-27). Sixth, the leaders of Israel should repent because they are pathetic and contributed to the sin and corruption of the nation and as a result will be judged (6:1-7). Seventh, the Israelites should repent rather than remain complacent because their pride and complacency are abhorrent to God and will result in his righteous judgment (6:8-14). Eighth, Israel should repent rather than remain complacent because God is merciful but there comes a time when he must judge his people for their sin and corruption (7:1-9, 8:1-14). Ninth, the Israelites should heed Amos' message because it comes from God, those who oppose it will be judged, and it will be fulfilled (7:10-17). Tenth, the faithful in Israel should not be discouraged because even though God does judge complacent sinners, he will return, restore, bless, and protect them (9:1-15). However, these messages overlap considerably and can be summarized into one overall statement of the message. The Israelites should learn from God's judgment to repent

of their sin and corruption and seek God and live righteously for him so that they can receive his promises rather than experience his judgment.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

# Lesson Seven

## **Consultation and Conclusion**

The final perspective from which a biblical book should be examined is the perspective of consultation and conclusion. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of consultation and conclusion; outline the procedure for examining a biblical book from this perspective; model the procedure on the Book of Amos; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

Consultation refers to taking into consideration what has been written in commentaries on the biblical book you are studying. The writers of these commentaries usually have more expertise and experience than you have in the area of biblical interpretation. Consulting these experts can be valuable for supplementing your understanding where it is deficient and correcting your understanding where it is in error. The placement of consultation of commentaries at the end of the study of a biblical book is intentional. Many students of the Bible equate Bible study with reading commentaries. The result is that rather than having a real encounter with God through the Bible, they read what someone else has to say about the Bible. Reading commentaries should never be equated with Bible study. Though it is more difficult to struggle through the methodology introduced in this guide, the results are well worth the effort. Old and New Testament introductions also provide valuable introductory studies of the books of the Bible and should be consulted as well. Conclusion refers to the process of reviewing, reevaluating, and revising your findings until you are satisfied with the results. Conclusion is important because it forces you to integrate all that you have come to understand about the book into a coherent whole that makes sense and is therefore more likely to be accurate.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you benefit from what others have written about the book and conclude your study of the biblical book.

1. First, select three good commentaries on the biblical book you are studying as well as an Old or New Testament introduction. Make sure that you follow the guidelines for selecting commentaries (Unit One, Lesson Four).
2. Second, read the introductions of the biblical book you are studying in these commentaries as well as the Old or New Testament introduction and make notes on information that either supplements or improves your understanding of the biblical book.
3. Third, review your own study of the biblical book and reevaluate your conclusions based on your clearer understanding of the book after having examining it from different perspectives and especially the information provided by these commentaries

and the Old or New Testament introduction. Make sure that you follow the guidelines for using commentaries (Unit One, Lesson Four).

4. Finally, revise your study of the biblical book and put it into its final form. Be careful to identify the source if you include information that comes from these commentaries or the Old or New Testament introduction using a parenthetical reference.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

The three commentaries I have selected are diverse. *Amos*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 31 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987) by Douglas Stewart is written from a conservative evangelical perspective. Amos, a Commentary, *The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969) by James Luther Mays is written from a more critical perspective. I have also selected *Amos*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 19B (Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995) by Billy K. Smith because I am a Baptist and it is written by prominent Baptist scholar. The Old Testament introduction I have selected for my study of the Book of Amos is Old Testament Survey (Eerdmans, 1982) by Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush.

Normally I would incorporate information from commentaries into my study of the book wherever appropriate, carefully identifying the sources using parenthetical references. However, to avoid confusion in those earlier lessons I have summarized the major contributions of each of the commentaries below. All three commentaries provide more depth than I have with regard to the broader historical background some of the Book of Amos. Therefore, they can be very helpful for a fuller understanding of Background and Purpose (Mays, 1-3; Smith and Page, 23-26; and Stewart, 283-284). All three commentaries provide some help with Genre and Function (Mays, 4-6, 12-14; Smith and Page, 30-31; and Stewart, 285-286). However, their analyses of Genre and Function tend to be rather general, with little specific help for understanding how prophetic literature works to communicate a message. All three provide valuable treatments of the message of the Book of Amos and can contribute to Message or Messages (Mays, 6-12; Smith and Page, 31-33; and Stewart, 288-293). Smith and Page as well as Stewart provide some help with Strategy and Structure (Smith and Page, 33-34; Stewart, 286-288). In fact, the outlines provided by Smith and Page are very similar to my own outline, though I had already arrived at my conclusions prior to consulting them.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. **Incorporate your findings into your study of Philippians where appropriate.**

## **Unit Review**

1. List six perspectives from which a biblical book can be viewed to facilitate understanding.
2. Define background and purpose and summarize the procedure for determining the background and purpose of a biblical book.

3. Define biblical context and role and summarize the procedure for determining the context and role of a biblical book.
4. Define genre and function and summarize the procedure for determining the genre and function of a biblical book.
5. Define strategy and structure and summarize the procedure for determining the strategy and structure of a biblical book.
6. Define message or messages and summarize the procedure for determining the message or messages of a biblical book.
7. Define consultation and conclusion and summarize the procedure for finishing the study of a biblical book.

## Unit Practice

Write an introduction to Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. Make sure that you examine it from every perspective: Background and Purpose (Authorship, Place and Date of Writing, the Recipients and Their Situation), Biblical Context and Role, Genre and Function, Strategy and Structure, and Message or Messages. Rather than including a separate section on consultation of commentaries, incorporate the significant information from commentaries into your study of the book wherever appropriate. Be careful to identify your indebtedness to sources with parenthetical references within the text and a list of sources consulted at the end.

## Unit Reinforcement

Studying a biblical book is not easy and you have probably just made your first attempt. Therefore, I have included my own introductory study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians in Appendix A. Examine this study carefully and evaluate your own work constructively. Allow yourself to be encouraged by that which you did well and learn from your mistakes. **Do not read my study until after you have completed your own study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.**

# Unit Three

## STUDYING A PASSAGE

The second level of studying the Bible is studying a passage. This level of study is specific enough to yield more concrete results; however, it would be difficult to understand a passage without having at least a general understanding of the book in which that passage is found. In this unit I introduce a method for studying a biblical passage by examining the passage from different perspectives and develop procedures for examining the passage from each of these different perspectives. I will also model the method and procedures using Amos 4:4-13. You will be given opportunities to practice the method and procedures as you work through the lessons and a basis for evaluating and learning from your practice at the end of the unit. A review is also included at the end of the unit to encourage you to master the method and procedures.

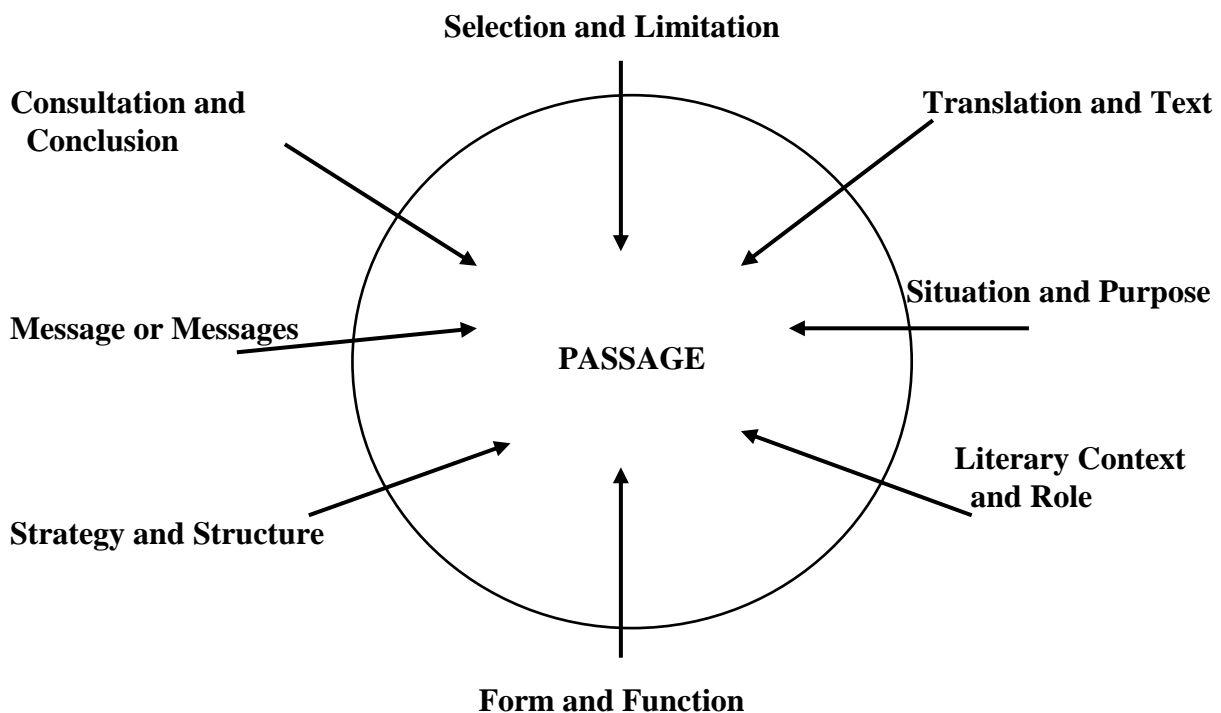
# Lesson One

## A Basic Method

The method introduced in this unit provides a means for understanding a biblical passage through examining the passage from eight different but interrelated perspectives: selection and limitation; translation and text; situation and purpose; literary context and role; form and function; message or messages; consultation and conclusion; and strategy and structure.

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### Perspectives for Studying a Passage



The premise underlying this approach is that anything can be better understood by looking at it from different perspectives. The perspectives on the passage provided in the method are based on common sense and basic principles of communication. You may have some difficulty at first examining a biblical passage from these different perspectives. The tendency will be for you to blend these perspectives together because you are not used to distinguishing between them. When you examine anything from different perspectives there is some overlap in the view you have from each of the different perspectives. Similarly, there is some overlap in these perspectives on the biblical passage. The overlapping of these perspectives sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish the different perspectives. Nonetheless, you should try to keep these perspectives as distinct as possible because your inability to focus will often lead to blurred vision and difficulty understanding the biblical passage.

# Lesson Two

## Selection and Limitation

The first perspective from which a biblical passage should be examined is the perspective of selection and limitation. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of selection and limitation; outline the procedure for examining a passage from this perspective; model the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philipians 1:27-30.

Selection refers to the process of deciding what passage to interpret. Ministers often select passages for interpretation based on a current crisis or need they are encountering in their lives or ministries. After identifying a crisis or need, ministers initiate a frantic search for an appropriate passage to address the crisis or need. However, I do not recommend this approach for the selection of passages for interpretation for several reasons. First, selecting passages in response to immediate crises and needs wastes time because the minister must start from the beginning with every interpretation since each interpretation is independent and does not build on previous study. Second, selecting passages in response to immediate crises and needs leads to superficial interpretation. The minister is forced by the time constraints of ministry to find ways to shorten the task and does not give sufficient time to adequately understand the message of the passage. Third, selecting passages in response to immediate crises and needs often leads to distorted interpretation. The minister is so influenced by the requirement of addressing the crisis or need that he often shapes the message of the passage to address the crisis or need rather than really listening to what God is saying through the passage.

Instead, I recommend that you select passages for interpretation from regular and systematic Bible study. In this approach the minister is continually involved in the interpretation of several books of the Bible. These interpretations then become a reservoir for life-giving preaching and teaching to address the crises and needs that arise in life and ministry. In this way you will save time because you will not have to start from the beginning for each interpretation; be able to devote adequate time to interpretation because you are building upon previous study; and avoid the bias that comes from responding to immediate crises and needs.

Limitation is the process of identifying the boundaries of the passage that will be interpreted. Some biblical books are easy to divide into units for interpretation because they

contain clearly defined passages that have a logical beginning and ending and address a unified situation, employ a unified form, have a unified strategy, and communicate a unified message. However, some types of biblical literature are difficult to divide into units for interpretation because the passages are not clearly defined. As far as possible, you should seek to identify the distinct units of the biblical book. However, you will also need to consider the amount of material that can be effectively interpreted as a unit. Two dangers lurk here. First, you may define the limits of the text so that the passage is so small that you focus attention on that which is secondary to the main message. Second, you may define the limits of the passage so that the passage is so large that you only superficially understand the message among many messages.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you select and limit a biblical passage:

1. First, examine the outline of the strategy and structure of the biblical book (see your study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians under Strategy and Structure). You should have already reached some preliminary conclusions about selection and limitation when you prepared that outline of the strategy and structure of the book. Those preliminary conclusions serve as the starting point for selecting the passage and setting its limits.
2. Second, examine the distinctiveness and cohesiveness of the passage you selected and limited when preparing the outline of the book. Does the passage have a recognizable beginning that is distinct from what precedes? Does the passage have a recognizable ending that is distinct from what follows? Does the passage address a unified situation, employ a unified form, have a unified strategy, and communicate a unified message?
3. Third, consider the practicality of interpreting the passage you selected and limited when preparing the outline of the book. Is the passage so long that it contains too much material to be effectively interpreted as a unit? Is the passage so short that it no longer conveys a clear message apart from its context?
4. Finally, adjust the limits of the passage in accordance with the natural divisions of the book and practical considerations for efficient interpretation and explain your decisions.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

In my outline of the strategy and structure of the Book of Amos I identified Amos 4:4-13 as a passage. Though prophetic literature is often difficult to divide into units, the verses in this passage seem to be distinct from the broader context and related to one another. This passage as I have defined it has a recognizable beginning and the verses within it seem to address dissimilar situations, accomplish distinct purposes, and proclaim different messages than preceding and subsequent verses. However, the end of the passage is not as distinct. Verse 13 contains a hymn praising "the LORD God Almighty." Nonetheless, this hymn seems to reinforce the announcement of judgment that is found in verse 12 so I have included verse 13 within the passage. These verses seem to address the same situation—complacency based on religious pride. These verses seem to have a strategic structure moving from identification of sin to announcement of judgment. These verses seem to have a united message—God will judge those who are complacent because of religious pride. In addition, this passage

as I have defined it is a length that can be interpreted readily and is sufficiently distinct from its context that its message can be understood apart from essential information supplied in the context.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30.

# Lesson Three

## **Translation and Text**

The second perspective from which a biblical passage should be examined is the perspective of translation and text. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of translation and text; outline the procedures for translating and determining the correct text of the passage; and model the procedures on Amos 4:4-13. You will not be required to practice these procedures because preparing a translation and determining the correct text requires knowledge of the biblical languages and some expertise in translation and text criticism.

### **Translating the Passage**

Translation refers to the expression of the meaning of the original language of the passage in English. A good translation is important because you must know what the passage actually says if you are going to be able to interpret the passage effectively. In addition, translation will enable you to more readily identify significant words and grammatical emphases that are not clear in English versions for study later (see Unit Four, Lesson Seven and Lesson Eight). However, being able to translate a passage requires knowledge of biblical Hebrew and Greek as well as the principles and procedures of translation.

Teaching even the basics of biblical Hebrew and Greek is well beyond the scope of this guide. I recommend that you look for the opportunity to study the biblical languages as well as the principles and procedures of translation. Being able to translate the passage will give you a clearer understanding of what the passage actually says as well as alert you to significant words and grammatical emphases. However, even without being able to translate the passage you can move ahead with confidence. The translators of most modern versions have expertise in the biblical languages and the principles and procedures of translation.

Though teaching the biblical languages and the principles and procedures of translation are beyond the scope of this guide, I have outlined a simple procedure for translating a passage that may be of service to you later when you have attained the required knowledge.

1. First, look up the words of the passage in a Hebrew or Greek lexicon; examine the range of meanings for the words; and consider which uses of the words seem to be the most appropriate in the passage.
2. Second, identify the grammatical forms and structures of the passage; examine the ways in which these grammatical forms and structures are used utilizing an outline of Hebrew or Greek syntax; and consider which uses of the grammatical forms and structures are most appropriate in the passage.



3. Third, formulate a translation based on your understanding of the appropriate use of words and grammatical forms and structures. Though your translation will need to make sense in English, you should strive for a very literal translation. It is imperative that you have as clear an understanding of the actual content of the original language as possible when you are studying a passage.
4. Finally, I encourage you to note words that seem to be significant for the expression of the message of the passage and grammatical forms and structures that seem to have an emphasis. These will become the subjects of detailed study when you consider the significance of the details of the passage (see Unit Four, Lesson Seven and Lesson Eight).

### **Determining the Correct Text of the Passage**

Text refers to the determination of the original wording of the passage. Unfortunately, no original of any book of the Bible exists and in the process of transmission errors have occurred in the copies. Since we take seriously the fact that God has spoken in Scripture it is imperative that we recover to the best of our ability the original words of that revelation. Textual criticism seeks to determine the original text of the Bible. However, textual criticism is a very technical field. Determining the correct text requires a knowledge of the history of the text, the tendencies of the scribes who copied the text, the witnesses to the text, and the principles and procedures for evaluating the text. Evaluating the text also requires facility in the biblical languages.

Teaching textual criticism is well beyond the scope of this guide. I recommend that you look for an opportunity to study textual criticism. Being able to evaluate the text will enable you to determine the original reading of the passage for yourself or at least allow you to critically evaluate the decisions of others. However, even without being able to evaluate the text you can move ahead with confidence. The editors of most modern translations have employed sound principles for evaluating the evidence and determining the correct text. In addition, most variant readings do not significantly impact the message of a passage.

Though teaching textual criticism is well beyond the scope of this guide, I have outlined a simple procedure for evaluating and determining the original form of the text that may be of service to you later when you have attained the required knowledge.

1. First, examine and compare the possible readings of the passage that are supplied in the textual apparatus of a critical edition of the text of the Old or New Testament.
2. Second, evaluate the possible readings based on internal evidence—the internal probability that the reading is correct based on what is known about the passage, the tendencies of the scribes, and the criteria of evaluation. There are three criteria for determining the reading that is most likely to be original. First, the original made sense so whatever reading is accepted should make sense as well. Second, the more difficult reading should be preferred because it is more likely that a scribe would clarify a difficult reading than the reverse. Third, the reading that provides the most logical explanation of how the other readings came to be is most likely to be original.
3. Third, evaluate the possible readings based on external evidence—the testimony of the different witnesses to the original text. The basic criterion of judgment is that early witnesses should be preferred. However, another criterion of evaluation is that the

character of the witnesses should be considered. Some witnesses to the Old Testament text are translations and others were produced by sects. Some witnesses to the New Testament tend toward paraphrase and expansion. These tendencies diminish the credibility of these witnesses.

4. Finally, choose the reading of the passage that is most likely based on internal and external evidence and explain your reasoning.

### **The Procedures Illustrated**

I have illustrated these procedures for translating and evaluating the text below using Amos 4:4-13. The arrangement of the translation reflects the parallelism of Hebrew poetry. I have also resorted to using bold in verses 6 and 7 print to indicate an emphasis that is conveyed in the Hebrew text that is difficult to translate into English. I have stayed with the Masoretic text rather than adopt readings based on later versions and conjecture.

**4:4**“Go to Bethel and sin;  
to Gilgal (and) multiply sin.  
Bring your sacrifices every morning,  
your tithes every third day.  
**5**Burn that which is leavened, a thanksgiving  
and announce freewill offerings—  
proclaim them, sons of Israel,  
for this is what you love to do,”  
declares the Sovereign LORD.

**6**“I gave you clean teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places.  
Yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD.

**7**“I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away.  
I sent rain on one city, but did not send rain on another city.  
One field had rain; and a field that did not have rain dried up.

**8**So two or three cities wandered to one city to drink water,  
but they were not satisfied.

Yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD.

**9**“I struck you with blight and mildew,  
multiplying (them) in your gardens and vineyards.

Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees.

Yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD.

**10**“I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt.

I killed your young men with the sword,  
along with the capturing of your horses.

I caused the stench of your camps to go up and into your nostrils.

Yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD.

**11** “I overthrew some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire.

Yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD.

**12** “Therefore, this is what I will do to you, Israel,  
and because I will do this to you,  
prepare to meet your God, Israel.”

**13**For behold! He who forms the mountains,  
creates the wind,  
and reveals his thoughts to man;  
he who turns dawn to darkness,  
and treads the high places of the earth—  
The LORD God Almighty is his name.

# Lesson Four

## Situation and Purpose

The third perspective from which a biblical passage should be examined is the perspective of situation and purpose. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of situation and purpose; outline the procedure for examining a passage from this perspective; model the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Situation refers to the circumstances that existed in the original context that led to the revelation of God and the writing of the passage. Understanding the situation of a passage is important because it provides an objective basis for determining the message of the passage and supplies a foundation for applying the message of the passage to situations in the modern context. You have already studied the background and purpose of the book. Biblical books normally address several situations or a general situation. Passages normally address specific situations or a particular aspect of the general situation. At this point you are concerned with determining the specific situation or the particular aspect of the general situation addressed by the passage.

Purpose refers to the actual reason or reasons for the revelation and writing of the passage and the intended response of those who were addressed. Understanding the purpose of a passage is important because it supplies another basis for understanding the message of the passage. In addition, it provides direction for guiding the message of the passage toward a specific objective in the modern context.

### The Procedure Outlined

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the situation and purpose of a biblical passage.

1. Review your study of the background and purpose of the biblical book so that you are aware of the specific situations or general situation addressed by the book (see your study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians under Background and Purpose). You already have a broad understanding of the situation that was addressed by the book. Use this as the basis for your understanding of the situation addressed by the passage.
2. Look for clues in the passage that would be helpful for reconstructing and specifying the situation addressed by the passage. The passage is probably addressed to a specific situation or aspect of the general situation. This step is like listening to one end of a telephone conversation and trying to determine who is on the other end of the telephone line and what they are talking about.

3. Describe the specific situation addressed by the passage based on your understanding of the general situation addressed by the book and the specifying clues found within the passage. Be as specific as possible, but avoid over-speculation.
4. Finally, deduce from your understanding of the specific situation addressed by the passage and the author's response within the passage what his purpose was for writing the passage. Try to focus on the transformation in the original readers of the passage that God and the author of the passage were seeking to produce.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

The Book of Amos was generally addressed to the affluent citizens of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. These affluent Israelites are characterized in the Book of Amos as oppressing the poor and perverting justice in the courts. In addition, they are described as confident in their religion, wealth, and might; unaware of their danger; and unresponsive to God's discipline. The general purpose of the Book of Amos was to warn these elite Israelites of God's impending judgment so that they would learn from his discipline and repent. Amos 4:4-13 seems to be focused on their complacency since they are sarcastically rebuked for their religious pride in verses 4-5 and unresponsiveness to God's discipline in verses 6-11. The purpose of Amos 4:4-13 seems to be to warn these elite Israelites of God's impending judgment since it concludes with an announcement of judgment. It also seems to be intended to lead them to repent of their pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to his discipline since it includes an indirect call to repent.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30.

# Lesson Five

## **Literary Context and Role**

The fourth perspective from which a biblical passage should be examined is the perspective of literary context and role. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of literary context and role; outline the procedure for examining a passage from this perspective; model the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Literary context refers to the place of the passage within the strategy of the book and the interrelationship of the passage with other passages in the book. Role refers to the distinctive contribution of the passage within the strategy of the book. Biblical passages do not stand in isolation, but are a part of a book. Many biblical books are structured strategically based on some organizational principle and with an overall impact intended. As a result the passages within the book are often interrelated. Knowledge regarding the placement of the passage within the strategy of the book or a strategic division of the book or its relationship with associated passages can reveal a great deal about the passage. Therefore, an understanding of the literary context and role of the passage is important because it provides a perspective for discerning the message of the passage. You have already considered the strategy and

structure of the biblical book. This study of the strategy and structure of the book provides the starting point for your consideration of the literary context and role of the passage.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the literary context and role of a biblical passage.

1. First, consider the significance of the placement of the passage within the overall strategy of the book in which it is found. It may be necessary for you to review your analysis of the strategy and outline of the structure of the book (see your study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians under Strategy and Structure). What does the overall strategy of the book reveal about the passage you are studying?
2. Second, consider the significance of the placement of the passage within the strategy of the division of the book in which it is found. It may again be necessary for you to review your outline of the structure of that division. What does the strategy of the division reveal about the passage you are studying?"
3. Third, consider the relationship of the passage to associated passages in the book. The passage may be related to other passages in many ways. Other passages may reinforce the passage you are studying by looking at the same issue from a different perspective or expressing the same message in a different way. Other passages may develop the same theme found in the passage you are studying. Other passages may supply a vital piece of information for understanding the passage that you are studying. Consider how these associated passages are related to the passage you are studying and what they reveal about it.
4. Finally, determine the distinctive contribution of the passage you are studying within the overall strategy and structure of the book and the particular division of the book in which it is found.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

The Book of Amos is roughly arranged by the nature of the material. Amos 4:4-13 is in the first half of the book, which contains prophetic words. These prophetic words address various aspects of the general situation and warn the people of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping of both situations addressed and warnings of judgment. The impact of this strategy seems to be to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 4:4-13 both contributes to the cumulative effect of these repeated warnings and provides a specific warning of the consequences of complacency based on religious pride. In addition, the Book of Amos seems to be strategically structured to provide some hope for the future without minimizing the message of judgment. Glimpses of hope are given throughout to Book of Amos for those who repent and a fully developed assurance of God's faithfulness to his people is included at the end. However, Amos 4:4-13 does not seem to contribute significantly to this underlying message of hope for the future.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30.

# Lesson Six

## Form and Function

The fifth perspective from which a biblical passage should be examined is the perspective of form and function. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of form and function; outline the procedure for examining a passage from this perspective; model the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Form refers to the specific type of literature in which the passage is composed. Function refers to the way in which the particular form works to communicate a message. Just as biblical books are normally composed in broad types of literature that function in characteristic ways that can be called genres, biblical passages are composed in smaller types of literature that function in characteristic ways that can be called forms. These forms were used as vehicles for the communication of the message of the passage. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to understand the message of a biblical passage unless you know how the form of the passage works to communicate the message. Understanding the form and function of a passage is essential for understanding its message.

There is normally a close relationship between the genre of a book and the forms of specific passages found within the book. For example, a book written in the narrative genre is normally composed of little narratives. Therefore, your analysis of the genre and function of the book provides the beginning point for your examination of the form and function of the passage. In addition, the Bible contains a great variety of forms that can be classified generally as either characteristic or creative forms. Many biblical forms occur often enough and are consistent enough for scholars to classify and describe their general character and function. An example is a parable. These forms can be called characteristic forms. However, other biblical forms are relatively unique and present a greater challenge to interpretation. These forms can be called creative forms. Furthermore, some passages are rather complex and not only employ a general form, but contain sub-forms as well.

### The Procedure Outlined

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the form and function of a biblical passage.

1. First, review your analysis of the genre and function of the book so that you will be familiar with the general literary character of the book and how it works (see your study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians under Genre and Function).
2. Second, determine if the passage is a characteristic form and research the nature of that form and how it functions in a Bible introduction or dictionary. For example, most Bible introductions and dictionaries can give you some help with parables. However, you should be alert for creative variations even in these characteristic forms.
3. Third, read the passage with sensitivity to its literary character and consider its nature and how it seems to work to communicate a message. You read different types of literature all the time and are able to discern how they work to communicate. Apply the same type of common sense to the biblical passage. This step is especially important when dealing with creative forms and forms that contain sub-forms.

4. Finally, evaluate the information that you have obtained and describe the nature of form found in the passage and how it works to communicate a message. How does the form of the passage correspond to the genre of the book and what does this reveal about the character of the passage and how it works to communicate a message? What have scholars determined about the character of this form and how it works to communicate a message? What is the general character of the passage and how does it seem to work to communicate a message? Does the passage contain any sub-forms and how do they contribute to the expression of the message?

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

Amos 4:4-13 can be generally classified as a prophetic exhortation. Exhortation usually employs direct or indirect commands and/or prohibitions to indicate the appropriate response. In this passage the appropriate response is indicated at least generally with a command in verse 12b, “Prepare to meet your God.”

The commands and/or prohibitions in prophetic exhortations are normally reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify the response and provide motivation for obedience. In this passage as in many prophetic exhortations, rebuking accusations and an announcement of God’s impending judgment provide the motivation for obedience—threat of God’s anger and wrath.

The rebuking accusation in verses 4-5 takes the more specific sub-form of a sarcastic call to worship and serves to emphasize the sinfulness of the Israelites’ worship because of pride. The rebuking accusation in verses 6-11 employs a repeated and ironic refrain to further emphasize the sinfulness of the Israelites’ persistent disregard of God’s discipline. These rebuking accusations also serve to express God’s displeasure and reinforce the need for obedience to the command. Furthermore, an announcement of judgment in verse 12a intensifies the warning and the need for obedience by alerting the Israelites to the threat of judgment. The command is followed a hymn praising the LORD God Almighty that serves to further encourage obedience by warning the Israelites of what an awesome prospect meeting God would be.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30.

# Lesson Seven

## **Strategy and Structure**

The sixth perspective from which a biblical passage should be examined is the perspective of strategy and structure. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of strategy and structure; outline the procedure for examining a passage from this perspective; model the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Strategy refers to the plan of the author as he wrote a biblical passage to communicate a message. Structure refers to an analysis of the strategy of a passage and usually takes the form of an outline. Admittedly, some biblical passages do not have a strategy and other passages are strategically arranged in ways that often puzzle modern readers. However, most biblical passages have some organizational plan that unites the individual parts into a coherent whole. The confusion of modern readers is usually because the biblical authors wrote in a context that employed different conventions of strategy and structure. Understanding the strategy and structure of a passage is important since the message of the passage is often communicated through the cumulative impact of all the parts of the passage as they are arranged strategically.

There is normally a close relationship between the form and function of the passage and the strategy and structure of the passage. Therefore, your analysis of the form and function of the passage provides the beginning point for your examination of the strategy and structure of the passage. The most common error when analyzing the strategy and structure of a passage is to impose a strategy and structure on the passage that is not present. You are trying to understand the strategic arrangement of the passage. Imposing a strategy that is foreign to the passage will only distort your understanding of the passage and its message.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the strategy and structure of a biblical passage.

5. First, determine the organizational principle of the passage. Passages are organized in many different ways. There is often a close relationship between the form of a passage and its organizational principle. Therefore, you should review your study of the form of the passage so that you are familiar with how that form is normally structured (see your study of Philippians 1:27-30 under Form and Function).
6. Second, try to identify the major divisions of the passage and make these the major points of your outline. These major divisions should contain logically related materials following the organizational principle of the passage.
7. Third, examine each of these major divisions and identify further levels of logically related materials and make these the sub-points of your outline. Continue with this procedure until you have thoroughly outlined the passage and your outline clearly indicates the place of every element of the passage in the overall strategy of the passage. Be careful to give each point in the outline a heading that clearly indicates its place in the strategy of the passage.
8. Finally, consider the structure of the passage using your outline and describe the overall strategy of the passage. Be careful not to impose a strategy on the passage that is not actually present.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

The sarcastically rebuking call to worship in verses 4-5 supports the command in verse 12b by identifying the worship of Israel as sin. The rebuking examples and illustration of unresponsiveness to the LORD's discipline in verses 6-11 support the command in verse 12b by identifying the unresponsiveness of Israel as foolish. The announcement of judgment in verse 12a supports the command in verse 12b by warning Israel of God's impending judg-



ment. The song in verse 13 reinforces the command in verse 12 by warning Israel of the awesome prospect of meeting the LORD God Almighty.

- I. Sarcastically Rebuking Call to Worship (verses 4-5)
  - A. Sarcastically Rebuking Call to Worship/Sin at Bethel and Gilgal
  - B. Sarcastically Rebuking Call to Offer Sacrifices, Tithes, and Thank Offerings
  - C. Sarcastically Rebuking Call to Brag and Boast about Freewill Offerings
  - D. Messenger Formula
- II. Rebuking Examples and Illustrations of Unresponsiveness to the LORD's Discipline (verses 6-11)
  - A. Rebuking Example of Judgment by Famine (verse 6)
    - 1. Description of judgment
    - 2. Rebuking refrain
  - B. Rebuking Example of Judgment by Drought (verses 7-8)
    - 1. Description of judgment
    - 2. Rebuking refrain
  - C. Rebuking Example of Judgment by Pestilence (verse 9)
    - 1. Description of judgment
    - 2. Rebuking refrain
  - D. Rebuking Example of Judgment by Plague and Warfare (verse 10)
    - 1. Description of judgment
    - 2. Rebuking refrain
  - E. Rebuking Example of Cataclysmic Judgment (verse 11)
    - 1. Description of judgment
      - a. Example of Sodom and Gomorrah
      - b. Illustration of a burning stick
    - 2. Rebuking refrain
- III. Exhortation to Prepare to Meet God (verses 12-13)
  - A. Announcement of Judgment (verse 12a)
  - B. Command to Prepare to Meet God (verse 12b)
  - C. The Awesome God whom they will Meet (verse 13)

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30.

# **Lesson Eight**

## **Message or Messages**

The seventh perspective from which a biblical passage should be examined is the perspective of message or messages. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of message or messages; outline the procedure for examining a passage from this perspective; model the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Message refers to the revelation of God's truth found within the passage for the original context and its implication for life and conduct. The message of the passage has been the primary goal from the very beginning of your study. However, it would be difficult for you to

discern the message of the passage without having a broad understanding of the message of the book and the insights on the passage provided by the perspectives of situation and purpose, literary context and role, form and function, and strategy and structure. Therefore, your study of the general message or messages of the book and prior study of the passage from these perspectives provides the beginning point for your examination of the message or messages of the passage.

Normally a passage contains only one primary message. If there are many distinct messages in the passage it may be that you have not limited the passage enough. The end product of the procedure outlined below is a statement or statements of the message of the passage. This statement is important because it leads to a clear and comprehensive understanding of the message. In addition this statement will provide the basis for applying and communicating the message to the modern situation.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you determine the message or messages of a biblical passage.

1. First, review your study of the message or messages of the book so that you have a general context for understanding the message of the passage (see your study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians under Message or Messages).
2. Second, review your study of the passage from the perspectives of situation and purpose, literary context and role, form and function, strategy and structure so that you have a specific context for understanding the message of the passage (see your study of Philippians 1:27-30 to this point).
3. Third, read through the passage several times with this information in mind and with sensitivity to the message of the passage.
4. Finally, state the message of the passage in its original context. Try to state the message as directly as possible and avoid simply describing the message. Strive for both clarity and comprehensiveness. You should include all the major points of the message, but in a way that can be readily understood. In most cases you can use the outline of the structure of the passage as the framework for constructing your statement of the message of the passage. However, when the structure of the passage seems chaotic it will be necessary for you to organize your statement in a way that expresses the message clearly to you. The message of the passage may be so complex that on some occasions it can be more clearly stated in several short sentences. However, you should be careful to indicate clearly the relationship of these statements to one another in the expression of the overall message.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

The message of Amos 4:4-13 in its original context was that the Israelites should prepare to meet God by repenting and returning to him because their prideful worship is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect.

## **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30.

# **Lesson Nine**

## **Consultation and Conclusion**

The final perspective from which a biblical passage should be examined is the perspective of consultation and conclusion. In this lesson I introduce the perspective of consultation and conclusion; outline the procedure for examining a passage from this perspective; model the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Consultation refers to taking into consideration what has been written in commentaries. The writers of these commentaries usually have more expertise and experience than you in the area of biblical interpretation. Consulting these experts can be valuable for supplementing your understanding where it is deficient and correcting your understanding where it is in error. Most commentaries have paragraphs that introduce each passage that has been defined. The placement of consultation of commentaries at the end of the study of a biblical passage is intentional. Many students of the Bible equate Bible study with reading commentaries. The result is that rather than having a real encounter with God through the Bible, they read what someone else has to say about the Bible. Reading commentaries should never be equated with Bible study. Though it is more difficult to struggle through the methodology introduced in this guide, the results are well worth the effort.

Conclusion refers to the process of reviewing, reevaluating, and revising your findings until you are satisfied with the results. Conclusion is important because it forces you to integrate all that you have come to understand about the passage into a coherent whole that makes sense and is therefore more likely to be accurate.

## **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you benefit from what others have written about the passage and conclude your study of the biblical passage.

1. First, read the introductory comments relative to the passage you are studying in the commentaries that you have selected and make notes on information that they provide that either supplements or corrects your understanding of the biblical passage.
2. Second, review your own study of the passage and reevaluate your conclusions based on your clearer understanding of the passage after having examined it from different perspectives and especially the information provided by the commentaries. Make sure that you follow the guidelines for using commentaries (see Unit One, Lesson Four).
3. Finally, revise your study of the passage and put it into its final form. Be careful to identify the source of any information that comes from a commentary or other source using a parenthetical reference and a list of sources.

## The Procedure Illustrated

The three commentaries I have selected are *Amos*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 31 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987) by Douglas Stewart; *Amos, a Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969) by James Luther Mays; and *Amos*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 19B (Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995) by Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page. **Normally I would incorporate information from commentaries into my study of the passage wherever appropriate, carefully identifying the sources using parenthetical references. However, to avoid confusion in those earlier lessons I have summarized the major contributions of each of the commentaries below.** Stuart helped me with Selection and Limitation by confirming that Amos 4:4-13 is a cohesive unit (Stewart, 336). Both Stewart and Mays helped me with Translation and Text through their original translations and careful evaluations of the text of Amos 4:4-13 (Mays, 76-77; Stewart, 334-336). Mays was particularly helpful with Form and Function for analyzing the significance of the sub-forms in Amos 4:4-13 (Mays, 73-74, 77-78). Stewart helped me with Strategy and Structure by clarifying the strategic relationship of the various elements of Amos 4:4-13 (Stewart, 336-337).

## The Procedure Practiced

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30. **Incorporate your findings into your study of the passage where appropriate.**

# Unit Review

1. List eight perspectives from which a biblical passage can be viewed.
2. Define selection and limitation and summarize the procedure for selecting and limiting a biblical passage.
3. Define situation and purpose and summarize the procedure for determining the situation and purpose of a biblical passage.
4. Define literary context and role and summarize the procedure for determining the context and role of a biblical passage.
5. Define form and function and summarize the procedure for determining the genre and function of a biblical passage.
6. Define strategy and structure and summarize the procedure for determining the strategy and structure of a biblical passage.
7. Define message and summarize the procedure for determining the message of a biblical passage.
8. Define consultation and conclusion and summarize the procedure for concluding the study of a biblical passage.

# Unit Practice

Write a study of Philippians 1:27-30. Make sure that you examine it from every perspective: Selection and Limitation, Situation and Purpose, Literary Context and Role, Form and Function, Strategy and Structure, and Message. Rather than including a separate section

on consultation of commentaries, incorporate the significant information from commentaries into your study of the passage wherever appropriate. Be careful to identify your indebtedness to sources with parenthetical references within the text and a list of sources consulted at the end.

## Unit Reinforcement

Studying a biblical passage is not easy and you have probably just made your first attempt. Therefore, I have included my own study of Philippians 1:27-30 in Appendix B. Examine this study carefully and evaluate your own work constructively. Allow yourself to be encouraged by that which you did well and learn from your mistakes. **Do not read my study until after you have completed your own study of Philippians 1:27-30.**

# Unit Four

## STUDYING THE DETAILS

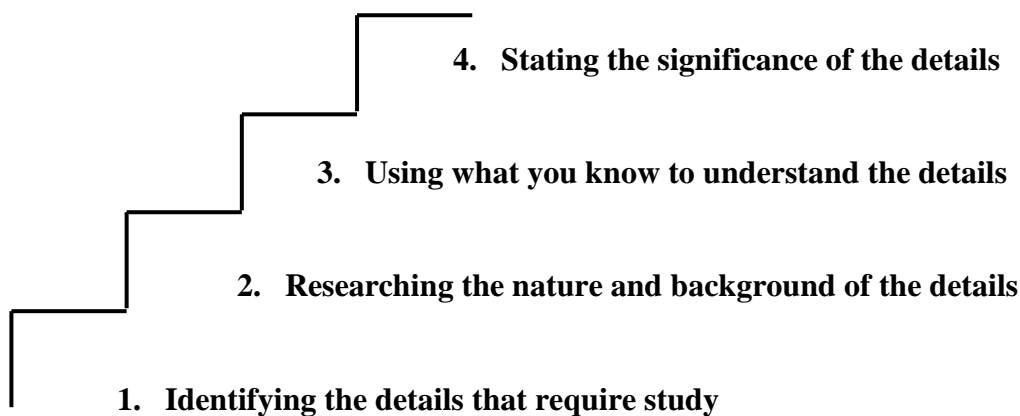
The third level of studying the Bible is studying the details of the passage. These details are very important because they add meaning and emphasis to the message of the passage. Studying a passage without considering the significance of the details is like looking at a black and white as opposed to a color picture. In this unit I will introduce a simple method for studying the details. In addition, I will provide specific guidance for studying seven common kinds of details: historical allusions, literary quotations and allusions, geographical references, sociological features, figures of speech, important words, and grammatical emphases. Furthermore, I will give you some guidance for the use of commentaries for studying the details and model the method and use of commentaries, employing Amos 4:4-13. At the end of the unit you will be given an opportunity to practice the method and a basis for evaluating and learning from your practice. A review is also included at the end of the unit to encourage you to master the method and procedures.

## Lesson One

### A Basic Method

Studying the details involves four steps: identifying the details that require study; researching the background and nature of the details; using what you know about the passage to understand the details; and stating the significance of the details. In this lesson I elaborate on the steps of this basic method.

#### Steps for Studying the Details



#### Identifying the Details that Require Study

The first step of studying the details is identifying the details that require study. Studying the details of a passage takes a considerable amount of time. You will not have enough time to study all the details. Therefore, you need to identify the details that need study the most. Three general kinds of details require the most study—significant details, puzzling de-

tails, and controversial details. Significant details are those details that play an important role in communicating the message of the passage. Since you are vitally concerned with understanding the message of the passage, it is imperative that you identify and study those details that play an important role in communicating the message. Puzzling details are details that are difficult to understand. Controversial details are details about which the scholars disagree. Puzzling details and controversial details may or may not play an important role in the communication of the message of the passage. However, they may cause some confusion about the passage that may prevent you from understanding the message. Since you are vitally concerned with understanding the message of the passage, it is imperative that you identify and study those details that cause confusion about the message. In subsequent lessons I provide guidance for identifying the details that need to be studied and give examples to show you how to identify these important details.

### **Researching the Nature and Background of the Details**

The second step of studying the details is researching the nature and background of details. The Bible contains many different kinds of details. These different kinds of details work in diverse ways to enhance the communication of the message of the passage. For example, historical allusions enhance the communication of the message by referring to an event in the past that illustrates or reinforces the message. Therefore, it is essential that you understand the nature of the detail and how it enhances the communication of the message. In addition, most details have a specific background that must be understood for the impact of the detail to have full effect. For example, a historical allusion may refer to a specific illustration of God's judgment in the past to reinforce a message of warning. Therefore, it is essential to research the specific background of the detail so that the detail can have full effect. In subsequent lessons I introduce the nature of some of the most common kinds of details; provide guidance for researching the background of these details; and give examples to show you how to research these details.

### **Using What You Know to Understand the Details**

The third step of studying the details is using what you know about the passage to understand the details. You already know a great deal. You have studied the book and the passage. This knowledge about the book and more importantly about the passage provides the basis for understanding the details. You have studied the passage from the perspectives of selection and limitation, translation and text, situation and purpose, literary context and role, form and function, strategy and structure, message or messages, and consultation and conclusion. Details are very context specific and can only be understood as they function within the specific context of the passage. Therefore, it is essential that you use what you know about the passage to help you understand the details. In subsequent lessons I give examples to show you how to use what you know to understand some of the most common kinds of details.

### **Stating the Significance of the Details**

The final step of studying the details is stating the significance of the details. In step three you use what you know about the passage to help you understand the detail. In the final step you relate what you know about the detail to enhance your understanding of the passage

and especially its message. The important details are those that either enhance or clarify the message of the passage. Therefore, it is essential that you state the significance of these details. Examine your statement of the message of the passage. Consider how your knowledge of the nature and background of this detail and its use within the context of the passage enhances your understanding of the message of the passage. In subsequent lessons I give examples to show you how to state the significance of some of the most common kinds of details.

# Lesson Two

## Historical Allusions

Historical allusions are the first type of detail that commonly occurs in the Bible. Historical allusions are references to people, places, things, and events of the past. When the historical allusion is to a place it could be studied as a geographical reference (see Lesson Four, Geographical References). I suggest that you study the detail as a historical allusion when the context specifies a particular event from history and as a geographical reference whenever the detail is not specific. However, you may want to study the detail from both perspectives. When the historical allusion is to a biblical historical narrative it could be studied as a literary allusion (see Lesson Three, Literary Quotations and Allusions). However, I suggest that you study it as a historical allusion. Historical allusions provide a historical illustration that reinforces the message in a variety of ways. Historical allusions are commonly used as illustrations of God's judgment of the wicked for example. These allusions to God's judgment of his people in history are found frequently in the Bible. These historical allusions serve as illustrations of God's judgment and as warnings to the readers of the danger of displeasing God. Below I relate the method for studying the details of the passage specifically to historical allusions and illustrate this method using Amos 4:4-13.

### Identifying Historical Allusions that Need To Be Studied

First, identify the historical allusions that need to be studied. References to events of the past are historical allusions. The reference may also be to people, places, and things of the past as well. These references should also be considered historical allusions if they relate to specific events of the past. Most historical allusions will have some contribution to the development of the message of the passage. Therefore, you should consider the importance of every historical allusion carefully. Amos 4:4-13 contains a number of historical allusions, including allusions to the plagues against Egypt (verse 10) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 11). These historical allusions do seem to be important for the enhancement of the message of the passage.

### Researching Historical Allusions

Second, research the background of the historical allusion. Very often historical allusions are extremely brief and presume familiarity with the historical events on the part of the readers. Unless you are already intimately familiar with the event to which the author is alluding, you will need to research the historical allusion. If the allusion is to biblical history, look up the pertinent historical accounts in the Bible and familiarize yourself with the biblical record. Books on the history of Israel or the New Testament church may also be helpful for



filling in your knowledge. Use the table of contents to locate the relevant information or the index if the allusion is specific enough. A Bible dictionary can also be a good resource for background information about historical allusions if the allusion is specific enough. Exodus 7-11 and Genesis 19 describe the cataclysmic judgments of God against the ungodly and wicked Egyptians and citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. God struck the Egyptians with ten plagues, climaxing in a plague in which all the first born sons of the land were killed. God totally destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by raining down burning sulfur upon them.

### **Using What You Know to Understand Historical Allusions**

Third, use what you know about the passage to help you understand the historical allusion. The historical allusions to God's judgments of Egypt and Sodom and Gomorrah occur within Amos' ironic rebuke of the Israelites for failing to heed God's warning judgments. God's judgments of Egypt and Sodom and Gomorrah are combined with the irony of the repeated refrain, "Yet you have not returned to me." These historical allusions seem to be used in this context to illustrate and emphasize the extent of God's judgment of the Israelites and intensify God's rebuke of them for foolishly disregarding his warning discipline.

### **Stating the Significance of Historical Allusions**

Finally, state the significance of the historical allusion for the development of the message of the passage. The message of Amos 4:4-13 was that the Israelites should prepare to meet God because their prideful worship is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. The historical allusions to God's judgments of Egypt and Sodom and Gomorrah enhance this message by emphasizing the persistent unresponsiveness of the Israelites to God's discipline and intensifying the warning of God's displeasure. In this way the need for the Israelites to prepare to meet their God is stressed.

# Lesson Three

## **Literary Quotations and Allusions**

Literary quotations and allusions are the second type of detail that commonly occurs in the Bible. Quotations are direct citations of literature, while allusions are indirect references to literature. Though there are some notable exceptions, most quotations and allusions in the Bible are from Scripture. When a literary allusion is to a biblical historical narrative it should be studied as a historical allusion. Literary quotations and allusions are used to reinforce the message of a passage in a variety of ways. Quotations and allusions from the Bible usually serve in part as scriptural proofs.

Sometimes the connection between the passage being studied and a quotation or allusion from Scripture used within it is very direct. At other times the connection between the passage being studied and the quotation or allusion from Scripture is more remote, especially in the use of the Old Testament by New Testament authors. The New Testament authors

wrote with the presupposition that the Old Testament was the authoritative word of God to the church as well as the people of Israel. They also wrote from the perspective that they lived in the time of fulfillment that had been inaugurated by the coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they saw a correspondence between Israel and the church that allowed them to apply the Old Testament to the new situation and interpret it in the light of God's new revelation in Christ. In some cases you may have difficulty discerning the connection between the Old Testament quotation or allusion and its use by a New Testament author. Nonetheless, a connection of some kind is normally there. Below I relate the method for studying the details of the passage specifically to literary quotations and allusions and illustrate this method using Amos 4:4-13.

### **Identifying Quotations and Allusions that Need To Be Studied**

First, identify the literary quotations and allusions that need to be studied. Quotations can be readily identified because they are usually put in quotation marks. The source of a quotation is seldom provided in the text and even then only a general source is normally identified. However, the footnotes in a study Bible usually identify the source of quotations from Scripture. Allusions are more difficult to identify. The cross-referencing system in a study Bible can be helpful for detecting some of the biblical allusions. However, these cross-referencing systems usually identify verses that are related by subject matter and not all of them are actual allusions. Concentrate on those that the author of the passage you are studying seems to be aware of and to which he could be alluding. Amos 4:4-13 contains no quotations but a number of allusions, including allusions to the Old Testament laws regarding the daily sacrifice, the tithe, and burning leavened bread in verse 5. These allusions do seem to be important for the development of the message of the passage.

### **Researching Quotations and Allusions**

Second, research the background of the literary quotation or allusion. If the quotation or allusion is from Scripture, look up the verses that are quoted or alluded to and seek to understand the significance of these verses in their original context. Sometimes the literary quotation or allusion is very brief, but presupposes the familiarity of the readers with the broader context. Therefore, you should examine the broader context of the quotation or allusion. The cross-referencing system of my study Bible identifies the source of the allusions in Amos 4:5 as Numbers 28:3, Deuteronomy 14:28, and Leviticus 7:13. Numbers 28:3 requires that the people of Israel offer two lambs a year old without defect every day as a regular burnt offering. Deuteronomy 14:28 requires that the people of Israel bring their tithes of produce every three years. Leviticus 7:13 requires that the people of Israel present an offering with cakes of bread made with yeast along with their fellowship offering of thanksgiving.

### **Using What You Know to Understand Quotations and Allusions**

Third, use what you know about the passage to help you understand the literary quotation or allusion. The allusions to the law in Amos 4:4-13 occur within Amos' sarcastically rebuking call to worship. This sarcastic call to worship begins by identifying the worship of the people of Israel as sin and concludes by identifying the reason that it is sin—their boasting and pride. The commands to offer two lambs, give tithes, and present an offering with yeast

seem to function within this context to identify worship practices that the people of Israel would have taken pride in and boasted about. However, they are clearly identified in the passage as sinful and displeasing to God.

### **Stating the Significance of Quotations and Allusions**

Finally, state the significance of the literary quotation or allusion for the development of the message of the passage. The message of Amos 4:4-13 was that the Israelites should prepare to meet God because their prideful worship is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. The literary allusions to the law enhance this message by dramatically demonstrating to the people of Israel that rather than being a basis for pride, their worship was sinful and displeasing to God despite the fact that it met and even exceeded the demands of the law. In this way the need for the Israelites to prepare to meet their God is stressed.

## **Lesson Four**

### **Geographical References**

Geographical references are the third type of detail that commonly occurs in the Bible. Geographical references are the names of places. Some of the place names found in the Bible are only incidental. However, biblical authors often included these place names because they had significant associations. These geographical references can be very important because the associations attached to the place name frequently contribute to the development of the message of the passage. In many cases the associations attached to a place relate to events of the past. Therefore, there is some overlapping between geographical references and historical allusions. I suggest that you study the detail as a historical allusion when the context specifies a particular event from history and as a geographical reference whenever the detail is not specific. However, you may want to study the detail from both perspectives. Below I relate the method for studying the details of the passage specifically to geographical references and illustrate this method using Amos 4:4-13.

### **Identifying Geographical References that Need To Be Studied**

First, identify the geographical references that need to be studied. Begin by noting any instances in the passage in which the author specifies a place name. Next, try to distinguish those geographical references that seem to be intended to contribute to the development of the message of the passage from those that are incidental. It may be that you will need to research the geographical reference before you are able to discern if it is significant. Amos 4:4-13 contains a number of geographical references, including references to Bethel and Gilgal in verse 4. These geographical references do seem to be important for the development of the message of the passage.

## **Researching Geographical References**

Second, research the background of the geographical reference. Bible dictionaries are usually the most convenient resource for researching the background of a geographical reference since the information is all in one place and can be accessed directly. Simply look up the place name in the dictionary and read. The Bible itself often provides the background necessary for understanding a geographical reference. Look up the place name in a concordance and examine those places in the Bible where the place name occurs. Books on the history of Israel and the New Testament church as well as historical atlases can also be helpful resources. Look up the place name in the index and examine those contexts in which the place name is discussed. Sometimes it is helpful to look at the location of a place on a map as well. The references to Bethel and Gilgal in Amos 4:4-13 had significant associations for the people of Israel. Bethel was the place where Jacob had his vision and was the most prominent religious center of the Northern Kingdom during the time of Amos' ministry. Gilgal was the place where the Israelites commemorated the crossing of the Jordan River by setting up a circle of stones taken from the center of the river and was also a prominent religious center during the time of Amos' ministry.

## **Using What You Know to Understand Geographical References**

Third, use what you know about the passage to help you understand the geographical reference. The geographical references to Bethel and Gilgal in Amos 4:4 occur within Amos' sarcastically rebuking call to worship in verses 4-5. This sarcastic call to worship serves within Amos 4:4-13 to identify the worship of the people of Israel as sin and indicate the reason that their worship is sin—their boasting and pride. The geographical references to Bethel and Gilgal are placed within commands that sarcastically invite the people of Israel to sin and thereby identify their worship at these locations as sin.

## **Stating the Significance of Geographical References**

Finally, state the significance of the geographical reference for the development of the message of the passage. The message of Amos 4:4-13 was that the Israelites should prepare to meet God because their prideful worship is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. The geographical references to Bethel and Gilgal enhance this message by dramatically demonstrating to the people of Israel that rather than being a basis for pride, their worship was sinful and displeasing to God. In this way the need for the Israelites to prepare to meet their God is stressed.

# **Lesson Five**

## **Sociological Features**

Sociological features are the fourth type of detail that commonly occurs in the Bible. Sociological features are instances when the passage reflects the distinct culture of the bibli-

cal world. These sociological features are frequently incidental to the development of the message of the passage. However, they sometimes are included by the author to contribute in some important way to the development of the message of the passage. In addition, the differences between the culture of the biblical world and modern culture may lead to confusion at times about the passage and its message. Therefore, understanding the sociological feature is often important for clarifying or illuminating the passage and its message. Some sociological features found in the Bible are due to the distinct identity of Israelites or Christians as the people of God. There is sometimes an overlap between sociological features and biblical quotations and allusions because Scripture often describes these sociological features. I suggest that you study these details as scriptural quotations and allusions because this approach results in the most specific results. Below I relate the method for studying the details of the passage specifically to geographical references and illustrate this method using Jonah 1:1-16 since Amos 4:4-13 does not contain any clear sociological features.

### **Identifying Sociological Features that Need To Be Studied**

First, identify the sociological features that need to be studied. Anything in the passage that reflects the distinctive culture of the biblical world is a sociological feature. Try to distinguish between those sociological features that are incidental to the message of passage and those that are either important for the development of the message of the passage or might cause confusion about the message if they are not clarified. There are no distinctive sociological features in Amos 4:4-13. The religious practice of the Israelites with respect to offering daily sacrifices, tithing their produce, and presenting leavened bread along with their thank offerings does reflect the distinct culture of the Hebrew people. However, these practices are specific allusions to Old Testament laws and should be studied as literary allusions (see Lesson Three, Literary Quotations and Allusions). Therefore, I would like to use Jonah 1:1-16 as an example. In that passage the sailors cast lots to determine who is responsible for the storm that threatened their lives. Though this sociological feature does not seem to contribute a great deal to the development of the message of the passage, failure to understand the cultural practice could cause some confusion about the message of the passage.

### **Researching Sociological Features**

Second, research the background of the sociological feature. Bible dictionaries are usually the most convenient resource for researching the background of a sociological feature when the feature is specific enough to name since the information is all in one place and can be accessed directly. The Bible itself often provides the background necessary for understanding a sociological feature. Look up the sociological feature in a concordance and examine those places in the Bible where the feature occurs. Books on the culture of the biblical world can also be helpful resources. If the sociological feature is specific enough to name, look up the feature in the index and examine those contexts in which the feature is discussed. If the sociological feature is too general to name, it may be necessary for you to scan the table of contents for likely locations where information might be found. The practice of casting lots was common in the ancient world and is condoned in the Old Testament as a means of determining that “the decision is wholly from the LORD” (Pr. 16:33). The practice involved drawing or throwing marked stones. The marking of the stone that was drawn or thrown provided the answer to whatever inquiry was made.

## Using What You Know to Understand Sociological Features

Third, use what you know about the passage to help you understand the sociological feature. The casting of lots in verse 7 is part of the story of the great storm in Jonah 1:1-16. This story contrasts the rebelliousness of Jonah and its results with the submissiveness of the sailors and its results to encourage the readers to be like the sailors rather than Jonah. Within this story the investigation by lots is one of several means for identifying Jonah and his rebelliousness as the cause of danger.

## Stating the Significance of Sociological Features

Finally, state the significance of the sociological feature for the development of the message of the passage. The message of Jonah 1:1-16 was that the people of Israel should not be like Jonah who said that he feared the LORD, but rebelled against God's call and was thrown into the sea to drown. Instead, they should be like the sailors who really feared God, did everything they could to determine and do the will of God, and were delivered. The investigation by lots enhances this message by reinforcing the connection between Jonah's rebellion and the storm. In this way the readers are led to reject Jonah's rebellion because of its connection with disaster.

# Lesson Six

## Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are the fifth type of detail that commonly occurs in the Bible. Sometimes what is said in the Bible is not literally what is meant. Instead, a figure of speech is employed to illustrate or emphasize the message or some aspect of the message. Figures of speech can be generally divided into illustrative and rhetorical figures.

Illustrative figures are employed to describe someone or something by relating it to something else.

1. **Metaphor** illustrates by equating one thing with another as in Jesus' equating of Herod to a "fox" in Luke 13:32—"He replied, 'Go tell that fox, I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'"
2. **Simile** illustrates by comparing one thing to another as in Jesus' comparison of his desire for the people of Jerusalem to a hen gathering her chicks in Luke 13:34b—"How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."
3. **Personification** illustrates by attributing human characteristics to something as in Paul's depiction of the church as a body in 1 Corinthians 12:12—"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."
4. **Anthropomorphism** illustrates aspects of divine character by describing God in human terms like the Psalmist's description of God's disdain for those who oppose him

and his anointed one in Psalm 2:4—“The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.”

5. **Symbolism** illustrates by representing one thing with another as in the use of the seven golden lampstands to represent the church in Revelation 1:12—“I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands.”
6. **Metonym** illustrates by substituting one word for another as when Paul uses the word “chains” to refer to his imprisonment—“As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ” (Phil. 1:13).
7. **Contrast** illustrates by setting one thing over against another as in Paul’s contrast of his former attitude toward his meritorious deeds to his present attitude toward them—“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ” (Phil. 3:7).

Rhetorical figures employ unusual or dramatic means of expression to make what is said more emphatic.

1. **Brachylogy** emphasizes through the use of short statements as in Paul’s exclamation in Romans 7:24a—“What a wretched man I am! (The use of brachylogy is more apparent in the Greek text which has only three words)
2. **Paronomasia** emphasizes by playing on the different uses of one word or the different meanings of two words that sound alike as in the play on two meanings of “ripe” in Amos 8:2—“‘What do you see Amos?’ he asked. ‘A basket of ripe fruit,’ I answered. Then the LORD said to me, ‘The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.’” (The actual play on words is different in the Hebrew text)
3. **Meiosis** emphasizes by using understatement as in Paul’s use of “most” to emphasize God’s displeasure with nearly all of the wilderness generation in 1 Corinthians 10:5—“Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.”
4. **Hyperbole** emphasizes by using exaggeration as in Jesus’ dramatic appeal to avoid sin at all costs in Matthew 5:29—“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.”
5. **Irony** emphasizes by describing a circumstance or result that is the opposite of what one might expect, frequently to draw attention to its remarkableness, appropriateness, or inappropriateness. A good example is Exodus 1:12a, which emphasizes the remarkable fact that the Israelites continued to multiply despite the oppression of the Egyptians—“But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.”
6. **Sarcasm** emphasizes by employing statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a humorous or derisive intent as in Paul’s scornful rebuke of the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 4:8—“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!”
7. **Repetition** emphasizes through the reiteration of a word, phrase, or idea as in the Seraphs’ praise of God’s holiness in Isaiah 6:3—“And they were calling to one another, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’”
8. **Rhetorical questions** emphasize through questions that actually imply an emphatic assertion or denial as in God’s question that concludes the Book of Jonah and asserts

God's right to be concerned for Nineveh—"Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah 4:11b)

Below I relate the method for studying the details of the passage specifically to figures of speech and illustrate this method using Amos 4:4-13.

### **Identifying Figures of Speech that Need To Be Studied**

First, identify the figures of speech that need to be studied. Figures of speech are not usually identified in the text and are often difficult to find. Familiarity with the figures of speech that commonly occur in the Bible is essential. In addition, be on the alert for that which does not make sense when taken literally because figures of speech frequently employ non-literal language. Amos 4:4-13 contains several figures of speech, including the use of sarcasm in verses 4-5. Amos' use of sarcasm in verses 4-5 is not introduced and is apparent only because Amos' words do not make any sense when taken literally. How could a prophet of God call his people to commit sin? Amos' use of sarcasm does seem to be significant for the development of the message of the passage. Other figures of speech in Amos 4:4-13 will be identified and studied later (see Lesson Ten, The Method Modeled).

### **Researching Figures of Speech**

Second, research the nature and background of the figure of speech and how it works to communicate meaning. The simple introduction provided above will probably not prove adequate in many cases. Many comprehensive introductions to biblical interpretation contain a more complete analysis of the important figures of speech used in the Bible. Use the table of contents or index if you can identify the figure of speech to locate this analysis. You may also want to consult E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible (Baker Book House, 1968). Though this book is overdone and outdated, it is still the best overall guide to biblical figures of speech generally available. Bullinger also includes a Scripture index that may help you identify some figures of speech. In addition, the background of a figure of speech must often be researched from one of the other perspectives. The sarcasm in Amos 4:4-5 employs statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a derisive intent. This sarcasm is combined with geographical references and allusions to the Old Testament law that must be researched as well in order to understand the full significance of the sarcasm.

### **Using What You Know to Understand Figures of Speech**

Third, use what you know about the passage to help you understand the figure of speech. Amos' use of sarcasm permeates his call to worship in verses 4-5. Within Amos 4:4-13 this call to worship serves to identify dramatically the worship of the Israelites as sin because of their religious pride. The sarcasm is combined with geographical references to dramatically identify the worship of the Israelites at Bethel and Gilgal as sin. The sarcasm combines with the allusions to the law to dramatically identify the worship practices of the Israelites as sin.



## **Stating the Significance of Figures of Speech**

Finally, state the significance of the figure of speech for the development of the message of the passage. The message of Amos 4:4-13 was that the Israelites should prepare to meet God because their prideful worship is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. Amos' use of sarcasm in verses 4-5 enhances this message by undermining the pride of the people of Israel in their religion and dramatically forcing them to realize that their worship was actually displeasing to God. In this way the need for the Israelites to prepare to meet their God is stressed.

# Lesson Seven

## **Important Words**

Important words are the sixth type of detail that commonly occurs in the Bible. Words are the building blocks used by the author to express the message of the passage. Certainly many of the words employed by the author have a straightforward meaning and clear use. However, in many cases the author has carefully chosen the words that he employs because of the images and ideas associated with these words. These are important words because they contribute to the development of the message of the passage.

Errors commonly occur when doing word studies. The following guidelines should help you avoid some of the more obvious errors. First, don't assume that the word means the same thing in the Bible that it means in the church today. Second, don't assume that biblical words always mean the same thing. The meaning of words often changes in different contexts. Third, don't assume that the original or basic meaning is always reflected in the use of a word. Words often develop over time and the original or basic meaning is no longer a consideration in its use. Fourth, do not read too much into a word by presuming that each use of the word contains all the implications of every other use of the word. The specific use of the word is usually limited by the context. Finally, do not make fine distinctions between synonyms that are not supported by the context. Words with similar meanings are often used in a general way with no distinction intended.

Below I relate the method for studying the details of the passage specifically to important words and illustrate this method using Amos 4:4-13. A basic orientation to the biblical languages is extremely helpful for studying important words. I suggest that you take courses in biblical Hebrew and Greek as soon as possible. As I relate the method for studying the details to important words I presuppose this basic orientation to Hebrew and Greek. However, I do try to give some direction to those who do not have this orientation.

## **Identifying Important Words that Need To Be Studied**

First, identify any words in the passage that need to be studied. These are words that contribute to the development of the message of the passage. These words convey an image

or have a depth of associations that enables them to convey a great deal of meaning. Sometimes it may be necessary to research the word before you are able to discern whether it is important for the development of the message of the passage or not. If you read Hebrew and Greek, you probably identified some of these important words when you were preparing your translation (see Unit Three, Lesson Three, Translation and Text). If you do not read Hebrew and Greek, you can still identify the Hebrew or Greek word using an interlinear Bible, a concordance with a key to the original languages, or a combination of both. Amos 4:4-13 contains a number of important words, but I have chosen to focus on the use of “Almighty” in verse 13 as an example. This word does seem to be important for the development of the message of the passage.

### **Researching Important Words**

Second, research the meaning and uses of the important word.

1. First, look up the word in a Hebrew or Greek lexicon and examine the various uses of the word. It is also helpful to look up other words from the same root and examine how they are used. The standard lexicons are The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers) and A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). These lexicons list the words in Hebrew and Greek alphabetical order. However, if you have an alphabetical listing of the Hebrew and Greek letters you can still find these words and examine their uses. An alternative for those who have no knowledge of biblical Hebrew and Greek is to use an English dictionary. However, an English dictionary will of course only provide information about the word used in translation.
2. Second, look the word up in a concordance and examine first hand how the word is used in the Bible. You can use an English concordance as long as it has some means for accessing the biblical languages. However, using English concordances to study Hebrew and Greek words is awkward and time consuming. As a compromise, I recommend The Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance and The Englishman’s Greek Concordance (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Press). Though you have to struggle with the Hebrew and Greek alphabets, you will be able to scan the occurrences of the words in English.
3. Finally, look up the word in a word study book for a comprehensive analysis of the use of the word by an eminent scholar. The most comprehensive word studies are found in Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament and Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company). The words are again listed in Hebrew and Greek alphabetical order. A good alternative is available for studying New Testament words that lists the words by their English equivalent, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Press). Bible dictionaries can also be employed for word studies when the word being researched is a prominent technical or theological term.

The word “Almighty” in Amos 4:13 is a translation of the Hebrew word *tsebaoth*. This word literally means “armies.” This word is used frequently in the Old Testament as a divine name to emphasize the power of God.

## **Using What You Know to Understand Important Words**

Third, use what you know about the passage to help you understand the important word and how it is used to contribute to the development of the message of the passage. Amos' use of the word "Almighty" as a divine name occurs within his hymn of praise to God in verse 13. This hymn of praise to God serves within Amos 4:4-13 to emphasize the awesome prospect of meeting God and reinforce the need to prepare to meet God. Amos' use of the word "Almighty" as a divine name seems to supplement and reinforce this awesome description of God.

## **Stating the Significance of Important Words**

Finally, state the significance of the important word for the development of the message of the passage. The message of Amos 4:4-13 was that the Israelites should prepare to meet God because their prideful worship is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. Amos' use of the word "Almighty" as a divine name enhances this message by reminding the people of Israel that the LORD God has all the armies of heaven at his disposal. In this way the need for them to prepare to meet their God is stressed.

# **Lesson Eight**

## **Grammatical Emphases**

Grammatical emphases are the seventh type of detail that commonly occurs in the Bible. Grammatical emphases are instances when the grammar creates an emphasis that contributes to the development of the message of the passage. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek. These languages are capable of conveying a significant amount of emphasis through the grammatical forms and structures. Advanced knowledge of the biblical languages is essential for studying grammatical emphases. I again suggest that you take courses in biblical Hebrew and Greek as soon as possible. I recognize that at this time you are probably limited to English translations of the Bible. However, many of the emphases in the grammar of the original languages have been conveyed in translation in the English versions. Since you presumably have some familiarity with the ways that English grammar conveys emphasis, you are able to study these grammatical emphases to some degree. Below I relate the method for studying the details of the passage specifically to grammatical emphases. As I do so, I presuppose advanced knowledge of biblical Hebrew and Greek so that the method will be of service to you later when you have the required knowledge. However, I do try to give some direction to those who do not have this knowledge.

## **Identifying Grammatical Emphases that Need To Be Studied**

First, identify any grammatical emphases in the passage that need to be studied. If you read Hebrew and Greek, you probably identified some of these grammatical emphases when

you were preparing your translation (see Unit Three, Lesson Three, Translation and Text). If you do not read Hebrew and Greek, you can still identify grammatical emphases that are detectable in the English translation you are using. Be especially on the alert for expressive grammatical constructions, distinctive punctuation, and grammatically significant words. Amos 4:4-13 contains several grammatical emphases. An example that is discernible in both the Hebrew text and English translation is the use of the absolute word *cal*, translated “every,” which occurs twice in verse 6.

### **Researching Grammatical Emphases**

Second, research the uses of the grammatical form or structure. The best place to look for help with grammatical forms and structures is a reference grammar. The classical reference grammars for Hebrew and Greek are Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, E. Kautzsch, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press) and A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press). However, other simpler and easier to use grammars are also available. In addition, a lexicon can also be helpful at times when studying grammatically significant words. The standard lexicons are The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers) and A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). If you are working with an English version, an English grammar and dictionary can be very helpful for providing information about grammatical forms and structures and grammatically significant words. The standard lexicon reveals that the Hebrew word *cal* comes from a verb root that means “complete, perfect” and is used absolutely to mean “all” or “every” (The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 480). An English dictionary reveals that the word “every” is used in an equally absolute way.

### **Using What You Know to Understand Grammatical Emphases**

Third, use what you know about the passage to help you understand the grammatical form or structure and how it is used to contribute to the development of the message of the passage. The Hebrew word *cal*, translated “every,” occurs twice in verse 6 within Amos’ ironic rebuke of the Israelites for failing to heed God’s warning judgments in verses 6-11. The descriptions of God’s judgments of the people of Israel in the past are combined with the irony of the repeated refrain, “Yet you have not returned to me.” The word *cal*, “every” seems to be used in this context to emphasize the extent of God’s judgment by famine and intensify God’s rebuke of them for foolishly disregarding his warning discipline.

### **Stating the Significance of Grammatical Emphases**

Finally, state the significance of the grammatical emphasis for the development of the message of the passage. The message of Amos 4:4-13 was that the Israelites should prepare to meet God because their prideful worship is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. The use of the word *cal*, “every,” enhances this message by emphasizing the persistent unresponsiveness of the Israelites to God’s discipline and in-

tensifying the warning of God's displeasure. In this way the need for the Israelites to prepare to meet their God is stressed.

# Lesson Nine

## Consultation and Conclusion

An additional step in the method for studying the details of the passage is consultation and conclusion. Consultation refers to taking into consideration what biblical scholars have written in commentaries. These commentaries can often provide you with significant help with the details of the passage since understanding these details requires considerable background knowledge, expertise, and experience and the writers of these commentaries are usually eminently qualified. Consulting the commentaries can be valuable for supplementing your understanding where it is deficient and correcting your understanding when it is in error. The placement of consultation of commentaries at the end of the study of the details is intentional. Many students of the Bible equate Bible study with reading commentaries. The result is that rather than having a real encounter with God through the Bible, they read what someone else has to say about the Bible. Reading commentaries should never be equated with Bible study. Though it is more difficult to struggle through the methodology introduced in this guide, the results are well worth the effort. **Nonetheless, you may need to depend on commentaries a great deal for your study of the details at first because of the background that is required for studying these details.** Conclusion refers to the process of reviewing, reevaluating, and revising your findings until you are satisfied with the results. Conclusion is important because it forces you to integrate all that you understand about the passage and its details into a coherent whole that makes sense and is therefore more likely to be accurate.

## The Procedure Outlined

The following procedure can be used to help you benefit from what biblical scholars have written about the details of the passage and conclude your study of these details.

1. First, read the specific comments on the passage you are studying in the commentaries you have selected and make notes on information that they provide that either supplements or corrects your understanding of the details of the passage.
2. Second, review your own study of the details of the passage and reevaluate your conclusions based on the information provided by the commentaries. Make sure that you follow the guidelines for using commentaries (see Unit One, Lesson Four).
3. Finally, revise your study of the details of the passage and put it into its final form. Be careful to identify the source of any information that comes from a commentary using a parenthetical reference.

## The Procedure Modeled

The three commentaries I have selected for my study of Amos are *Amos*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 31 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987) by Douglas Stewart; Amos, a Commentary, *The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969) by James Luther Mays; and *Amos*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 19B (Broadman and

Holman Publishers, 1995) by Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page. I have incorporated the contributions of these commentaries into my analysis of the details of Amos 4:4-13 in the final lesson of this unit.

# Lesson Ten

## The Method Modeled

In previous lessons I provided guidance for studying seven common kinds of details found in the Bible and gave examples to illustrate how to study these details. However, this approach is somewhat misleading. It gives the impression that these seven common kinds of details should be used as a checklist for identifying details and that these details should be studied by kind—identifying and studying historical allusions, then literary quotations and allusions, etc. There are several reasons why I do not recommend this approach. First, the Bible contains many more kinds of details than those that I have introduced. Therefore, if you use these kinds of details as a checklist you will probably fail to consider some important details. Instead, I encourage you to study whatever details are important whether or not they can be classified as one of these common kinds of details. Second, studying the details by kind removes the details from their context. As a result you may encounter difficulty relating what they know about the passage to your understanding of the details. Instead, I urge you to study the details in the order that they occur within the passage. Third, details often come in clusters rather than standing alone. Consequently, attempting to study a detail apart from related details will lead to confusion. Instead, I encourage you to study details in the natural clusters within which they occur. Below I summarize my study of the details of Amos 4:4-13 as a model for you to follow. I have also incorporated the insights of commentaries wherever they have provided significant help and carefully identified the source.

### **Go to Bethel and Sin . . .**

Amos begins his call of the Israelites to worship in the first half of verse 4, “Go to Bethel and sin; to Gilgal (and) multiply sin.” This detail cluster combines sarcasm, geographical references, and important words. Sarcasm employs statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a humorous or derisive intent. In this context Amos is clearly being derisive. Bethel and Gilgal were places where God had revealed himself in Israel’s history and important centers of the worship for the people of Israel. Amos employs these geographical references to make the connection with the worship of the Israelites. The unacceptability of their worship is indicated by the word “sin.” Through sarcastically calling the people of Israel to worship at Bethel and Gilgal, Amos was dramatically identifying their worship at these religious centers as sin and expressing God’s displeasure with their worship. In this way Amos was undermining their religious pride and stressing their need to prepare to meet God.

### **Bring Your Sacrifices every morning . . .**

Amos continues his call of the Israelites to worship in the second half of verse 4 and the first line of verse 5, “Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every third day. Burn that which is leavened, a thanksgiving.” This detail cluster combines sarcasm and liter-

ary allusions. Sarcasm employs statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a humorous or derisive intent. In this context Amos is clearly being derisive. Numbers 28:3 requires that the people of Israel offer two lambs a year old without defect every day as a regular burnt offering. Deuteronomy 14:28 requires that the people of Israel bring their tithes of produce every three years. Leviticus 7:13 requires that the people of Israel present an offering with cakes of bread made with yeast along with their fellowship offering of thanksgiving. Amos employs these literary allusions to make the connection with the worship of the Israelites. Amos has already identified the worship of the Israelites as sin in the first half of verse 4. Through sarcastically calling the Israelites to bring their sacrifices, give their tithes, and burn their leavened bread, Amos was dramatically identifying their worship practices as sin and expressing God's displeasure with their worship. In this way Amos was undermining their religious pride and stressing their need to prepare to meet God.

### **Announce freewill offerings . . .**

Amos concludes his call of the Israelites to worship in the second half of verse 5, “and announce freewill offerings—proclaim them, sons of Israel, for this is what you love to do,” declares the Sovereign LORD.” This detail cluster combines sarcasm and the use of significant words. Sarcasm employs statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a humorous or derisive intent. In this context Amos is clearly being derisive. The words “announce” and “proclaim” in the context clearly refer to the Israelites’ practice of declaring aloud their participation in worship. Rather than going to Bethel and Gilgal to offer their sacrifices, give their tithes, and present their thanksgiving and freewill offerings as expressions of their devotion to God, the Israelites were worshiping because of their desire to impress others with their piety. Their misplaced desire in worship is made clear with the explanation, “for this is what you love to do.” Through sarcastically calling the Israelites to announce and declare their worship, Amos was dramatically identifying their religious pride as sin and expressing God's displeasure with their worship. In this way Amos was undermining their religious pride and stressing their need to prepare to meet God.

### **I Gave You Clean Teeth . . .**

Amos alludes to several judgments that God had brought against the Israelites in verses 6-11. I have chosen to deal with these as a detail cluster because all the details serve a similar function. Generally, this cluster of allusions to God's judgments in the past seems to stress the variety and severity of God's judgments. The variety of God's judgments is stressed by the diverse judgments described, including famine (verse 6), drought (verses 7-8), pestilence (verse 9), plague and warfare (verse 10), and catastrophe (verse 11). The severity of the judgments is stressed at numerous points. The famines were so severe that the Israelites had no need to brush their teeth (verse 6). The droughts were so severe that even when the Israelites traveled to a city that had water they couldn't get enough to satisfy them (verse 8). The plagues were so severe that they are compared to the plagues with which God struck Egypt as described in Exodus 7-11 (verse 10a). The warfare was so severe that the stench of the rotting bodies was stifling (verse 10b). The catastrophes that struck some Israelites were so severe that they are compared to the utter devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah as described in Genesis 19 (verse 11a). Amos concludes his emphasis on the severity of God's judgments with a simile, “You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire.” The Israelites had come so close to being consumed by God's judgment that they had already begun to burn. Through stressing the variety and severity of God's judgments, Amos emphasizes that

God had done everything he could to warn the Israelites. Therefore, they had no excuse for their failure to respond.

### **Yet you have not returned to me . . .**

Amos intertwines a refrain within his allusions to God's judgments in verses 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11, "'Yet you have not returned to me,' declares the LORD." This refrain is repeated five times for emphasis. This refrain is loaded with irony. Irony describes a circumstance or result that is the opposite of what one might expect, frequently to draw attention to its remarkableness, appropriateness, or inappropriateness. In this context Amos is clearly drawing attention to the remarkable inappropriateness of the Israelites' failure to heed God's warning judgments. God had done everything he could do to warn the Israelites through his diverse and severe judgments. They should have heeded his warning. Through this rebuking refrain, Amos was forcing the Israelites to recognize the inappropriateness of their unresponsiveness to God's discipline. In this way Amos was undermining their complacency and stressing their need to prepare to meet God.

### **Therefore, This Is What I Will Do . . .**

Amos announces God's judgment against the proud, complacent, and unresponsive Israelites in verse 12a, "Therefore, this is what I will do to you, Israel." However, it is uncertain what Amos was referring to with these words. Some commentators think that a more specific announcement of judgment has been lost (Mays, p. 80). Stewart believes that the announcement of judgment refers back to the preceding descriptions of judgment that would be unleashed together without restraint (Stewart, 339). Another possibility is that Amos was pointing to some catastrophe as he was delivering this prophetic message as an illustration of God's judgment. Amos might even be using a rhetorical figure of speech known as *aposiopesis* or *sudden silence*, which is commonly used in a threatening way (see E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, 151). Whatever Amos is referring to, he announces God's judgment to reinforce the need to obey the command that follows.

### **Prepare To Meet Your God . . .**

Amos reinforces the warning of God's judgment and commands the Israelites in verse 12b, "and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, Israel." Implied within the command is a call to repent of those sins that have previously been identified—religious pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to God's warning judgments. In addition, the command contains a warning that is developed in the subsequent verse. This warning is ironic. Irony describes a circumstance or result that is the opposite of what one might expect, frequently to draw attention to its remarkableness, appropriateness, or inappropriateness. The Israelites have been going to their centers of worship in Bethel and Gilgal. The correct reason for doing so would be to meet God in worship and to hear him speak. However, the Israelites had been worshiping to impress others with their piety and ignoring God's attempts to get their attention. Nonetheless, Amos warns that they would meet God anyway, but in judgment. It is remarkably appropriate that those who went to God for the wrong reasons would still meet him in judgment. Through this command, Amos was calling the Israelites to repent of their religious pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to God's discipline and reinforcing the need for them to repent by warning them of the danger of meeting God.



## He Who Forms the Mountains . . .

Amos concludes with a hymn of praise to God that reinforces his command to prepare to meet God in verse 13. I have chosen to deal with this hymn as a detail cluster because all the details serve a similar function. Most of the details accentuate the awesome majesty and power of God as the sovereign Lord of creation. God is the one who “forms the mountains,” “creates the wind,” “turns dawn to darkness,” and “treads the high places of the earth.” Amos employs an illustrative figure known as anthropomorphism in the last of these lines. Anthropomorphism is a type of metaphor that illustrates the divine nature by describing God in human terms. The metaphor exalts God literally by elevating him above everything on earth. A distinct element of the hymn is in the third line, “and reveals his thoughts to man.” This line serves in this context to emphasize that people are without excuse since God reveals his thoughts. The final line of the hymn is climactic, “The LORD God Almighty is his name.” The Hebrew word translated “Almighty” literally means “of hosts” and emphasizes the unlimited power at God’s disposal as the commander in chief of all the heavenly host. Through this hymn Amos stresses the frightening prospect of meeting the LORD God Almighty who is the sovereign Lord of creation for those who have violated his revealed will.

# Unit Review

1. List the four basic steps toward determining the significance of the details in a biblical passage.
2. Name seven common types of detail that are found in the Bible.
3. What are historical allusions?
4. Name three sources for researching the background of historical allusions.
5. What are literary quotations and allusions?
6. Name two study Bible tools for locating the source of biblical quotations and allusions.
7. What are geographical references?
8. Name three sources for researching the background of geographical references.
9. What are sociological features?
10. Name two sources for researching the background of sociological features.
11. What are illustrative and rhetorical figures of speech?
12. Identify two keys for identifying figures of speech.
13. What are important words?
14. List five guidelines for doing word studies.
15. Name three sources for researching the meanings and uses of words.
16. What are grammatical emphases?
17. Name three things for which you need to be especially alert when considering grammatical emphases.

# Unit Practice

Apply the method introduced and illustrated in this unit to the details of Philippians 1:27-30. Limit your study to three details or detail clusters. Make sure you identify the detail, research the background and nature of the detail, use what you know to help you under-

stand the detail, and state the significance of the detail. Rather than including a separate section on the consultation of commentaries, incorporate the significant information from commentaries into your studies of the details wherever appropriate. Be careful to identify your sources using parenthetical references and include a list of sources at the end.

## Unit Reinforcement

Studying the details of a passage is not easy and you have probably just made your first attempt. Therefore, I have included my own study of the details of Philippians 1:27-30 in Appendix C. Examine this study carefully and evaluate your own work constructively. Allow yourself to be encouraged by that which you did well and learn from your mistakes. **Do not read my study until after you have completed your own study of the details of Philippians 1:27-30.**

# Unit Five

## APPLYING THE MESSAGE

The task of biblical interpretation is not complete once you have studied the passage and determined its message in its original historical context. Application of the message of the passage to specific situations in the modern context is also necessary. Application refers to the task of examining the message of a biblical passage that was addressed to an ancient people and situation and determining its significance for modern people and situations. Applying the message of the Bible to modern people and situations can be difficult and the approaches that are employed are sometimes inadequate. Therefore, I have included lessons one and two in this unit to introduce the challenge and potential of applying the biblical message and warn about some inadequate approaches. Subsequent lessons introduce a basic method and develop procedures for applying the message of the Bible to modern situations. In these lessons I will also illustrate this method and procedures using Amos 4:4-13. You will be given opportunities to practice the method and procedures as you work through these lessons and a basis for evaluating and learning from your practice at the end of the unit. I have also included a lesson illustrating this method on two challenging passages since neither Amos 4:4-13 or Philippians 1:27-30 are difficult to apply. A review is also included at the end of the unit to encourage you to master the method and procedures.

## Lesson One

### The Challenge and Potential

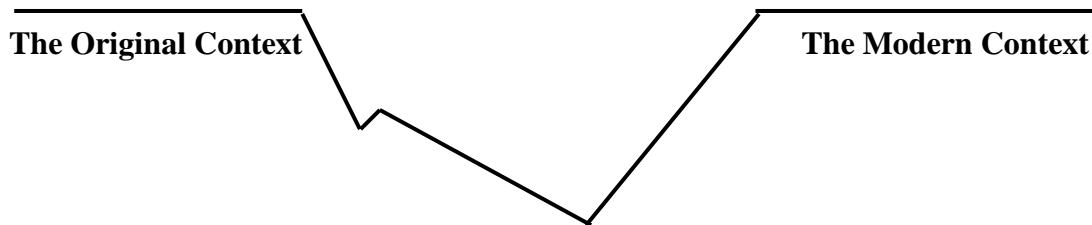
Difficulties are occasionally encountered that present a real challenge for the application of the message of a passage to modern people and situations. Nonetheless, the message of most passages in the Bible can be readily applied to modern people and situations with little or no adjustment and even the messages of most difficult passages can be applied to modern people and situations with some adjustment. In this lesson I introduce the challenge of applying the message of the Bible because of the Contextual Gap and affirm the potential for applying the message of the Bible to the modern situation because of authority, reliability, and relevance of the Bible.

### The Contextual Gap

Some very real difficulties are sometimes encountered when applying the biblical message to modern people and situations. The Bible sometimes speaks to issues that have no clear parallel in the modern context. The Bible sometimes fails to directly address issues that are of vital concern in the modern context. The Bible sometimes seems to presuppose as true what is regarded as mistaken in the modern context. The Bible sometimes uses arguments that seem unconvincing in the modern context. The Bible sometimes commends practices that seem inappropriate in the modern context. The Bible sometimes seems unclear or inconsistent on particular issues. The problems encountered when applying the Bible to the modern situation sometimes seem like a great chasm that hinders us from hearing God speak through the Bible today. This chasm between the original context and the contemporary con-

text can appropriately be called the Contextual Gap. If we are to apply the message of biblical passages that have contextualized elements then we must bridge the Contextual Gap between the original place, time, culture, and situation and modern people and their contexts.

### **The Contextual Gap**



### **The Authority, Reliability and Relevance of the Bible**

The difficulties described above may seem very disturbing. Acknowledging some of these difficulties may seem to call into question the authority and reliability as well as the relevance of the Bible. However, it is important to acknowledge these difficulties so that they can be overcome. In addition, these difficulties are really no threat when the nature of the Bible as divine communication to humans is rightly understood. God speaks through the Bible to humans. Humans have some capacity to hear God speak, but this capacity is limited because they are finite, fallen, and bound to specific social and historical contexts. The Bible sometimes exhibits some contextualized elements because it has been accommodated to finite, fallen, and contextually bound humans so that they can hear God speak.

Nonetheless, God is still the one who speaks through the Bible. God is absolute truth. The Bible through which God speaks reflects his character and will. Therefore, the message of the Bible is authoritative and reliable. The contextualized elements should be regarded as yet another expression of God's grace in revealing himself in ways that humans can understand. Just like Jesus revealed God in the flesh as his incarnate Word, the Bible reveals God in a document as his written Word. In a similar way to Jesus, who shared God's divine nature as his incarnate Word, the Bible shares God's divine nature as his written Word. The Contextual Gap can be crossed because the Bible is authoritative and reliable.

In addition, there are two factors that all humans of every age in history and every society in the world share. These factors unite us with those who were originally addressed by God's revelation in the Bible. First, all humans share the same fallen condition and are, therefore, subject to the same struggles. The form of the struggle might be different in some ways in diverse historical contexts and situations, but the essential struggle remains the same. Second, God deals with humanity in a relatively consistent fashion throughout the different epochs of history, within various cultural contexts, and in response to specific situations. These factors make the message of the Bible relevant for people of every age and society, including ours. The Contextual Gap can be crossed because humans of every age and culture share the same condition and similar struggles and God deals with them consistently.

# Lesson Two

## Some Inadequate Approaches

Some inadequate approaches are sometimes used to apply the message of the Bible to modern people and situations. These approaches are inadequate either because they fail to acknowledge or deal adequately with the contextualized nature of the Bible or because they do not fully accept the relevance or submit to the authority of the biblical message. In this lesson I introduce and caution you against the naïve approach, the imaginative approach the pessimistic approach, and the biased approach.

### The Naïve Approach

The first inadequate approach to applying the biblical message is the naïve approach. Those who use the naïve approach assume that the message of the Bible is relevant and authoritative for all times and apply it directly to modern people and situations. Though this method sounds pious, it ignores the very real difficulties that sometimes occur when applying the message of the Bible because of its contextualized nature. In most cases when contextualized elements within the passage are minimal, this approach poses no problem. However, if there are significant contextualized elements within the passage, the results can be disastrous. Those who use the naïve approach to application walk to the edge of the Contextual Gap without being aware of the danger and step into the void.

### The Imaginative Approach

The second inadequate approach to applying the biblical message is the imaginative approach. Those who use the imaginative approach normally assume the message of the Bible is relevant, but recognize the difficulties of applying the message of the Bible directly. Therefore, they sometimes choose fantastic means to overcome these problems like allegorizing. Through this approach the elements of biblical stories are given a deeper spiritual significance that allows for considerable flexibility in applying the message to new situations. However, there is often very little relationship between what the passage actually says and the message that it is attributed to it. Those who use the imaginative approach find some means to catapult themselves across the Contextual Gap without considering the catastrophic impact with hard ground even if they reach the other side.

### The Pessimistic Approach

The third inadequate approach to applying the biblical message is the pessimistic approach. Those who use the pessimistic approach are very aware of the contextualized nature of the Bible and this awareness leads them to be extremely pessimistic about the relevance for the biblical message for modern people and situations. The biblical message is relegated to the past and little confidence is placed in its relevance for today. As a result, little effort is expended on applying the message to today. Those who use the pessimistic method look across the Contextual Gap at the biblical message from the modern context where they can admire it from afar as a historical artifact, but keep it at a distance to safely avoid its demands.

## The Biased Approach

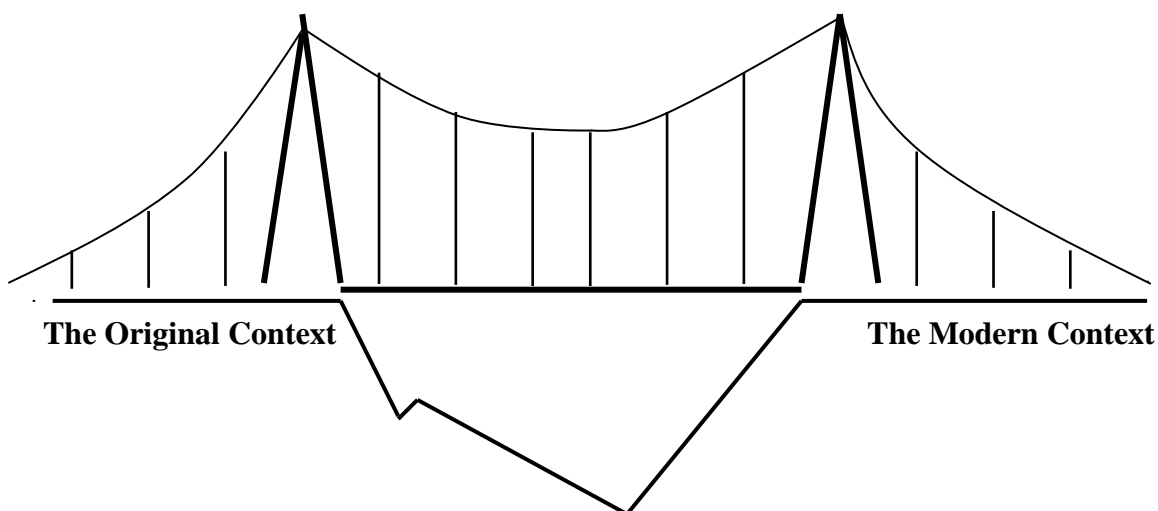
The fourth inadequate approach to applying the biblical message is the biased approach. Those who use the biased approach normally acknowledge the reliability and relevance of the biblical message. However, they do not always submit to what God has said. Instead, they filter the significance of the biblical message through their own theological or philosophical perspective. Of course there is a sense in which this approach is unavoidable. What we already know, or think we know, is a necessary framework for understanding new information. However, problems arise when the biblical message is distorted by the filter or contorted to fit the framework. The biblical message should be the basis for transforming our theology or philosophy, not the reverse. Those who use the biased approach look across the Contextual Gap at the biblical message from the contemporary context and use it to confirm their prejudices while keeping it at a distance so that they can ignore where it challenges their perspective.

# Lesson Three

## A Basic Method

Instead of using one of these inadequate approaches, I advise you to use an approach to applying the biblical message that deals adequately with the contextualized nature of the Bible and fully accepts the authority and relevance of the biblical message. In this lesson I introduce a basic method for applying the message of the Bible to contemporary situations. This method consists of four steps. First, you must be certain of the message of the passage in its original context before you try to apply the message to the contemporary situation. Second, you must establish a correspondence between the original and modern contexts as a basis for applying the message of the passage to the contemporary situation. Third, you must distinguish anything in the passage that is contextualized so that these contextualized elements can be considered when applying the message of the passage to the contemporary situation. Finally, you must adjust your statement of the message of the passage in the original context where necessary so that it is relevant for the contemporary situation.

### Bridging the Contextual Gap



In the lessons that follow, I furnish procedures for completing each of these steps, comparing the task of applying the message of the Bible to building a suspension bridge over the Contextual Gap. Being certain of the message is the tower on the original context side of the Contextual Gap that provides one of the anchors for the suspension bridge. Establishing a correspondence between the original and modern situations is the tower on the modern context side of the Contextual Gap that provides the other anchor for the suspension bridge. Distinguishing the contextualized elements within the passage is the cable network that is anchored to the two towers and supports the roadbed of the suspension bridge across the Contextual Gap. Adjusting the message of the passage for a new context is the roadbed of the suspension bridge across the Contextual Gap that is supported by the cable network and anchored by the two towers.

# Lesson Four

## Being Certain of the Message

The first step toward bridging the Contextual Gap is to be sure that you know the message of the passage in its original context. In this lesson I introduce this step of being certain of the message; outline the procedure for being certain of the message; illustrate the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Being certain of the message is making sure you know the message of the passage in its original context before applying the message to the modern context. You should not attempt to apply the message of the passage to the modern context if you are unsure of the message of the passage in its original context or your statement of that message does not reflect the actual message of the passage in its original context. How can you apply the message when you don't know the message? Applying a message you don't understand simply does not make sense! You must either clarify your understanding of the message or abandon your attempt to apply the message to the modern situation. Being certain of the message is the tower on the original context side of the Contextual Gap that provides one of the anchors for the suspension bridge.

### The Procedure Outlined

The following procedure can be used to help you be certain of the message of the passage in its original context. As you work through this procedure it may be necessary for you to refine your statement of the message or conclude that you are not certain about the message and abandon your attempt to apply it.

1. First, reexamine your statement of the message of the passage in its original context from the perspective of situation and purpose (see your study of Philippians 1:27-30 under Situation and Purpose). Does your statement of the message address that situation and accomplish that purpose?
2. Second, reexamine your statement of the message from the perspective of literary context and role (see your study of Philippians 1:27-30 under Literary Context and Role). Is your statement of the message consistent with the role of the passage within the strategy of the book?

3. Third, reexamine your statement of the message from the perspective of form and function (see your study of Philippians 1:27-30 under Form and Function). Is your statement of the message consistent with the nature of the passage and how it works to communicate a message?
4. Fourth, reexamine your statement of the message from the perspective of strategy and structure (see your study of Philippians 1:27-30 under Strategy and Structure). Does your statement of the message include all of the important points that are found in the outline? Does your statement of the message include any points that are not found in the outline?
5. Finally, reexamine your statement of the message from the perspective of the consultation of commentaries. Do the commentators disagree with you about the message of the passage? Do the commentators disagree with one another about the message of the passage?

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

My statement of the message of Amos 4:4-13 is that the Israelites should prepare to meet God because their prideful worship is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. This statement of the message is consistent with what I discovered about situation and purpose, literary context and role, form and function, and strategy and structure. In addition, even though there is some dispute among the commentators about specifics, this statement of the message is generally consistent with what most commentators regard as the basic message of this passage.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30.

# Lesson Five

## **Establishing Correspondence**

The second step toward bridging the Contextual Gap is to establish a correspondence between the original and modern contexts. In this lesson I introduce this step of establishing correspondence; outline the procedure for establishing correspondence; illustrate the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Establishing correspondence is identifying situations in the modern context that are similar enough to the original context to provide a basis for the application of the message. The commonalities that unite people of different societies and epochs of human history and God's consistency in dealing with all people throughout history are the bases for applying what God has revealed to Israel and the early church to modern people and situations. If there is no correspondence between the original and modern situations, then the message is applied to people and situations it was never intended to address. The result is a distorted understanding of the message of the passage for today. Therefore, it is essential that a correspondence be established between then and now. Establishing a correspondence between the original



and modern situations is the tower on the modern context side of the Contextual Gap that provides the other anchor for the suspension bridge.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you establish a correspondence between situations in the original and modern contexts.

1. First, review your study of the situation and purpose of the passage so that you are familiar with the situation that was addressed by the passage in its original context (see your study of Philippians 1:27-30 under Situation and Purpose).
2. Second, examine the modern context and try to identify situations that correspond to the situation in the original context. These situations do not need to correspond exactly. However, the situations need to be sufficiently similar to provide a firm foundation for application. When a suspension bridge is built, the anchoring towers are normally placed as near to one another as the terrain allows so that the bridge has the firmest possible foundation. Similarly, the closer the correspondence between the original and modern situations, the firmer the foundation for application.
3. Finally, describe the situation in the modern context to which you want to apply the message of the passage and justify the application of the message of the passage to that situation based on the correspondence between the original and modern situations.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

In my study of the situation and purpose of Amos 4:4-13 I concluded that this passage seems to be addressed to Israelites who were proud of their religion, which led them to complacency and unresponsiveness to God's discipline. I recognize that Christians today sometimes become proud of their religion and this often leads them to complacency and unresponsiveness to God's discipline. Therefore, I feel justified in applying the message of Amos 4:4-13 to Christians today who are proud of their religion and complacent and unresponsive as a result because of the correspondence between them and the Israelites that Amos addressed.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30.

# **Lesson Six**

## **Distinguishing the Contextualized**

The third step toward bridging the Contextual Gap is to distinguish anything in the passage that is contextualized. In this lesson I introduce this step of distinguishing the contextualized; outline the procedure for distinguishing the contextualized; illustrate the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Distinguishing the contextualized is identifying anything in the message that may need to be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern context. The differences between the original context and the modern context sometimes result in contextualized elements within the passage and its message. If these contextualized elements are ignored you may confer divine authority in the modern context on that which was only relevant in the original context. Nonetheless, you should begin with the assumption that the great majority of what is found in the Bible is eternally valid. Otherwise you may conclude that part of the eternally valid message of the biblical passage is limited to the original context. Distinguishing the contextualized elements within the passage involves some subjectivity. Therefore, you should pray for God's guidance and be humble about your conclusions. Distinguishing the contextualized elements within the passage is the cable network that is anchored to the two towers and supports the roadbed of the suspension bridge across the Contextual Gap.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you distinguish the contextualized elements within the passage and its message.

1. First, consider the distinctiveness of the people addressed by the passage. The message of the passage is more likely to be eternally valid to the degree that the situation of those originally addressed by the passage is common to people of different historical epochs and cultures. The message of the passage is more likely to be contextually limited to the degree that the situation of those addressed by the passage is unique to their time and culture.
2. Second, consider the nature of the material found in the passage. That which is central to the message of the passage is more likely to be eternally valid, whereas that which supports the message in some cases may have been accommodated to the perceptions and practices of the original recipients. Behavioral principles and ideals are more likely to be eternally valid, whereas specific prescription in some cases may be limited to the specific context of the original recipients.
3. Third, consider the practical difficulties of an infinite God, communicating divine truth, to limited humans. Was it necessary for God to accommodate the material in the passage to the presuppositions and practices of those he was addressing so that they could understand him or for the sake of his priorities? Considering the relationship of the material found in the passage to the perceptions and practices of the original recipients may help you distinguish these contextualized elements. That which is contrary to their perceptions and practices is more likely to be eternally valid, whereas that which corresponds to their perceptions and practices may be an accommodation and therefore contextually limited.
4. Fourth, consider what God has revealed in the rest of Scripture. That which is consistently affirmed throughout the Bible is likely to be eternally valid. However, when the teaching of the Bible seems to be inconsistent it is more likely that contextual factors are involved. General priority should be given to that which is revealed later, especially the New Testament as opposed to the Old Testament, and that which is prevalent rather than that which is obscure.
5. Finally, make a list of the contextualized elements of the passage that you are able to identify so that you can consider these when adjusting the message of the passage to a new context.

## **The Procedure Illustrated**

Amos 4:4-13 does seem to contain some contextualized elements. Though there is considerable correspondence between the situation of those Amos addressed in the passage and Christians today, they were Israelites and their prideful religious observances and experience of specific disciplinary judgments make them unique to a degree. The descriptions of their specific religious observances and disciplinary judgments are not central to the message of the passage either. A command is found within the passage, "Prepare to meet your God." However, it is so general that it does not present any major problems for application. There does not seem to be any accommodation of the material in the passage to the presuppositions and practices of those addressed. The Bible consistently affirms that religious pride and unresponsiveness to God's discipline displeases God and results in judgment. Therefore, only the impact of the specific religious practices and disciplinary judgments needs to be considered when adjusting the message of the passage to a new context.

## **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to Philippians 1:27-30.

# **Lesson Seven**

## **Adjusting the Message**

The final step toward bridging the Contextual Gap is to adjust the message of the passage where necessary so that it is suitable for the new context to which it is applied. In this lesson I introduce this step of adjusting the message; outline the procedure for adjusting the message; illustrate the procedure on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on Philippians 1:27-30.

Adjusting the message is making the changes to the message required when applying it to the modern context. The message of the passage for a specific situation in the modern context is the goal of application and self-evidently important. Be careful to consider the implications of the message of the passage for your own life as well as for others. Adjusting the message of the passage to a new context involves some subjectivity. Therefore, you should pray for God's guidance and be humble about your conclusions. Adjusting the message of the passage for a new context is the roadbed of the suspension bridge across the Contextual Gap that is supported by the cable network and anchored by the two towers.

## **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you adjust the message of the passage for a specific situation in the modern context.

1. First, review your statement of the message of the passage in the original context.
2. Second, consider the impact that the contextualized elements of the passage that you have identified have had on that statement of the message.
3. Third, make the adjustments to the message of the passage that are required because of these contextualized elements and the new context to which it is applied. That

which is unique to the people addressed may need to be applied with reserve, related to contextual equivalents, or eliminated altogether from the statement of the message. That which is not central to the message of the passage can be eliminated in most cases when it appears to be an accommodation to the presuppositions or practices of those addressed by the passage in the original context. Specific commands and prohibitions may either need to be generalized or related to contextually equivalent responses. That which is inconsistent with the rest of Scripture may need to be updated based on subsequent biblical revelation or qualified based on the predominant teaching of the Bible.

4. Fourth, review your adjusted statement of the message of the passage and make sure that it clearly expresses the message of the passage for the new context.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

My statement of the message of Amos 4:4-13 is that the Israelites should prepare to meet God because their prideful worship is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. The specific religious practices and disciplinary judgments do not impact this statement of the message since these details have already been eliminated for the sake of a clear statement of the message in the original context. However, those addressed by the passage are sufficiently unique that some reserve should be expressed in the statement of the message for the modern context. My statement of the message of Amos 4:4-13 for the modern context is that Christians should prepare to meet God if they are proud of their worship and unresponsive to God's discipline because their religious pride is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they may meet God in judgment; and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. This statement seems to express well the message of the passage for the modern context.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to your statement of the message of Philippians 1:27-30.

# **Lesson Eight**

## **Applying Challenging Passages**

Admittedly, the contextualized elements within Amos 4:4-13 and Philippians 1:27-30 are minimal. Therefore, the messages of these passages are relatively easy to apply to the modern situation. You will undoubtedly encounter other passages that contain severe tensions between the original and modern contexts. Applying the messages of these passages will be much more challenging. In this lesson I provide some examples of applying the message of some highly contextualized passages as a model. I have included my application of one passage from the Old Testament—Joshua 14:1-15—and one passage from the New Testament—Titus 2:9-10.

## **Joshua 14:1-15**

My statement of the message of Joshua 14:1-15 in its original context is that God's people should seize the land like Caleb because God has given the Israelites the land of Canaan and God will strengthen them, help them to defeat the inhabitants of the land in battle, and give them the land that he promised them like he did for Caleb. This statement of the message is consistent with what I discovered about the situation and purpose, literary context and role, form and function, and strategy and structure of Joshua 14:1-15.

Joshua 14:1-15 seems to be addressed to a general situation in which the Israelites were still faced with the challenge of defeating the armies of Canaan, capturing the land God promised them, and becoming a nation that would bring glory to God. Today Christians are also faced with the challenge of fulfilling God's purpose and realizing his promises in spite of opposition.

However, it is apparent that the message of this passage can not be literally applied to Christians. How can Christians today claim and seize the land of Canaan? The situation of Israel was significantly different than the situation of the church today. At that time God was working through the nation of Israel. He gave Israel the land of Canaan and sought to establish it as a nation that would bring him glory among all nations of the world. Today God is working through the church, which is composed of people from many nations. God seeks to establish it as a people that will bring him glory among all the peoples of the world. In addition, even though the New Testament sometimes uses analogies of warfare, it clearly reveals that the church is not to advance the gospel through military conquest.

As a result, my statement of the message of the passage in its original context must be adjusted at the points where it describes the promise and purpose of God and the means of attaining that promise and purpose if it is to be relevant for the modern context. My statement of the message of Joshua 14:1-15 for the modern context is that Christians should proclaim the gospel because this is God's purpose for them and God will strengthen them, help them to overcome the opposition they encounter, and enable them to realize his purpose and promise like Caleb.

## **Titus 2:9-10**

My statement of the message of Titus 2:9-10 in its original context is that Christian slaves should be subject to their masters, try to please them, not talk back to them, not steal from them, but show that they can be trusted, so that the gospel of salvation will be more attractive. This statement of the message is consistent with what I discovered about the situation and purpose, literary context and role, form and function, and strategy and structure of Titus 2:8-9.

Titus 2:8-9 seems to be addressed to a situation in which Christian slaves were prone to temptations common to slaves—disrespect for their masters, rebellion against their burden, and theft. As a result of their anti-social and evil behavior people were rejecting the gospel. Today, workers who are Christians are also prone to the temptations of disrespect, rebellion, and theft and as a result of their behavior people reject the gospel.

However, the message of the passage is difficult to apply directly to Christians today. The institution of slavery is nearly eradicated and few Christians would approve its revival. Yet this passage seems to condone the institution of slavery and has been used by Christians in the past as a justification for keeping slaves. The situation in the original context is quite distinct from the situation in the modern context. In the original context slavery was an accepted social institution. Failing to adhere to the accepted social practice with regard to slavery by Christians would result in the rejection of the gospel. In the modern context the institution of slavery is vehemently rejected by society. Condoning slavery in the modern context would result in the rejection of the gospel. It seems likely that this passage is simply an accommodation of God to human sin for the sake of his priorities. In fact, this passage seems to provide some insight into the priority of God—that the gospel of salvation be made attractive. Though many passages in both the Old and New Testament seem to accept slavery as an established social institution, others teach principles that undermine the institution of slavery.

As a result, my statement of the message of Titus 2:9-10 in its original context must be adjusted at the points where it specifically addresses slaves and is related to masters. My statement of the message of Titus 2:9-10 in the modern context is that workers who are Christians should be subject to their bosses, try to please them, not talk back to them, not steal from them, but show that they can be trusted, so that the gospel of salvation will be more attractive.

## Unit Review

1. What are some of the difficulties encountered when applying the message of the Bible?
2. How can those difficulties be reconciled with an understanding of the Bible as the authoritative word of God?
3. What factors make it possible to apply the message of the Bible to modern people and situations?
4. Name four inadequate approaches to applying the message of the Bible and describe their weaknesses.
5. List the four steps of applying the message of a passage to the modern context.
6. Define what being certain of the message means. Summarize the procedure for confirming the validity of the statement of the message of a passage in its original context.
7. Define what establishing a correspondence means. Summarize the procedure for establishing correspondence between the original and modern situations.
8. Define what distinguishing the contextualized means. Summarize the procedure for distinguishing the contextualized elements of a passage.
9. Define what adjusting the message means. Summarize the procedure for adjusting the message of a passage to new situations in the modern context.

# Unit Practice

Write an application of the message of Philippians 1:27-30. Make sure that are certain about the message in the original context, establish correspondence between the original and modern context, distinguishing anything within the message that is contextualized, and make the adjustments required by changing contexts. Turn the completed application into your instructor.

# Unit Reinforcement

Applying the message of a biblical passage is not easy and you have probably just made your first attempt. Therefore, I have included my own application of the message of Philippians 1:27-30 in Appendix D. Examine this application carefully and evaluate your own work constructively. Allow yourself to be encouraged by that which you did well and learn from your mistakes. **Do not read my application until after you have completed your own application of the message of Philippians 1:27-30.**

# Unit Six

## COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE

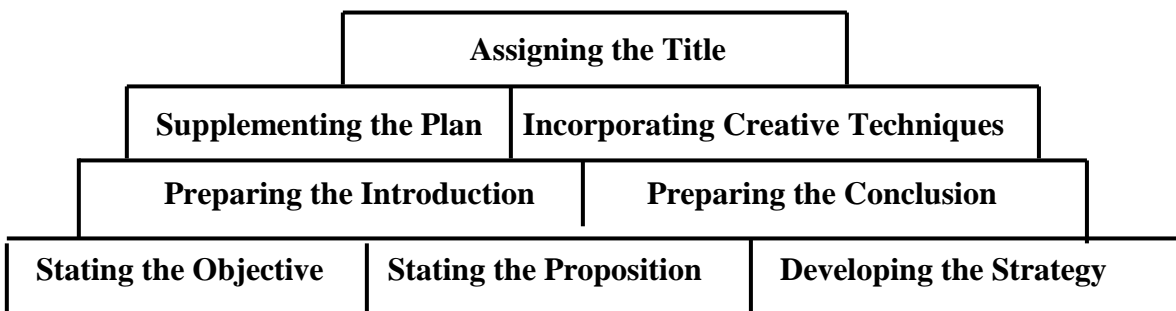
The task of biblical interpretation is still not complete once you have applied the message of the passage to a situation in the modern context. Whether or not you are a professional minister, God has given you the responsibility of communicating the biblical message to others. There are many opportunities for communicating the biblical message, but proclamation and teaching are the most basic opportunities and the methods used to prepare sermons and Bible studies can be adapted for other opportunities such as evangelism, discipleship, and counseling. Sermons and Bible studies come in a variety of forms, predominantly expository and topical. I concentrate in this unit on expository sermons and Bible studies because they are the most basic and promote a close adherence to the biblical message. Expository sermons and Bible studies are based on a passage, which provides the basis for the purpose, message, and development of the sermon or Bible study. In this unit I introduce a method and procedures for building expository sermons and Bible studies and model this method on Amos 4:4-13. You will be given opportunities to practice the method and procedures as you work through the lessons and a basis for evaluating and learning from your practice at the end of the unit. A review is also included at the end of the unit to encourage you to master the method and procedures.

## Lesson One

### A Basic Method

The task of preparing an expository sermon or Bible study can be compared to using blocks to construct a building. In this lesson I introduce a basic method for building an expository sermon or Bible study. This method consists of eight building blocks: stating the objective, stating the proposition, developing the strategy, preparing the introduction, preparing the conclusion, supplementing the plan, incorporating creative techniques, and assigning the title. In addition, you must assemble these building blocks into a suitable structure. In the lessons that follow I develop this method and furnish procedures for using these building blocks to construct the plan of an expository sermon or Bible study.

#### The Building Blocks of a Sermon or Bible Study





# Lesson Two

## Stating the Objective

The first building block in an expository sermon or Bible study is stating the objective. In this lesson I introduce this building block; outline the procedure for stating the objective; illustrate the procedure on my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

The objective is a brief statement of the response you are seeking in the congregation or class members. An objective is important because it focuses your aim on one target. Too often preachers and teachers have so many targets they are trying to hit that they end up not hitting anything. If you concentrate on one target, however, the likelihood is increased that you will accomplish what you desire.

### The Procedure Outlined

The following procedure can be used to help you state the objective of your sermon or Bible study.

1. First, review your description of the situation in the modern context to which you applied the passage because that is the situation you should address with your sermon or Bible study (see your application of the message of Philippians 1:27-30 under Establishing Correspondence). Addressing a situation that corresponds to the situation addressed by the passage in the original context will insure that your sermon or Bible study communicates God's message to the right people. If you decide to change or specify the situation in the modern context, you should work your way through the application methodology again.
2. Second, review your study of the purpose of the passage in its original context (see your study of Philippians 1:27-30 under Situation and Purpose). Coordinating your statement of the objective with the purpose of the passage in its original context will insure that your sermon or Bible study accomplishes God's purpose.
3. Third, consider what you hope to accomplish through your sermon or Bible study. Try to be as specific as possible about the response you hope to achieve among those who listen to the sermon or participate in the Bible study.
4. Finally, state as specifically as possible the life-transforming changes you hope to achieve in the congregation or class through your sermon or Bible study.

### The Procedure Illustrated

After considering the context in the modern situation to which I applied Amos 4:4-13, the purpose of this passage in its original context, and what I hoped to accomplish through my sermon/Bible study, I wrote the following statement of the objective. The objective of this sermon/Bible study is to lead Christians to repent of their religious pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to God's discipline and dedicate themselves to living their lives wholeheartedly for God.

## **The Procedure Practiced**

Decide whether you are going to prepare a sermon or Bible study. Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

# **Lesson Three**

## **Stating the Proposition**

The second building block of an expository sermon or Bible study is stating the proposition. In this lesson I introduce this building block; outline the procedure for stating the proposition; illustrate the procedure on my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

The proposition is a brief statement of the message you want to communicate through your sermon or Bible study. I sometimes call it the sermon in a sentence or the message in a minute. As the objective focuses your aim on the target, the proposition keeps you on target by reminding you of what you want to say in your sermon or Bible study. The tendency when preaching or teaching is sometimes to chase rabbits—to be diverted from the primary message and develop irrelevant tangents. The proposition serves like the internal guidance system of a missile so that the sermon or Bible study stays on the course to reach the target.

## **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you state the proposition of your sermon or Bible study.

1. First, review your statement of the message of the passage for the modern context. Your statement of the message of the passage for the modern context provides the basis for your statement of the proposition and insures that the message of your sermon or Bible study is God's message and not your own (see your application of the message of Philippians 1:27-30 under Adjusting the Message).
2. Second, review your statement of the objective of your sermon or Bible study. Your statement of the objective may affect what you choose to include from your statement of the message of the passage in your sermon or Bible study.
3. Third, consider whether you want to proclaim or teach the entire message of the passage or focus on particular aspects of that message.
4. Fourth, state what you want to say in the sermon or Bible study based on the message of the passage in the modern context and the specific objective. Try to limit yourself to one sentence or a few brief sentences.

## **The Procedure Illustrated**

After reviewing my statement of the message of Amos 4:4-13 in the modern context and my statement of the objective of my sermon, I decided to proclaim the entire message of this passage. Therefore, my statement of the proposition of my sermon corresponds with my

statement of the message of the passage in the modern situation. Christians should prepare to meet God if they are proud of their piety and unresponsive to his discipline because their religious pride is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet him in judgment and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

# Lesson Four

## **Developing the Strategy**

The third building block of an expository sermon or Bible study is developing the strategy. In this lesson I introduce this building block; outline the procedure for developing the strategy; illustrate the procedure on my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

The strategy is the plan for accomplishing the objective and proclaiming the proposition and usually takes the form of an outline. A plan is obviously important. You would not attempt to build a house without blueprints. If you did, the house would probably be a monstrosity. The Winchester Mystery House in Santa Clara, California was built and renovated over many years by the eccentric inventor of the Winchester repeating rifle. This house is a tourist attraction because of its many idiosyncrasies. If you don't use a plan for your sermon or Bible study, you may walk up a staircase, as I have done at the Winchester Mystery House, and encounter a brick wall rather than a doorway.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you develop a strategy for your sermon or Bible study.

1. First, review your statement of the objective of your sermon or Bible study. Considering your statement of the objective will insure that the strategy of your sermon or Bible study is consistent with what you hope to accomplish.
2. Second, review your statement of the proposition of your sermon or Bible study. Considering your statement of the proposition will insure that the strategy of your sermon or Bible study is consistent with the message you want to communicate.
3. Third, consider both the strategy of the passage itself (see your study of Philippians 1:27-30 under Strategy and Structure) and the character of the congregation or class. In many cases the strategy of the passage itself is a natural and effective way to structure the sermon or Bible study. However, you should also consider what strategy would be most effective in the accomplishing the objective and proclaiming the message in the specific context where you are preaching or teaching.

4. Fourth, outline the major points that you hope to communicate through your sermon or Bible study, making sure that they lead strategically to the accomplishment of your objective and the communication of the message. State each point as a declarative sentence that will introduce this point in your sermon or Bible study.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

After reviewing my statement of the objective and proposition of my sermon on Amos 4:4-13 and considering the strategy of the passage and the character of the congregation that would hear my sermon/Bible study, I developed the following outline of the strategy.

- I. Christians should prepare to meet God if they are proud of their piety because religious pride is sin.
- II. Christians should prepare to meet God if they have been unresponsive to his discipline because unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish.
- III. Christians should prepare to meet God if they are proud of their piety and unresponsive to his discipline because they will certainly meet him in judgment and meeting the LORD God Almighty is a frightening prospect.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and illustrated above to your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

# Lesson Five

## **Preparing the Introduction**

The fourth building block of an expository sermon or Bible study is preparing the introduction. In this lesson I introduce this building block; outline the procedure for preparing the introduction; illustrate the procedure on my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

The introduction is a very important part of an expository sermon or Bible study. In the first few minutes your congregation or class will decide whether they should pay attention to you or not. Therefore, the introduction should be prepared to gain the attention of your congregation or class. A good way of accomplishing this purpose is to begin with a real need that the members of your congregation or class have and demonstrating the relevance of the sermon or Bible study for meeting that need.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you prepare the introduction of your sermon or Bible study.

1. First, review the statement of the objective, the statement of the proposition, and the outline of the strategy of your sermon or Bible study. Considering the objective, proposition, and strategy will help to insure that your introduction contributes to what you hope to accomplish, what you want to say, and how you want to say it.
2. Second, begin your introduction by identifying a real need in the lives of the congregation or class. Identifying a real need in the lives of the congregation or class members will gain their immediate interest in your sermon or Bible study.
3. Third, continue your introduction by describing briefly the situation in the original context address by the passage. Describing the situation in the original context establishes a connection between the congregation or class members and those to whom God was originally speaking in the passage.
4. Conclude your introduction by establishing the relevance of the passage upon which the sermon or Bible study is based for meeting the needs of the congregation or class members. Establishing the relevance of the passage for meeting the needs of the congregation or class members helps to sustain their interest in the sermon or Bible study as you proceed.

### **The Procedure Modeled**

After reviewing the statement of the objective, the statement of the proposition, and the outline of the strategy of my sermon on Amos 4:4-13, I composed the following basic introduction.

Christians today sometimes come to church because they are proud of their piety and they want to impress others with their devotion. They often do not really want to encounter God and hear him speak and in fact may be ignoring God's attempts to get their attention through discipline. The Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were also proud, complacent, and unresponsive to God's discipline. As a result God warned them through the prophet Amos to prepare to meet their God. We also need to hear this warning that is recorded in Amos 4:4-13.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and modeled above to your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

# **Lesson Six**

## **Preparing the Conclusion**

The fifth building block of an expository sermon or Bible study is preparing the conclusion. In this lesson I introduce this building block; outline the procedure for preparing the conclusion; illustrate the procedure on the plan of my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

The conclusion of a sermon or Bible study is also a very important building block of an expository sermon or Bible study. The conclusion is your last chance to reinforce the

proposition and accomplish the objective. Therefore, the conclusion should be prepared to encapsulate the message in a way that can be remembered and to lead to a time of decision.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you prepare the conclusion of your sermon or Bible study.

1. First, review the statement of the objective, the statement of the proposition, and the outline of the strategy of your sermon or Bible study. Considering the objective, proposition, and strategy will help to insure that your conclusion contributes to what you hope to accomplish, what you want to say, and how you want to say it.
2. Second, begin your conclusion by reestablishing the relevance of the sermon or Bible study and the passage upon which it is based for meeting the need of the congregation or class. Reestablishing the relevance will help to insure the attention of the members of your congregation or class at this critical stage.
3. Third, continue your conclusion by restating your proposition for the congregation or class in a personal way. Restating your proposition in a personal way will help to insure that the congregation or class members hear God speak to them and remember the message after they leave.
4. Finally, climax your conclusion by leading the congregation or class members to a time of decision that challenges them to respond in a way that is consistent with the objective.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

After reviewing the statement of the objective, the statement of the proposition, and the outline of the strategy of my sermon on Amos 4:4-13, I prepared the following basic conclusion.

Christians today sometimes come to church because they are proud of their piety and they want to impress others with their devotion. They often do not really want to encounter God and hear him speak and in fact may be ignoring God's attempts to get their attention through discipline. The Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were also proud, complacent, and unresponsive to God's discipline. As a result God warned them through the prophet Amos to prepare to meet their God. We also need to hear this warning that is recorded in Amos 4:4-13. You should prepare to meet God if you are proud of your piety and unresponsive to his discipline because religious pride is sin; unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; you will certainly meet God in judgment and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. You can be prepared to meet God by repenting of your religious pride and unresponsiveness to his discipline and truly devoting yourself to him.

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and modeled above to the plan for your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

# Lesson Seven

## Supplementing the Plan

The sixth building block of an expository sermon or Bible study is supplementing the plan. In this lesson I introduce this building block; outline the procedure for supplementing the plan; illustrate the procedure on the plan for my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

The effectiveness of the sermon or Bible study can usually be enhanced by supplementing the plan with explanations, proofs, illustrations, and applications. To explain is to make clear or understandable. Explanation is necessary because people frequently are uncertain about the meaning of the Bible and the nature of Christian belief and practice. To prove is to establish the validity of what you say with evidence and logical reasoning. Non-Christians and Christians as well will be reluctant at times to accept the truth of what you say. Therefore, you may need to establish the validity of your message. To illustrate is to provide an example or instance that helps to explain, prove, or apply what you say. A primary source of illustrations is the Bible. However, you should also include illustrations from the world of the modern audience since these may be more readily understood. These illustrations come from being a keen observer of nature and human life, reading widely in various fields, and creative invention. To apply is to relate what you say to daily life and draw out the implications. The message of the Bible is relevant for everyday life and part of your job is to communicate that relevance. You must not assume that your audience will make the application for themselves. People are too often prone to hear what you say and fail to make the connection with their lives.

### The Procedure Outlined

The following procedure can be used to help you supplement the outline of your sermon or Bible study.

1. First, review the statement of the objective, the statement of the proposition, and the outline of the strategy of your sermon or Bible study so that your supplementary material contributes to what you want to accomplish, what you want to say, and how you want to say it.
2. Second, consider the context of the sermon or Bible study and the nature of the congregation or class so that the supplementary materials you employ will be appropriate to the situation and group.
3. Third, examine the plan of your sermon or Bible study and determine where and in what ways the plan needs to be supplemented.
4. Fourth, prepare your explanations, proofs, illustrations, and applications and insert these into your plan where appropriate, writing out in full what you intend to say.

### The Procedure Illustrated

After reviewing the statement of the objective, the statement of the proposition, and the outline of the strategy as well as considering the context of my sermon/Bible study, I de-

terminated that supplementing it in several ways could enhance the plan. I determined that supplementing the plan with an illustration of a call to worship and an explanation of Amos' sarcastic call to worship in Amos 4:4-5 would clarify and enhance the first point of my message. This illustration and explanation is included below as an example. Other examples of supplementing the plan of the sermon or Bible study can be seen in Lesson Nine, Assigning the Title and Assembling the Plan, which contains the complete plan for my sermon/Bible study on Amos 4:4-13.

A call to worship is a common element found in many worship services. One of the most frequently used calls to worship is the *Doxology*—"Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen." However, it is clear that Amos is being sarcastic in his call to worship. Sarcasm employs statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a humorous or derisive intent. Amos is not trying to be funny!

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and modeled above to the plan for your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

# **Lesson Eight**

## **Incorporating Creative Techniques**

The seventh building block of an expository sermon or Bible study is incorporating creative techniques. In this lesson I introduce this building block; outline the procedure for incorporating creative techniques; illustrate the procedure on the plan of my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13; and give you an opportunity to practice the procedure on your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

The effectiveness of a sermon or Bible study can often be enhanced by the incorporation of creative techniques. There is a sense in which this step applies more to Bible studies than sermons. Sermons are normally preached to large diverse groups in formal worship meetings where the people in the congregation are passive listeners. Bible studies are normally taught to small homogeneous groups in informal classes where there is more opportunity for participation by the students. Therefore, there are usually more opportunities for creative techniques in Bible studies than sermons. Nonetheless, I encourage you to incorporate as many creative techniques as the preaching or teaching context allows.

### **Creative Techniques**

Creative techniques can be divided generally into those that are centered on the preacher or teacher and those that are centered on the congregation or class. Preacher- or teacher-centered techniques retain control so that the sermon or Bible study can be directed toward accomplishing the objective and proclaiming or teaching the message. However, congregation- or class-centered techniques involve people more and as a result they are better able to maintain interest and allow the message to change their lives.



**Preacher- or teacher-centered techniques.** Preachers and teachers can maintain control without limiting themselves to preaching and lecturing. They can also accomplish the objective and communicate the message of the sermon or Bible study through the use of creative presentations using drama, music, art, or literature. In addition, they can use resource people who have expertise or experience in an area or who have special talents and can present the message creatively. Furthermore, they can use audiovisual presentations, employing audiocassettes, videos, slides, etc.

**Congregation- or class-centered techniques.** Preachers and teachers can also benefit from releasing some of their control and involving the congregation or class more directly in the sermon or Bible study. The variety of congregation- or class-centered techniques is almost endless. Below I describe briefly some of the techniques I have found to be most helpful. Inductive Bible studies provide people with an opportunity to interpret a passage of Scripture themselves using a simple methodology. Discussions come in a variety of forms and provide people with an opportunity to talk about and clarify issues. Questionnaires also come in a variety of forms and provide people with an opportunity to evaluate issues or themselves. Case studies and problem solving introduce a hypothetical or real situation and provide people with an opportunity to respond. Simulation games and role-playing place the congregation or class in a make-believe world where they are again provided with an opportunity to respond. Creative opportunities involve people in communicating the message through drama, art, music, or writing. Field trips take the congregation or class out of the church into real life situations that illustrate or give them a chance to apply the message. Workshops provide an opportunity for the congregation or class to practice skills under the supervision of a master.

### **The Procedure Outlined**

The following procedure can be used to help you supplement the outline of your sermon or Bible study.

1. First, review the statement of the objective, the statement of the proposition, and the outline of the strategy of your sermon or Bible study so that your creative techniques contribute to what you want to accomplish, what you want to say, and how you want to say it.
2. Second, consider the context of the sermon or Bible study and the nature of the congregation or class so that the creative techniques you employ will be appropriate to the situation and group.
3. Third, examine the plan of your sermon or Bible study and determine where and in what ways creative techniques can contribute to the plan.
4. Fourth, prepare your creative techniques and insert these into your plan where appropriate, describing fully what you intend to do.

### **The Procedure Illustrated**

After reviewing the statement of the objective, the statement of the proposition, and the outline of the strategy as well as considering the context of my sermon/Bible study, I determined that my plan could be enhanced in several places by creative techniques. I determined that incorporating a creative technique could enhance the first point of my message by dramatically forcing the congregation or class members to see the direct relevance of God's

words through Amos for them. This creative technique is described below as an example. Other examples of incorporating creative techniques into the plan of the sermon or Bible study can be seen in Lesson Nine, Assigning the Title and Assembling the Plan, which contains the complete plan for my sermon/Bible study on Amos 4:4-13.

*Enlist a member of the congregation or class with dramatic ability to play the role of a modern day Amos and interrupt the first point of the sermon or Bible study and deliver the following modernization of Amos' message. "Go to church and sin; go to Sunday School and sin even more. Read your Bible every morning and bring your tithe every week. Thank the Lord for how wonderful you are and brag about your willingness to give to him—boast about it, you Christians, for this is what you love to do," declares the Sovereign LORD."*

### **The Procedure Practiced**

Apply the procedure outlined and modeled above to the plan for your sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30.

# Lesson Nine

## **Assigning the Title and Assembling the Plan**

The eighth building block of an expository sermon or Bible study is assigning the title. In addition, the building blocks need to be assembled into a suitable plan. In this lesson I provide some general instruction for assigning a title and assembling the building blocks of the sermon or Bible study. I also include the completed plan of my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13 as a model.

### **Assigning the Title**

Though a title is not always necessary, it is often valuable for promoting the sermon or Bible study. The title should be *catchy* in order to catch the interest of those who see it and motivate them to come. However, the title should also have a direct relationship to the message and not promise more than you can deliver in the sermon or Bible study. If there is no relationship between the title and the message or the title is so sensational that you can not meet the expectations aroused, those who attend may feel cheated and disregard the message altogether. The title of my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13 is, *Go to Church and Sin*. This title should provoke interest in the sermon/Bible study. However, it does have a direct relationship to the message of the sermon/Bible study.

### **Assembling the Plan**

In this unit I have introduced the building blocks of an expository sermon or Bible study. However, these building blocks have been introduced in an order that is sensible for the preparation of the plan for a sermon or Bible study. You still need to arrange these building blocks into a logical order that is sensible for the delivery of a sermon or teaching of a Bible study. I recommend the following order: title, text, statement of the objective, statement of the proposition, introduction, outline of the strategy, and conclusion. The supplementary materials and creative techniques should be inserted into the introduction, outline of the strat-

egy, and conclusion where they occur. Below is the completed plan of my sermon/Bible study based on Amos 4:4-13 as a model.

**Title:** *Go to Church and Sin*

**Text:** Amos 4:4-13

**Objective:** The objective of this sermon is to lead Christians to repent of their religious pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to God's discipline and dedicate themselves to living their lives wholeheartedly for God.

**Proposition:** Christians should prepare to meet God if they are proud of their piety and unresponsive to God's discipline because their religious pride is sin; their unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; they will certainly meet him in judgment and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect.

### **Introduction**

Why have you come to church today? *Give the congregation or class members an opportunity to respond.* A primary reason Christians should come to church is to encounter God and hear him speak. However, Christians today sometimes come to church because they are proud of their piety and they want to impress others with their devotion. They often do not really want to encounter God and hear him speak and in fact may be ignoring God's attempts to get their attention through discipline. The Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were proud, complacent, and unresponsive to God's discipline. As a result God warned them through the prophet Amos to prepare to meet their God. We also need to hear this warning that is recorded in Amos 4:4-13.

#### **I. Christians should prepare to meet God if they are proud of their piety because religious pride is sin.**

- A. A call to worship is a common element found in many worship services. One of the most frequently used calls to worship is the *Doxology*—"Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen." However, it is clear that Amos is being sarcastic in his call to worship. Sarcasm employs statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a humorous or derisive intent. Amos is not trying to be funny!"
- B. Amos rebuked and condemned the spiritual pride of the Israelites by sarcastically calling them to worship at Bethel and Gilgal and equating their worship with sin—"Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more."
- C. Amos rebuked and condemned the spiritual pride of the Israelites by sarcastically calling them to offer their sacrifices and bring their tithes and identifying their sin as pride—"Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings—boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,' declares the Sovereign LORD."
- D. *Enlist a member of the congregation or class with dramatic ability the week before to play the role of a modern day Amos. At this point have him interrupt the sermon or Bible study and deliver the following modernization of Amos'*

*sarcastic call to worship.* “Go to church and sin; go to Sunday School and sin even more. Read your Bible every morning and bring your tithe every week. Thank the Lord for how wonderful you are and brag about your willingness to give to him—boast about it, you Christians, for this is what you love to do,” declares the Sovereign LORD.”

- E. Application—You should prepare to meet God if you are proud of your piety because religious pride is sin.

## **II. Christians should prepare to meet God if they are unresponsive to his discipline because unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish.**

- A. Amos described the various and severe judgments that God had brought against the Israelites because of their sin. *Ask the congregation or class members to name the various kinds of judgment that God brought against the Israelites (famine, drought, pestilence, plague, and war).*
- B. Amos emphasized the severity of God’s judgments in two ways. First, he compared God’s judgments against some Israelites to his judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah—“I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.” According to Genesis 19:24-26, God rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah and everyone on the entire plain was consumed along with the vegetation. Even Lot’s wife became a pillar of salt when she looked back. Second, Amos compared the Israelites to a burning stick—“You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire.” They had come so close to being consumed by God’s judgment that they had already begun to burn.
- C. Amos rebuked the Israelites by repeatedly emphasizing their ironic failure to heed God’s warning judgments despite their variety and severity—“Yet you have not returned to me . . . yet you have not returned to me . . . yet you have not returned to me . . . yet you have not returned to me . . . yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD.” By repeatedly emphasizing their failure Amos underscored their extreme foolishness.
- D. Application—You should prepare to meet God if you have been unresponsive to his discipline because unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish.

## **III. Christians should prepare to meet God if they are proud of their piety and unresponsive to his discipline because they will certainly meet him in judgment and meeting the LORD God Almighty in Judgment is a frightening prospect.**

- A. Amos announced God’s judgment against the Israelites because of their pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to his discipline—“Therefore, this is what I will do to you, Israel.” The meaning of Amos’ warning is uncertain. Some think that a more specific announcement of judgment has been lost. Others think that Amos is referring back to the judgments already described that will be unleashed together without restraint. Another possibility is that Amos was pointing to some catastrophe as an illustration of God’s judgment of Israel. Whatever the specific meaning of Amos’ words, he was clearly warning the people of Israel of the reality of God’s judgment of them for their religious pride and unresponsiveness to his discipline.
- B. Amos warned the Israelites to prepare to meet their God—“and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.” The desired result of worship is to meet God. However, the people of Israel had been going to Bethel and Gilgal because of their religious pride while being unresponsive to God’s

discipline. Amos warned them that they would still meet God, but for judgment rather than worship.

- C. Amos described the frightening prospect of meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment—“He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth—the LORD God Almighty is his name.” *Prepare a brief slide presentation depicting the awesome majesty and power of God as revealed in the wonders of nature and show it as Amos 4:13 is read slowly, emphasizing the final line.*
- D. Application—You should prepare to meet God if you are proud of your piety and unresponsive to his discipline because you will certainly meet him in judgment and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect.

## Conclusion

Why have you come to church today? A primary reason Christians should come to church is to encounter God and hear him speak. However, Christians today sometimes come to church because they are proud of their piety and they want to impress others with their devotion. They often do not really want to encounter God and hear him speak and in fact may be ignoring God’s attempts to get their attention through discipline. The Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were also proud, complacent, and unresponsive to God’s discipline. As a result God warned them through the prophet Amos to prepare to meet their God. We also need to hear this warning that is recorded in Amos 4:4-13. You should prepare to meet God if you are proud of your piety and unresponsive to his discipline because religious pride is sin; unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish; you will certainly meet him in judgment and meeting the LORD God Almighty in judgment is a frightening prospect. You can be prepared to meet God by repenting of your religious pride and unresponsiveness to his discipline and truly devoting yourself to him.

## The Procedure Practice

Assign the title and assemble the plan of your sermon or Bible study based on Philip-  
pians 1:27-30.

# Unit Review

1. List eight building blocks of an expository sermon or Bible study.
2. Define objective and summarize the procedure for stating the objective of an expository sermon or Bible study.
3. Define proposition and summarize the procedure for stating the proposition of an expository sermon or Bible study.
4. Why is the strategy of a sermon or Bible study important? Summarize the procedure for developing the strategy of an expository sermon or Bible study.
5. Why is the introduction of a sermon or Bible study important? Summarize the procedure for preparing the introduction of a sermon or Bible study.

6. Why is the conclusion of a sermon or Bible study important? Summarize the procedure for preparing the conclusion of a sermon or Bible study.
7. What are four ways that the plan of a sermon or Bible study can be supplemented?
8. Summarize the procedure for supplementing the plan of a sermon or Bible study.
9. What are four techniques that can be incorporated into the plan of a sermon or Bible study?
10. Summarize the procedure for incorporating creative techniques into the plan of a sermon or Bible study.

## Unit Practice

Write a sermon or Bible study based on Philippians 1:27-30. Make sure that you include all the essential elements: Title, Objective, Proposition, Introduction, Body, and Conclusion. Incorporate supplemental material and creative techniques into the sermon or Bible study where appropriate.

## Unit Reinforcement

Preparing an expository sermon or Bible study is not easy and you have probably just made your first attempt. Therefore, I have included my own sermon plan based on Philippians 1:27-30 in Appendix E. Examine this sermon plan carefully and evaluate your own work constructively. Allow yourself to be encouraged by that which you did well and learn from your mistakes. **Do not examine my sermon plan until after you have turned in your own sermon or Bible study plan based on Philippians 1:27-30.**

# Appendix A

## PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

### Background and Purpose

#### Authorship

The evidence in the Epistle to the Philippians testifies strongly for Pauline authorship. Paul is identified as the author of the epistle in the first verse. In addition, what is revealed about the author corresponds to what is known about Paul from the book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles. Furthermore, Pauline authorship of Philippians was never questioned in the early church. Allusions to Philippians are found in Clement, Ignatius, Hermas, Justin Martyr, and others. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian wrote from Philippians and attribute it to Paul. Philippians was included in the earliest canonical lists and Pauline authorship was presupposed.

#### Place and Date of Writing

Paul was evidently in prison when he wrote the epistle, but the place of his imprisonment is uncertain. The book of Acts records two imprisonments of Paul in Caesaria (Acts 23-26) and Rome (Acts 28). However, Paul writes that he has been imprisoned on numerous occasions (2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:23). The description of Paul's imprisonment in Philippians provides some additional evidence for speculation about the place of where Paul wrote this letter.

The traditional view is that Paul was imprisoned in Rome in the early 60's when he wrote Philippians. This position is substantiated by several arguments. First, the presence of a *praetorium* (1:13) and members of Caesar's household (4:22) would be expected in Rome. Second, the relative freedom of Paul's imprisonment as reflected in Philippians corresponds with the description of his Roman imprisonment in Acts 28. Third, Paul's expectation that he would either be executed or released (1:18-26; 2:24) is consistent with a Roman imprisonment since as a Roman citizen he could appeal for a trial at Rome if he were anywhere else. However, many objections have been raised to the traditional view that Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote Philippians. First, *praetorium* and Caesar's household could be understood in a way that did not necessarily require that Rome be the place of Paul's imprisonment. Second, the distance between Philippi and Rome is not consistent to the indications of frequent communication between Paul and the Philippian church. Third, Acts gives no indication that Timothy was with Paul in Rome as he was when Paul wrote Philippians.

Other common suggestions for the place of Paul's imprisonment when he wrote Philippians include Caesaria and Ephesus. Both of these alternatives can be substantiated to a degree based on the description of Paul's imprisonment in Philippians and their ability to resolve some of the difficulties of a Roman imprisonment. However, both of these alternatives have difficulties of their own. Though the evidence for the place and date of writing of Philippians is inconclusive, Rome in the early 60's remains the best working hypothesis (see any

of the sources listed below for a thorough analysis of place and date of writing, especially Guthrie, 526-536).

### **Situation and Purpose**

Athenian colonists founded the city that became Philippi in around 360 B. C. The city came under attack and the inhabitants appealed to King Philipp who sent troops, built a fort, and named the city after himself. The fortified city served as a source of protection for nearby gold mines and a strategic road between the West and the East. The Romans took over the city from the Persians in 168 B. C. The Roman ruler Octavian recognized the strategic location of the city and established a military colony there. The inhabitants were given Roman citizenship along with its rights and privileges and they cherished their status.

The founding of the church in Philippi by Paul is described in Acts 16. Paul's visit to Philippi was directed by God's Spirit who forbade him from entering into Bithinia and gave him the vision of a Macedonian begging, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" After arriving in Philippi, Paul went to the Jewish place of prayer where a woman named Lydia responded to his message and opened her house as a base for Paul's ministry. When Paul commanded a spirit of divination to come out of an annoying fortuneteller he was brought up on charges before the magistrates of the city, beaten, and thrown into prison. He had an opportunity to escape when the prison doors were opened, but he remained in his cell and led the grateful jailer and his family to Christ. The next day the magistrates sent word for him to be released, but Paul revealed that he was a Roman citizen and demanded that the magistrates themselves release him. Upon his release Paul went to Lydia's house, encouraged the Christians there, and departed.

Though Paul's stay in Philippi was short, his epistle to them indicates that his relationship with the Philippian church was deep and lasting. The epistle indicates that they sent him a gift after he went on to Laodicea and through Epaphroditus while he was in prison and that he considered them his partners in the gospel (Phil. 4:10-20). The epistle seems to indicate that the church in Philippi was strong, but that there were several forces that might be eroding the strength of the Christians and threatening their ability to endure. First, the church seems to have been concerned about Paul's struggle since he spends a considerable amount of the epistle assuring the Philippian Christians of God's sovereign control over his life (1:12-26). Second, the church seems to have been going through struggles of their own since Paul says that they share his struggle and encourages them to remain faithful (1:27-30; 2:12-18). Third, the church seems to have been divided since Paul encourages the Philippian Christians to strive for unity and even appeals directly to two women who were experiencing strife (2:1-11; 4:2-3). Fourth, the church may have been threatened by false teaching since warns them of this danger in 3:1-21. The specific nature of the false teaching is uncertain, but it seems that he may have been addressing several dangers—a misplaced emphasis on the externals of religion (3:1-11), an unrealistic notion of already being perfect (3:12-16), and a corrupted focus on the worldliness and its pleasures (3:17-21). Finally, Paul's expression of gratitude for the gift of the Philippian Christians also seems to suggest that they were experiencing considerable hardship (4:10-20).

Paul had many reasons for writing the Philippians. He certainly wrote the Philippians to thank them for their gift, introduce Timothy, and smooth the way for the return of Epaphroditus. However, his primary purposes for writing were to strengthen their faith in God with



regard to his trial as well as their own; help them to overcome their differences so that they could be united and strong; warn them about false teachers so that they would be uncontaminated; and encourage them to depend on God for their needs.

### **Biblical Context and Role**

Paul's Epistle to the Philippians is in the New Testament division containing the Epistles. The Epistles serve generally within the New Testament to provide instruction, encouragement, and warning for Christians as they seek to live out the implications of Christianity that are revealed by the Gospels and illustrated in the Book of Acts. Philippians provides specific instruction relative to persecution, disunity, false teaching, and hardship. The close relationship of Philippians to other epistles of Paul makes familiarity with other epistles of Paul helpful when studying Philippians.

### **Genre and Function**

Philippians is obviously an epistle, but what is an epistle? New Testament epistles are letters written by an authoritative and caring Christian teacher to give practical guidance for churches and individuals experiencing problems or facing challenges. Philippians provides practical guidance for a church. New Testament epistles normally contain formal features such as an opening address and blessing, thanksgiving and report of prayer, personal report, and concluding greeting and blessing. Philippians contains all of these formal features. These forms function in subtle ways to convey a message. However, the nature and function of these forms is beyond the scope of this general study and must be deferred until those passages that take these forms are studied. New Testament epistles are dominated by epistolary instruction. In epistolary instruction direct or indirect commands and/or prohibitions usually indicate the appropriate response. These commands and prohibitions are usually supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify and provide motivation for obedience. However, in many cases the indication of the appropriate response is incomplete or absent altogether. In these cases the appropriate response must be implied from the explanations and reasoned arguments. Occasionally there will be only commands and/or prohibitions with no explanations or reasoned arguments. In these cases the authority of the teacher alone compels obedience. Philippians corresponds generally to this pattern of instruction.

### **Strategy and Structure**

Paul's Epistle to the Philippians is structured according to the general pattern of New Testament epistles. The epistle is introduced with a characteristic address and thanksgiving and prayer. The epistle is concluded with a characteristic greeting and benediction. Within the body of the epistle, different problems are addressed in turn, though there is some overlapping of related issues.

- I. Introduction
  - A. Salutation (1:1-2)
  - B. Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3-11)

- II. Paul's Testimony of Faith
  - A. Paul's Faith while in Prison (1:12-18a)
  - B. Paul's Faith whether he Lived or Died (1:18b-26)
- III. Paul's Appeal for Faithfulness, Unity, and Obedience
  - A. Paul's Appeal for Faithfulness (1:27-30)
  - B. Paul's Appeal for Unity (2:1-11)
  - C. Paul's Appeal for Obedience (2:12-18)
- IV. Paul's Commendation of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30)
- V. Paul's Warning against Dangerous Influences
  - A. Paul's Warning against Superficial Religion (3:1-11)
  - B. Paul's Warning against Complacency (3:12-16)
  - C. Paul's Warning against a Worldly Perspective (3:17-21)
- VI. Paul's Concluding Appeals (4:1-9)
- VII. Paul's Gratitude to the Philippians for their Gift and Teaching regarding God's Provision (4:10-20)
- VIII. Concluding Greeting and Benediction (4:21-23)

### **Message or Messages**

Paul's Epistle to the Philippians contains several general messages. First, the Philippian Christians should remain faithful in spite of persecution because God is in control in spite of appearances and suffering is a part of their calling. Second, they should strive for unity by being humble and sacrificial like Christ Jesus. Third, they should not be led astray by superficial religion, complacency, or a worldly perspective because of the superiority of the gospel. Fourth, they can experience peace through an attitude of reconciliation, thankful prayer, and concentrating on the positive. Fifth, they can endure hardship through the Lord who gives them strength.

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# Appendix B

## PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

### Selection and Limitation

Though Philippians 1:27-30 is closely related to both that which precedes and follows, it is relatively self-contained, has a cohesive content, and is of an appropriate length to be effectively studied as a unit.

### Translation and Text

**1:27**Only, continually live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or I remain absent and hear about you, I find that you are continually standing in one spirit, continually striving together with one soul for the faith of the gospel **28**and not being frightened in anything by your enemies. This is a sign to them of their destruction but of your deliverance and this from God. **29**Because to you has been given on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him, **30**since you have the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear to be in me.

### Situation and Purpose

Philippians 1:27-30 seems to reflect a situation in which the Philippian Christians were experience opposition from a resistant and hostile society since Paul says that they are experiencing the same struggle he had when he was in Philippi and was still experiencing in prison. In addition, the passage seems to reflect a concern that the Philippian Christians might be discouraged by Paul's struggle since he gives them assurances about his situation in 1:12-26 and urges them in to remain faithful to their commitment no matter what happens to him in 1:27-30. Paul probably feared that the persecution of the Philippian Christians and his own struggle would undermine their faith and commitment. Therefore, he wrote Philippians 1:27-30 to exhort and encourage the Philippian Christians to remain faithful to God.

### Literary Context and Role

Philippians 1:27-30 is integrally related to its context. The preceding passages establish a basis for the appeal to faithfulness in this passage by testifying of God's sovereign control over Paul's life even in prison (1:12-26). The subsequent passages supplement the exhortation to faithfulness in this passage by appealing for unity so that they would have the combined strength to resist persecution (2:1-11) and restating the appeal to faithfulness from a different perspective (2:12-18). These related passages provide valuable insight into Philippians 1:27-30. The role of Philippians 1:27-30 within this context is to exhort the Philippian Christians to remain faithful.

### Form and Function

The passage can be classified generally as epistolary instruction. In epistolary instruction direct or indirect commands and/or prohibitions usually indicate the appropriate re-

sponse. Philippians 1:27-30 contains a command in verse 27a that indicates the appropriate response. These commands and prohibitions are usually supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify and provide motivation for obedience. In Philippians 1:27-30 the command indicating the appropriate response is supplemented and reinforced with an explanation in verses 27b-28a and reasoned arguments in verses 28b-30. However, in many cases the indication of the appropriate response is incomplete or absent altogether. In these cases the appropriate response must be implied from the explanations and reasoned arguments. In Philippians 1:27-30 the command indicating the appropriate response is general, but it is clarified with an explanation in verses 27b-28a.

### **Strategy and Structure**

Paul begins Philippians 1:27-30 with the command to live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel in verse 27a. However, this command is rather nebulous. Therefore, he explains the specifics of what it means to live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel in verses 27b-28a. He concludes by providing reasoned arguments for living patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel in verses 28b-30.

- I. Command to Live Patriotically in a Manner Worthy of the Gospel (verse 27a)
  - A. The Priority of Living Patriotically
  - B. Command to Live Patriotically
  - C. Standard of Living Patriotically
- II. Explanation of the Nature of Patriotic Living Worthy of the Gospel (verses 27b-28a)
  - A. Whether Paul Comes or Remains Absent
  - B. Standing Firm in One Spirit
  - C. Contending as One Man for the Faith of the Gospel
  - D. Without Being Frightened in Any Way by the Opposition
- III. Rationale for Patriotic Living Worthy of the Gospel (verses 28b-30)
  - A. Their Courage is a Sign to their Opposition
  - B. Suffering has been Granted to them along with Belief
  - C. They have the same Struggle as Paul

### **Message or Messages**

The message of Philippians 1:27-30 in its original context was that whatever happened, the Philippian Christians should live as patriotic citizens of God's kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel by standing firm in one spirit, striving as one man to advance the gospel, and not being frightened in any way by their opposition because of the testimony of their courage, the grace they have received, and the duty they share with Paul as soldiers of the cross.

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# Appendix C

## THE DETAILS OF PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

### **Only**

Paul introduces his command with the word, “Only.” The Greek word underlying this translation is frequently used to stress extreme urgency in appeals. In this context the urgency of the appeal is stressed in relationship to whether Paul was released so that he can come and see the Philippian Christians or remained a prisoner so that he could only hear about them. “Only” serves in this context to stress the urgency of obeying Paul’s command to live patriotically regardless of his circumstances.

### **Continually live patriotically**

Next, Paul commands the Philippian Christians, “continually live patriotically.” The verb employed in the Greek text means “to live as a citizen.” Citizenship was an important ideal in the Roman world. The Philippians were Roman citizens and the Philippian Christians were probably very proud of their citizenship. However, Paul was probably not encouraging the Philippian Christians to be patriotic citizens of Rome. In Philippians 3:20, Paul maintains that the citizenship of a Christian is in heaven. The command is in the present tense, stressing the need for continuous action. With the command “continually live patriotically” Paul was appealing to the Philippian Christians to consistently live in a way that expresses their patriotic devotion to God and his kingdom.

### **In a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**

Paul concludes his command by stating, “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” “The gospel of Christ” of course refers to the good news of the coming of Christ so that the sins of people could be forgiven and they could be reconciled to God. At the heart of the gospel is Jesus’ death on the cross. God certainly paid a high price so that people could have a relationship with him. With the words “in a manner worthy of the cross of Christ” Paul reinforces his command by appealing to the gratitude of the Philippian Christians for their experience of the costly gospel of salvation.

### **Then, whether I come . . . or I remain absent . . .**

Paul introduces the explanation of the implications of his command by stating, “Then, whether I come and see you or I remain absent and hear about you.” These two alternatives are references to the uncertainty of Paul’s situation. He could be released from prison, continue his incarceration, or even be executed as he revealed in 1:18b-26. These possibilities would impinge upon Paul’s ministry to the Philippian church. However, Paul refers to the possibilities to explain that the obedience of the Philippian Christians to his command to live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel was not dependent upon his circumstances or his ability to supervise their obedience.

### **Continually standing in one spirit**

Paul continues the explanation of the implications of his command by expressing his expectation, “I find that you are continually standing in one spirit.” The Greek word translated “you are continually standing” was often used to describe an army that had set its defense and refused to retreat even against overwhelmingly superior forces. This verb is in the present tense, stressing the need for continuous action. Paul expresses this expectation to explain that the obedience of the Philippian Christians to his command to live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel required that they remain faithful to their commitment no matter what opposition or difficulties they encountered. The words “in one spirit” add another element to Paul’s expectation. The word “spirit” is ambiguous. The word could be translated “spirit,” referring to the human spirit. Every human being has a spirit, but Paul expresses the expectation that the Philippian Christians remain faithful “in one spirit.” If “spirit” is the correct translation, Paul is explaining that obedience to his command to live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel requires unity. Another possibility is that Paul means, “Spirit,” referring to the Holy Spirit, which he frequently maintains is the bond of unity that unites Christians. If “Spirit” is the correct translation, Paul is not only explaining that living patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel requires unity, but he is directing them to the basis of that unity, the Holy Spirit.

### **Continually striving with one soul . . .**

Paul continues the explanation of the implications of his command by expressing another expectation, “continually striving together with one soul for the faith of the gospel.” The Greek word translated “continually striving together” is the source of the English word *athletics* and was frequently used to refer to the cooperative efforts of teammates at the games. However, Paul’s consistent use of terminology from warfare in this passage suggests that he may have had a military background in mind. Perhaps the image behind the choice of words was the Roman phalanx. The phalanx was of body of heavily armed infantry formed into close deep ranks and files. The phalanx was an awesome offensive weapon of warfare that made the Roman army almost invincible in battle. Of course teamwork and cooperative action were an essential feature that Paul reemphasizes with the words “with one soul.” The phalanx was powerful because the entire army moved as one person. Paul expresses this expectation to explain that the obedience of the Philippian Christians to his command to live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel required that they continue to work together to advance the gospel no matter what opposition or difficulties they encountered. Paul defines the cause for which they were fighting as “the faith of the gospel.” Here “faith” is used in a general sense for the content of the Christian religion that is further defined as the gospel—the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul’s addition of these words adds further motivation for obedience by reminding the Philippian Christians that the cause for which the struggle is the gospel that is their salvation and the hope of a lost world.

### **Not being frightened in anything . . .**

Paul concludes the explanation of the implications of his command by expressing a final expectation, “and not being frightened in anything by your enemies.” The Greek word that is used here was often used to describe horses that had been spooked and run away. Paul clearly had a military background in mind because of his consistent use of military terminology in this passage and by the clarifying phrase “by your enemies.” The participle is again in

the present tense stressing the need for consistent courage. Paul expresses this expectation to explain that patriotic living that is worthy of the gospel requires consistent courage in the face of the enemy.

### **This is a sign to them . . .**

Paul begins his arguments for obeying his command by asserting, “This is a sign to them of their destruction but of your deliverance and this from God.” A “sign” is a demonstration or proof. There is some confusion about the antecedent of “This,” but the logic of Paul’s argument seems to indicate that it refers back to the courage that Paul has previously explained is required of those who live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. The antecedent of “them” and “their” is clearly “enemies.” As the confidence of an army can be shaken by the courage of their opposition, Paul argues that the confidence of those who oppose the Philippian Christians may be shaken if they witness the Philippian Christians continually stand in one Spirit, continually strive together with one soul, and not be frightened in anything. The courage of the Philippian Christians could even convince their enemies that they are in danger of destruction and should surrender and commit their lives to Jesus so that they can be delivered as well.

### **Because to you has been given . . .**

Paul continues his arguments for obeying his command by asserting, “Because to you has been given on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him.” The Greek verb translated “has been given” was a very theologically significant word for Paul. He conveys with it the undeserved favor that God has shown to people, especially in the gospel. Here Paul correlates two experiences of God’s grace. The first experience of God’s grace is salvation through faith. They have received the grace of God so that they are able “to believe.” However, Paul correlates their experience of God’s grace to believe with God’s grace “to suffer for him.” The Philippian Christians should live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel because suffering goes along with their experience of God’s grace of salvation.

### **Since you have the same conflict . . .**

Paul concludes his arguments for obeying his command by asserting, “since you have the same conflict, which you saw in me and now hear to be in me.” Paul is clearly appealing to his own example as one who had been and still was involved in a struggle. The word translated “conflict” was frequently used with regard to the struggle of contestants at the games, but Paul probably has a military background in mind. The clause, “which you saw in me,” refers to Paul’s experience when he founded the church in Philippi. At that time he was beaten and thrown into prison because of his witness according to Acts 16. The phrase, “and now hear to be in me,” refers to Paul’s current trial and faithful witness. Paul is arguing that the Philippian Christians should live patriotically in a manner worthy of the gospel because they, like him, are soldiers of the cross and can not escape conflict with the enemies of God.



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# Appendix D

## APPLICATION OF PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

### **Being Certain of the Message**

I reexamined my statement of the message under Message or Messages and concluded that this statement is consistent with what I discovered about situation and purpose, literary context and role, form and function, and strategy and structure of the passage. In addition, even though there is some dispute among the commentators about specifics, this statement of the message is generally consistent with what these commentators regard as the message of this passage.

### **Establishing Correspondence**

I reexamined my study of the situation and purpose of Philippians 1:27-30 and noted that this passage seems to be addressed to Christians who were experiencing opposition from a resistant and hostile society. Christians today still experience opposition from a resistant and hostile society.

### **Distinguishing the Contextualized**

I was unable to distinguishing anything contextualized in Philippians 1:27-30 that would affect the application of the message of this passage to the modern situation.

### **Adjusting the Message**

Since there is a clear correspondence between the original situation addressed by Philippians 1:27-30 and the modern situation and there is nothing contextualized in this passage, the message in the modern situation is identical to the message in the original context except that those addressed has been made more inclusive. Whatever happens, Christians should live as patriotic citizens of God's kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel by standing firm in one spirit, striving as one man to advance the gospel, and not being frightened in any way by their opposition because of the testimony of their courage, the grace they have received, and the duty they share with Paul as soldiers of the cross.

# Appendix E

## AN EXPOSITORY SERMON BASED ON PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

**Title:** Worthy of the Gospel of Christ

**Objective:** The objective of this sermon/Bible study is to exhort and encourage Christians to live faithfully for Christ even though they live in a resistant and even hostile world.

**Proposition:** Whatever happens, Christians should live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel by standing firm in one spirit, striving as one man for the faith of the gospel, and not being frightened in any way because of the testimony of their courage, the grace they have received, and the duty they share with Paul as soldiers of the cross.

### Introduction

Warfare is an appropriate analogy for the Christian life. We have been sent on a mission to conquer the world for God by leading people to trust in Jesus Christ. However, like all wars, this warfare is extremely difficult. Satan is a powerful enemy and he has a great multitude of allies. Most people reject God’s message of salvation and retaliate against the church with opposition and persecution. Sometimes it seems easier for Christians to run away or surrender. The Philippian Christians were also engaged in this warfare. They also were rejected and attacked. As a result some of them were discouraged and on the verge of giving up the fight. In response, Paul wrote Philippians 1:27-30 to exhort the Philippian Christians to remain faithful to God. Through Paul’s words God can also speak to us today about what we should do, how we can do it, and why we must do it.

### I. **Whatever happens, Christians should live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.**

- A. First, Paul emphasizes the urgency of his command for Christians to live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom—“Whatever happens.” Actually these two words translate the one Greek word that literally means “only.” However, this word is frequently used to stress extreme urgency in appeals. In this context the urgency of the appeal is stressed in relationship to whether Paul is released so that he can come and see them or remains a prisoner and can only hear about them—“Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence.” “Whatever happens” serves in this context to stress the urgency of obeying Paul’s command regardless of his circumstances.
- B. Second, Paul commands Christians to live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom—“conduct yourselves.” This command appears rather undistinguished. However, the verb employed in the Greek text could be literally translated, “live patriotically.” Patriotism was an important ideal in the Roman world. The Philippians were Roman citizens and the Philippian Christians were probably very proud of their citizenship. However, Paul was not encouraging the Philippian Christians to be patriotic citizens of Rome. In Philippians 3:20,

Paul maintains that the citizenship of a Christian is in heaven. With the command “conduct yourselves” Paul was appealing to the Philippian Christians to live in a way that expresses their patriotic devotion to God and his kingdom. *Play a recording of the National Anthem. Ask congregation or class members to consider or express their feelings after listening. Explain* Paul was appealing to the Philippian Christians based on the same feelings of patriotism that they felt, but that he was not encouraging them to be good citizens of Rome. Instead, he was appealing to their loyalty to God and his kingdom.

- C. Third, Paul sets the standard for patriotic living—“in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” “The gospel of Christ” of course refers to the good news of the coming of Christ so that the sins of people could be forgiven and they could be reconciled to God. At the heart of the gospel is Jesus’ death on the cross. God certainly paid a high price so that people could have a relationship with him. With the words “in a manner worthy of the cross of Christ” Paul reinforces his command by appealing to the gratitude of the Philippian Christians for their experience of the costly gospel of salvation.
- D. Application—Whatever happens, you should live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

## **II. Christians can live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel by standing firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel, and not being frightened in any way.**

- A. First, Paul explains that living as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel requires that Christians stand firm in one spirit—“I will know that you stand firm in one spirit.” Loyal soldiers take their stand and courageously refuse to retreat even when an overwhelming enemy force confronts them. One of the reasons that they are able to maintain their courage is their unified dedication. Similarly, you should live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel through a unified dedication to remain faithful to God no matter what opposition you encounter.
- B. Second, Paul explains that living as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel requires that Christians contend as one man for the faith of the gospel—“contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.” The Roman phalanx was a body of heavily armed infantry formed into close deep ranks and files. The phalanx was an awesome offensive weapon of warfare that made the Roman army almost invincible in battle. The phalanx was powerful because the entire army moved as one person. Similarly, you should live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel through a unified determination to advance the gospel no matter what opposition you encounter.
- C. Third, Paul explains that living as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel requires that Christians not be frightened in any way—“without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.” Courage is the most esteemed ideal of the soldier. Conversely, cowardice is odious to the soldier. Similarly, you should live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel through courageous resolution to trust in God and not be frightened by anything.

- D. Application—You can live as patriotic citizens of God’s kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel by standing firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel, and not being frightened in any way.

**III. Christians should stand firm in one spirit, contend as one man for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way because of the testimony of their courage, the grace they have received, and their duty as soldiers of the cross.**

- A. First, Paul maintains that Christians should stand firm in one spirit, contend as one man for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way because of the testimony of their courage—“This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.” *Show the congregation or class members several common road signs and ask them to explain what each sign signifies. Explain* According to Paul, the courage of a Christian is a sign. As the confidence of an army can be shaken by the courage of their opposition, Paul maintains that the confidence of the enemies of the church may be shaken if they witness the courage of Christians. The courage of Christians could even convince their enemies that they are in danger of destruction and should surrender and commit their lives to Jesus so that they can be delivered along with Christians.
- B. Second, Paul maintains that Christians should stand firm in one spirit, contend as one man for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way because of the grace they have received—“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.” We all enjoy receiving gifts. *Have the congregation or class members share their experiences of receiving gifts and their resulting feelings.* Certainly gratitude is among those feelings that we have when we receive gifts. Certainly we are grateful for God’s gracious gift of salvation. Paul maintains that a part of the gracious gift we have received along with salvation is the gift of suffering. We can not have the one without the other. Therefore, we should gratefully accept God’s gift of suffering along with the gift of salvation..
- C. Finally, Paul maintains that Christians should stand firm in one spirit, contend as one man for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way because it is their duty as soldiers of the cross—“since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.” When Paul founded the church in Philippi, the Philippian Christians saw his suffering with their own eyes. He was beaten and thrown into prison because of his faithful testimony to the gospel. They had also heard that he was continuing to suffer because of his commitment to Jesus Christ. He was in prison and undergoing a trial that could result in his execution. Paul maintains that Christians share this same struggle with him. During the Gulf War CNN showed soldiers complaining about going into combat because when they joined the U.S. armed forces they did not anticipate the nation going to war. I could hardly believe my eyes and ears! The duty of a soldier is to fight! In the same way, it is the duty of Christians to courageously fight like Paul as soldiers of the cross.
- D. Application—You should stand firm in one spirit, contend as one man for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way because of the testimony of your courage, the grace that you have received, and your duty as soldiers of the cross.

## **Conclusion**

Living the Christian life can be very much like warfare. We have been sent on a mission to conquer the world for God by leading people to trust in Jesus Christ. However, Satan is a powerful enemy and he has a great multitude of allies. Most people reject God's message of salvation and retaliate against the church with persecution. Sometimes it seems easier for Christians to run or surrender. The Philippian Christians were also engaged in this warfare. Through Paul's words to them in Philippians 1:27-30 God can speak to us today about what we should do, how we can do it, and why we must do it. We should live as patriotic citizens of God's kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel by taking responsibility for ourselves, standing firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel, and not being frightened in any way because of the testimony of our courage, the grace we have received, and the duty we have as soldiers of the cross.