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DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A TRAINING IN BIBLICAL  
INTERPRETATION FOR THE BIBLE STUDY TEACHERS AT  
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, WAYNESBORO, GEORGIA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Michael Lewis Godfrey

May 2015

**APPROVAL SHEET**

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To Carrie, my precious bride and best friend,  
for your steadfast love and unwavering support.

To Abbie Noelle and Caleb Haddon, our precious children,  
for whom I give thanks to the Lord.

To my brothers and sisters in Christ at First Baptist Church, Waynesboro,  
for your gracious and ongoing support of this endeavor.

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## PREFACE

Many deserve thanks for their investment both in this project and in me. Therefore, I would like to thank First Baptist Church, Waynesboro, Georgia. As a body of believers you have encouraged, supported, prayed for, and loved me throughout my ministry here and especially during my work on this project.

This project would not have been completed without the faithful support of Dr. G. Al Wright Jr. As my pastor and close friend, he pored over every line of this project with joy and enthusiasm. Every page bears his mark. Therefore I owe him a debt of gratitude that words could not express.

I am grateful to Dr. Russell T. Fuller, my faculty supervisor. He provided valuable critique and encouragement throughout this process. This project bears the marks of his careful eye. Furthermore, I am grateful to Dr. Jim Hamilton and Dr. Robert Plummer, who have overseen the Applied Theology cohort. These men have a contagious love of and enthusiasm for the Word of God, which God has used to excite further passion in my heart for the Scripture.

Our children, Abbie Noelle and Caleb Haddon, have enthusiastically supported me as I pursued God's call to go back to school. They sacrificed time with me for the completion of this project. Never did they doubt Daddy's finishing school. I have drawn strength from their unwavering confidence. They are a greater joy and encouragement to my life and ministry than I have words to say.

Finally, I am overwhelmed with thankfulness to my wife, Carrie. Her sacrifice for this project and my further education has been greater than anyone else's. Weekly she gave up time with me so that I could be at the office reading, writing, and working on this

project. She constantly encouraged, supported, and cheered me on to finish the project and the Doctor of Ministry program, just as she did when I was pursuing my Master of Divinity. She is truly a better friend and bride than I could have dreamed of, and she is a treasure for whom I give thanks continually.

Michael L. Godfrey

Waynesboro, Georgia

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to develop and implement training in biblical interpretation for the Bible study teachers at First Baptist Church, Waynesboro, Georgia.

#### **Goals**

Four goals determined the effectiveness of the project. The first goal of this project was to develop a six-part curriculum for training Bible study teachers in biblical interpretation. This goal was measured by submitting the developed curriculum to the elders, and ministerial staff, along with an evaluation rubric for curriculum review (appendix1). The rubric was employed by the elders and ministerial staff to evaluate the effectiveness and biblical fidelity of the prepared curriculum. The goal was successfully met when 75 percent of the indicators were marked at the sufficient or above level.

The second goal was to evaluate interpretive skills of the Bible study teachers at First Baptist Church Waynesboro, Georgia (FBCW). This goal was measured by the administering of a pre-training survey designed to test the Bible study teachers' knowledge and skills in biblical interpretation (appendix 2). The project questionnaire consisted of questions taken from a question bank focused on the science and art of biblical interpretation.<sup>1</sup> This goal was successfully accomplished once I received the completed questionnaires and assessed the responses.

The third goal of this project was to train the Bible study teachers in the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Plummer, "Bank of Quiz and Test Questions for 40 Questions book," accessed August 25, 2013, [www.robplummer.com/resources](http://www.robplummer.com/resources).

science and art of biblical interpretation. A six-part curriculum was developed and used for these classes that were taught bi-monthly for a twelve-week period. Additionally, necessary handouts containing notes and exercises for the developing skills in biblical interpretation were used to supplement the teaching material (appendix 2). This goal was measured by re-administering the pre-project questionnaire during the final session. The results of the questionnaires were then compiled and analyzed. A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine if there was a positive, significant statistical difference between the pre-training and post-training questionnaires. This goal was deemed successful if the t-test proved that there was a positive statistical change in the knowledge of and skill in biblical interpretation.

The fourth goal was to create a strategic plan for the repetition of training in biblical interpretation. FBCW will be adding additional teachers and Bible study classes. The need for this training is ongoing as the church grows and new teachers are needed. This goal was measured by the review of a strategic plan for training teachers in biblical interpretation (appendix 5). The ministerial staff and elders were given, in addition to the strategic plan, an evaluation rubric by which they could assess the potential effects, obstacles, and gains of the strategic plan (appendix 4). Once the rubrics were returned, the plan was revised as needed in light of the results gathered from the completed evaluation rubrics. The goal was successfully met when 75 percent of the indicators were marked at the sufficient or above level. An additional benchmark of success was the approval of the plan by the elders and a commitment to implementation.

### **Ministry Context**

The goals listed were carried out at First Baptist Church Waynesboro, Georgia. First Baptist Church currently has eleven weekly Bible study classes meeting on Sunday mornings. The classes that will be considered in this project include both adults and students. Student ministry classes cover the age range from 12 years old to 18 years old.

The adult Sunday school classes serve the remainder of the church ages 19 to 91. The numerical breakdown of these classes is as follows: 3 student ministry Sunday school classes and 8 adult Sunday school classes. Senior staff or the elders of the church teach 6 of the 11 Sunday school classes. Four of these classes have an enrollment exceeding 30 members, two of which exceed 60 members.

In addition to these weekly meetings, there are periodic small group Bible studies occurring during the fall and spring semesters. Currently there are guidelines for the small group Bible studies. The church offers 5 small group Bible studies during each of the previously mentioned semesters. These studies are targeted at specific cross-sections of the congregation. Two studies are offered to men, 2 studies are offered to women, and a final study is offered to couples. Although this number of studies has been the goal of the ministerial staff and elders, it has not been the practice for the last two years. There has been only one male Bible study class offered over this time span. The opportunities for male involvement in small group Bible has study have been almost unanimously co-ed settings.<sup>2</sup> These classes typically have 8 to 12 students. Additionally, there may be multiple facilitators. Co-teaching occurs primarily within the couples Bible studies due specifically to content. For example, a Bible study on marriage would be led by a couple.

It should be noted that the various groups mentioned above are not the sum total of all of the Bible studies offered by church members. FBCW currently has “home” studies organized and offered by church members. While these studies will not be considered in the evaluation of this project, the materials and curriculum produced for this project will be made available to these teachers.

FBCW is constructing a new sanctuary and will be breaking ground on new

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<sup>2</sup> The lack of attention to gender specific Bible studies is elaborated on in the rationale section of this chapter as this forms some basis for this project.

educational space in the coming years. Upon completion of these projects, the expansion of educational space will provide the space needed for new classes to be formed. New classes will present a need for new teachers. Once the goals of this project are successfully accomplished, current teachers will receive necessary training. Additionally, a strategy and resource for the training of new teachers in biblical interpretation will be established.

For each of these Bible study groups, a process is in place through which the material to be used will be considered and evaluated. In order for a study to be considered for use within a class, a senior staff member and to the body of elders must review and approve the material based on its theological content and consistency. Once approval has been gained, the material is made available to teachers for use in the various Bible study settings. In recent months, a new measure has been put in place in order to strengthen the organization of these groups via the addition of Bible study coordinators. The role of the coordinators is to promote, enlist and organize small group studies. The implementation of this new role is still in its infancy stage, but has yielded an improved involvement of church members in available groups.

Currently there are no specific evaluation tools or standards by which teachers are measured. The only measure of a teacher's effectiveness is the response of participants and the previously mentioned evaluation of the material by the elders. While this feedback provides a measure of accountability, there still remains the need to train teachers in biblical interpretation in order to equip them more fully to teach the Scriptures.

In addition to the lack of an evaluation measure, FBCW has no method of training teachers in biblical interpretation. The approval of any teacher into a teaching role is a decision that is made by the nominating team. This team has no standard criteria for evaluating or considering teachers' abilities. Essentially candidates have no "proving

ground”; they are given the necessary materials and assigned a class. In addition, there is not a strategy in place for the ongoing training of both current and prospective teachers. The goals of this project addressed this deficiency.

### **Rationale for the Project**

The rationale for this project is explained in this section. At this point there is a need for training our teachers at FBCW in biblical interpretation. First, there is no training in biblical interpretation available for teachers within the church. It is necessary at this time to implement a method for equipping teachers to interpret the Bible faithfully and accurately. We have a number of committed teachers who are serving the church in teaching roles, and most have served faithfully for years in this capacity. One of the strengths of FBCW is the teaching ministry of the church and yet there is no plan in place for the ongoing training of Bible study teachers. This project will provide the necessary tools for current teachers to become Bible interpreters in order to sharpen their skills within the Bible study classrooms. Additionally, due to the steady growth of the community and the church, the classes are overcrowded. Therefore, we have a need for new teachers who have been equipped to interpret and teach the Bible. Outside of printed or web-based curriculum, which is presented to the teachers, there is no method for equipping these new teachers. We are in need of a way to implement training for Bible study teachers. In recent months, new teachers have been recruited for Bible study classes. The new teachers, as a part of their transition into the teaching roles, would benefit greatly by training in biblical interpretation. While there are books and other resources available for personal study in biblical interpretation, our desire is to create a program for teachers tailored to our local church context. Thirdly, our desire is to develop and implement a targeted training for the teachers. Teachers could simply read texts on biblical interpretation. However, at this stage in the life of FBCW, the need is not simply to provide teachers with books, but to teach and train them interactively in the art and

science of biblical interpretation. This method of training will offer teachers a better grasp of the concepts they are being taught. Finally, as new classes are birthed and new teachers are needed, FBCW will need a strategy and plan in place for the evaluation and training of new Bible study teachers. Since there is a need for new classes now in the life of the church, we must implement a means of training new teachers in biblical interpretation, equipping them with the skills they will need to handle rightly the Scriptures. Each of these realities point to a great need for equipping our teachers in the skill of biblical interpretation.

The church needs more male teachers. We have those who are willing to serve as facilitators but few who are confident in teaching a class. This project, while not targeting statistically these potential teachers, will be made available and open to all who desire to improve their skills in biblical interpretation. Likewise, there will be a concerted effort by the staff and elders to draw in the men of the church in order to equip them with the skills needed to interpret the Bible confidently and accurately. The lack of male leadership in the area of the small group Bible studies reveals yet another pressing need for this project. We are not equipping the men of the church to teach the Bible. A clear benefit of this project will be the equipping of these men, and Lord willing the start of vibrant male small group Bible studies.

Several key benefits will rise out of training our teachers in biblical interpretation. First, teachers will grow in their understanding of the Bible. Understanding of the biblical text is fundamental to teaching it. Therefore, as the teachers' ability to understand increases, the skill of effective application grows. Fruit of this growth will be seen beyond the teachers as well. Secondly, Bible study participants will benefit as they observe and learn sound methods of biblical interpretation employed within their Bible studies. Third, first-time teachers will be equipped both to understand and interpret the Bible with confidence. Fourth, FBCW will be enriched through a growing knowledge of

the Scriptures as the teachers develop skills in biblical interpretation and present the Bible in class settings. Fifth, the health of the church will increase as class participants better explore and understand the Bible. Finally, the church will have both a strategy and the necessary materials to repeat evaluation and training as necessary. As our church grows, adding more classes, and as teachers are recruited a strategic plan will be in place to sustain the health of the teaching ministry within the church. The pressing reality of the need for men and women to teach the Bible faithfully will be met as the strategic plan is implemented into the life of the church.

### **Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

*Biblical interpretation.* “To properly interpret a text is to faithfully convey the inspired human author’s meaning of the text, while not neglecting the divine intent.”<sup>3</sup>

*Biblical theology.* “The interpretive perspective reflected in the way the biblical authors have presented their understanding of earlier Scripture, redemptive history, and the events they are describing, recounting, celebrating, or addressing in narratives, poems, proverbs, letters, and apocalyses.”<sup>4</sup>

*Metanarrative.* “The overall story told by the Christian Scriptures, which is not totalizing or oppressive, and which makes possible the ‘redemptive-historical’ level of biblical interpretation.”<sup>5</sup>

*Exegesis.* “Exegesis means to ‘draw out of’ a text what it means.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 79.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *What is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 16. Additionally, there is much debate about the nature and definition of biblical theology. While I adopt Hamilton’s definition and methodology, there are multiple excellent resources within the field, which are cited in the bibliography of this project.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Wolters, “Metanarrative,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 506-7.

<sup>6</sup> Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 57.

*History of redemption; Redemptive history.* “The series of events throughout history by which God acted to bring about the salvation of his people.”<sup>7</sup> These terms are often interchangeable as they are referencing the same reality, and were used in this fashion in this project.

There is one limitation for this project: the project took place over a five-month period of time.

There is one delimitation to this project. The project focused on only the Bible study teachers who currently serve as student or adult Bible study teachers. While the training was open to more, the pre and post surveys were only completed and gathered from this group.

### **Research Methodology**

The evaluation tools and research instruments are connected to the goals of the project. Therefore, multiple evaluation tools and research instruments were implemented throughout this project.<sup>8</sup> The first goal of this project was to develop a curriculum on the topic of biblical interpretation. In order to measure this goal, the senior pastor, the elders, and the ministerial staff evaluated the developed curriculum with an evaluation rubric designed to test the effectiveness and biblical fidelity of the curriculum (see appendix 2). The senior pastor served as the primary proofreader and content editor during the development of the curriculum. Furthermore, upon completion of the training and the developed curriculum, the materials were distributed to the senior pastor, elders, and ministerial staff for review using the prepared rubric. There was a period of two weeks for evaluation and review of the curriculum. Upon completion of the review, the

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<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1243.

<sup>8</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

curriculum was corrected and revised in accordance with the results gained through the employment of the evaluation rubric. The goal was successfully met when 80 percent of the indicators were marked at the sufficient or above level.

The second goal of this project was to evaluate the interpretive skills of the Bible study teachers at FBCW. This goal was accomplished at the beginning of the second phase of the project. Phase 2 of the project lasted six weeks. The third goal of this project is to implement the developed curriculum through a series of training sessions with the teachers of FBCW. The teachers gathered bi-monthly for training in the curriculum over a period of three months. There were six training sessions taking place in this portion of the project. In order to gather the necessary evaluation data a pre-training questionnaire was administered upon arrival at the first training session (see appendix 1). This questionnaire is designed to test the abilities of the Bible study teachers in the area of biblical interpretation. The second goal was accomplished when the surveys were completed and the results are cataloged. Upon the conclusion of the final training session the pre-project questionnaire was administered to the teachers in order to track their progress in skillful biblical interpretation. A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine if there was a positive statistical difference between the pre-training and post-training questionnaires. This goal was deemed successful when the t-test proved that there is a positive statistical change in the knowledge of biblical interpretation in the teachers of FBCW.

The fourth goal of this project was to create a strategic plan for the ongoing implementation of the training of Bible study teachers in the life of FBCW. The elders and the ministerial staff measured this goal by using a developed evaluation rubric (see appendix 3). This rubric was designed to evaluate the repeatability, frequency of training and the process of implementation into the life of FBCW. This took place during Week 15, the final week, of the project. After evaluating the plan, the plan was then revised to

reflect the necessary changes. The plan was then returned to the elders and staff for final review. The goal was successfully met when the results revealed 80 percent of the indicators were at the sufficient or above level.

CHAPTER 2  
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR  
TRAINING TEACHERS IN BIBLICAL  
INTERPRETATION

All who pick up and read the Scripture immediately interpret it. This reality is inescapable. The Bible has numerous examples that demonstrate the need for biblical interpretation. The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture ensures that the Bible has been written in such a manner that people can understand it. However, to understand the Bible, one must be able to interpret it accurately. Thankfully, as one reads the Scripture there are many accounts of accurate biblical interpretation. These examples occur in various types of biblical literature. The purpose of this chapter is to examine five biblical examples wherein biblical interpretation is demonstrated descriptively, via biblical narrative, and prescriptively, via epistle and discourse. These examples provide a clear picture of the necessity of biblical interpretation, and further model faithful and accurate ministry of the Word.

**Ezra and the Levites Interpreted the Scripture**

The narrative from Nehemiah 8:1-8 is a paradigmatic account for those who would stand and teach the Scriptures. The context is startlingly close even to our present day in that the Law of God had become foreign to many of his people. In our day, even within the church, it is possible that the same reality could be spoken of us. Prior to this account, through the righteous judgment of God, Israel had gone into exile in foreign lands and here one reads an account after some have returned to Jerusalem according to God's grace and faithfulness. The return of Israel from exile was not a one-step process. Persian permission and assistance in the reestablishment and rebuilding of a subject

nation, namely Israel, is a testimony to the power of God in accomplishing his purposes in the world for his people. However, the process was time consuming and dangerous. In Nehemiah 8:1-8 one enters into the post-exilic narrative of Israel. The temple has been reconstructed (Ezra 5-6). The wall surrounding the city of Jerusalem has likewise been reconstructed (Neh 1-6). There are some chronological difficulties surrounding this text, but these relate primarily to the placement of this event within the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative and do not affect the importance or veracity of the account.<sup>1</sup> The rebuilding of Jerusalem is punctuated with scenes of worship and celebration. This scene is one of those moments.

The passage opens with an assembly of the people of Israel, called as it were by the people. The author states, “all the people gathered,” and “they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses” (Neh 8:1). They are gathered in the presence of God and the Word of God occupies center stage. The presence of “a wooden platform” (8:4) is indicative of a planned worship gathering. The specific reason for their assembly is not mentioned in these verses while the time of year is given, “on the first day of the seventh month” (8:2).<sup>2</sup> The choice of Ezra as the one to lead in this public assembly is no surprise if one considers what has already been written about him.

Ezra is a heroic figure in the Old Testament who is often overlooked. He is an example of a faithful Israelite and scribe. Scribes held an official role in the ancient near east, and more specifically in Israel during the exilic period. Edwin Yamauchi notes, “Scribes were scholars who studied and taught the Scriptures.”<sup>3</sup> In Ezra 7:1-10 readers are introduced to Ezra via his priestly pedigree and his piety as a worshiper of God.

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<sup>1</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 275-76.

<sup>2</sup> Many commentators agree that this was likely to observe the feast of trumpets, which would later become the New Year celebration in Israel.

<sup>3</sup> Edwin Yamauchi, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, in vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 649.

Beyond this Ezra is identified as one who possesses skill in biblical interpretation. In Ezra 7:6 the author states, “He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses” meaning in this case “ a student and expositor of God’s written word.”<sup>4</sup> Ezra’s skill in the Scriptures would be of paramount importance as Israel sought to rebuild their city from the ashes. Furthermore, Ezra’s piety is described in such a way that the subsequent details of his ministry make sense to the reader of this narrative. “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and teach his statutes and rules in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). There is no clearer job description for the Bible teachers than what one sees here in the heart of Ezra. For Ezra to stand and accurately instruct the people concerning the law in Jerusalem he would have to know the Scripture himself. Beyond this, Ezra understood the connection between understanding the Scripture and living in accordance with the Scripture. Therefore, when the time came to stand and instruct the people of God, Ezra was prepared along with other Levites who were able to interpret the Scripture.

During this assembly Ezra reads from the Law “from early morning until midday” (8:3). This statement serves as a summary statement that is unpacked in the following verses.<sup>5</sup> Three key factors for interpreting this passage are; the description of the people in attendance, the work of Ezra and the Levites among the people, and the resulting impact on the people. First, The people gathered are twice described by the phrase “both men and women” and “who could understand” (8:2, 3). Clearly the assembly would include not only adults but also children. The author draws attention to the inclusion of the entire community. Excluded from this event were only those who could not understand what was to be read and heard. From this text we can see the theological assumption that the Scriptures can be understood. From the description of the

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<sup>4</sup> Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 92

<sup>5</sup> Leslie C. Allen and Timothy S. Laniak, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 126.

people in attendance one can see the author communicating the perspicuity of the Scriptures. However, understanding is not immediate, as one observes in the following explanatory verses (8:5-8). Second, Ezra, along with others referred to as “the Levites” (8:7), read from and interpreted the Law for the people: “helped the people to understand the Law” (8:7) and “gave the sense so that the people understood the reading.” Though the people gathered were able to comprehend what they heard, this comprehension did not preclude the need for interpretation. Marvin Breneman notes, “Since the people had lived in a foreign country all of their lives, they had lost some of their ability to understand Hebrew.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Ezra and the Levites serve the people by explaining the meaning of the Scripture to the assembly. How Ezra and the Levites accomplish this explanation among the people is a matter of discussion. The ESV states, “They read from the Law of God, *clearly*,” which could be translated “with interpretation,” “with translation,” or “paragraph by paragraph.”<sup>7</sup> Regardless of whether they are translating or interpreting, they are demonstrating that effective teaching requires accurate biblical interpretation. The next phrase is proof as Ezra and the Levites “gave the sense” of what was read. The task before them was to interpret the Scriptures for the people, a task that they accomplish as the passage continues. Finally, readers are told, “The people understood the reading” (8:8). The climax of this passage is the people understanding what they have heard, namely the Scripture. The goal of the interpretive efforts of Ezra and the Levites is achieved in the understanding of the people. Therefore, what one observes in this text is an appropriate example, or even model, for the teaching ministry of the church. Those entrusted with the task of teaching the word of God must be trained

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<sup>6</sup> Marvin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 225.

<sup>7</sup> F. Charles Fensham makes a persuasive case for the use of “translate” in this passage. F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 217-18.

in the art and skill of biblical interpretation.

Ezra is a paradigmatic figure for believers and even more so for those called to teach in the church. The description in Ezra 7:10, “Ezra set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes in and rules in Israel,” is an appropriate aspiration for any Bible teacher. The connection between this commitment and his description as one “skilled in the Law of Moses” cannot be separated. However, Ezra is far from the only example of one who faithfully demonstrated skill in biblical interpretation. Jesus likewise displays skill in biblical interpretation in his teaching ministry.

### **Jesus Interpreted the Scriptures**

In the gospel of Luke there are multiple moments demonstrated, in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, in which one observes the necessity of skill in biblical interpretation. Two primary scenes from Luke’s narrative will demonstrate that Jesus was a skilled expositor of the Old Testament, and furthermore will demonstrate some paradigmatic elements for those who interpret the Scriptures today. First, this section examine Luke’s account of Jesus’ first recorded sermon in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:14-21). Second, it will examine Jesus conversation with two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-27). There has never existed an expositor of the Scripture to compare with the Lord Jesus, so one need not assume that all of Jesus’ teaching ministry will simply carry over to any given setting. Yet by observing these events in the life of the savior one can discern help for one’s own methods, preparation, and training in biblical interpretation. In short, Jesus demonstrated necessary skills in biblical interpretation.

First, Jesus’ public ministry begins, according to Luke, with his return to Galilee and teaching in the synagogues (Luke 4:14-15). Luke notes intentionally that Jesus’ return is “in the power of the Spirit.” An early pattern in Luke’s gospel is the

presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the event of Jesus' birth, and his public ministry.<sup>8</sup> In this case the "power of the Spirit" is linked to the teaching ministry of Jesus. I. Howard Marshall notes, "The power of the Spirit is linked especially with the apostolic witness, and hence here the primary reference is presumably to the authority of Jesus to teach."<sup>9</sup> The connection between the return of Jesus in the "power of the Spirit" and Jesus' teaching ministry is demonstrated by Luke's description of Jesus' action in Galilee upon his return, "And he taught in their synagogues." Luke's comment informs his readers of a key component of Jesus teaching ministry. The work of the Holy Spirit is essential for the development of skill in biblical interpretation. Therefore, it is necessary to note that Luke links the teaching ministry of Jesus to the "power of the Spirit."

Luke then transitions to the setting of a local synagogue in Nazareth. The formation of synagogues and the form and structure of synagogue services is not detailed in the Bible. Darrell Bock states, "The origin of synagogues is still shrouded in mystery. In all probability, synagogues arose during the Babylonian captivity, when the Temple could no longer be a focus of worship. Taking the temple's central place, they served as locales for teaching and prayer among the dispersed Jewish people."<sup>10</sup> In fact, Robert Stein notes this passage as "the oldest account we possess of a synagogue service."<sup>11</sup> In this account one observes some of the components of the synagogue worship at the time of Jesus. These synagogue details are not the primary focus of Luke's account. Luke is focused on Jesus messianic proclamations through his exposition of a section of "the

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<sup>8</sup> Lucan references to Spirit 1:15 (Jesus); 1:35 (Mary); 1:41 (Elizabeth); 1:67 (Zechariah); 2:25-27 (Simeon); 3:22 (Jesus' Baptism); 4:1 (Jesus' temptation); 4:14 (Jesus);

<sup>9</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 176.

<sup>10</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 392.

<sup>11</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman), 155.

scroll of the prophet Isaiah.” However, the details surrounding the sermon and even the statements of the sermon itself demonstrate Jesus’ skill in biblical interpretation. First, Luke states Jesus attended the synagogue “as was his custom.” The pattern of Jesus’ life is described through his participation in the worship of Yahweh. The pattern of Sabbath worship is not a novel practice in the life of Jesus at this time. Luke has already established that Jesus’ life was one of worship, which included the development of interpretive skill (2:40; 46-47). Second, Jesus “stood up to read” which does not appear to be an assumption on Jesus’ part but in all likelihood an invitation by the ruler of the Nazareth synagogue.<sup>12</sup> This invitation to read the Scripture and teach in this synagogue is rooted in Luke’s previous comment concerning the spread of Jesus’ reputation (4:14). Jesus is given the scroll of Isaiah to read from. Commentators differ in opinion as to whether he requested the scroll of Isaiah, or that Isaiah was the scroll to be read that day according to a prescribed pattern. Luke does not address this issue. However, it is apparent that Jesus selected the portion of Isaiah he would read.<sup>13</sup> Luke records that Jesus, “found the place where it was written” signifying that upon receipt of the scroll Jesus knew the text he would read and comment upon. Finally, after completing his reading of the text he “sat down” (4:20) to instruct the people gathered at the synagogue. His exposition begins with an open claim of Messianic fulfillment: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21). Jesus demonstrates the ability to openly read, interpret and apply the Scripture in this passage. It would be impossible for him to accomplish this task if he had not first been trained in biblical interpretation. No one has record of Jesus receiving formal rabbinic training, which is not the argument being made. Rather, one can infer that Jesus, through customary synagogue attendance and a yearly pattern of temple worship, developed skill in biblical interpretation. One also sees that he

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 181-82.

utilized this skill in other synagogues as he taught in the towns he visited.

Jesus was a skilled biblical interpreter. Luke demonstrates this reality further near the end of his gospel. However, Jesus did not restrict himself to public exposition of Scripture. He was equally skilled as an interpreter of Scripture when out of the public eye. The best example of this skill occurs as he interprets the Bible to two skeptical disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35.

The account of Jesus' interaction with two disciples on the road to Emmaus is unique to Luke. This discussion will examine the response of Jesus to the disciples in 24:25-27. The setting of the conversation is after the resurrection of Jesus (24:21-24). These disciples are departing Jerusalem following the Passover celebration and the crucifixion, in their mind, of the one the "hoped to be the one to redeem Israel" (24:21). These two disciples are in discussion concerning the events that have taken place. Luke states that Jesus comes upon them as they "were talking and discussing" (Luke 24:14). Darrell Bock notes that the "two men are engaged in an intense discussion."<sup>14</sup> This reality is evident when one recognizes in 24:14-15 Luke references speech three times. Jesus approaches, unrecognized by the men, and joins the conversation by asking them what they are speaking about (24:17-19). The men give an accurate, albeit incomplete, account of what had taken place in Jerusalem in the previous days (24:19b-24). Luke includes these individuals as members of the believing community, and yet he records Jesus' forceful rebuke of these disciples for their lack of belief. If these disciples had understood the Scriptures, they would not be so shaken by what they had seen in Jerusalem, but rather they would have been filled with assurance and hope that Messiah had come.

Jesus responds with a stinging assessment of these disciples. He refers to them as "foolish ones" and "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (24:25).

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<sup>14</sup> Darrell Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1909.

Jesus condemns their doubt, which, as Jesus states, is a refusal to believe the Scripture, mainly the prophets. I. Howard Marshall explains Jesus' rebuke by stating, "Acceptance of what the prophets said should have led the disciples to believe the reports of the women at the tomb."<sup>15</sup> The issue at hand with these disciples is their reluctance to trust God as he is revealed in his word. What a striking reality that these two who were at least in some measure associated with Jesus as followers and yet could be so hardened to the Scripture. Surely there is caution present in this rebuke concerning the reality of faith in Jesus Christ. True believers in Jesus Christ are verified by their belief of "all the prophets have spoken." Jesus continues by rhetorically pointing these disciples to the reality of the suffering of the Messiah. The nature of the question assumes that the disciples would not have said "the Christ should suffer these things" (24:27). Joel Green notes, "From the perspective of his followers, the answer is, clearly and categorically, No! According to Jesus, the perspective of the Scriptures is different."<sup>16</sup> It is important to note Jesus' emphasis on the sufficiency of the Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, in guiding people understanding the gospel. These disciples had need of understanding the Scripture, which Jesus was about to give them.

Readers are told, "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (24:27). Surely this was a conversation any Bible student would have loved to hear. The Savior privately connects the interpretive dots for these disciples. Just as in the earlier text Jesus demonstrates his skill in biblical interpretation. Luke says that Jesus "interpreted" the Scriptures. In the case of these two disciples they had not understood the meaning of the Old Testament in reference to the Christ. Like the members of the assembly in Nehemiah 8, these two

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<sup>15</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 896

<sup>16</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 848.

would be classified as “able to understand” and the Scriptures were equally clear, yet the disciples were in need of someone to interpret the Scripture. Jesus does so through his explanation of “Moses,” “all the prophets,” and “all the Scriptures.” He is not bound to one section of the Scripture. Jesus unfolds, according to Luke, multiple points in Scripture explaining the meaning to these two disciples. Luke shows us the incredible skill Jesus possessed in biblical interpretation. Furthermore, Jesus demonstrates a clear understanding of the metanarrative of Scripture. He is able to interpret individual sections of Scripture in light of the entire corpus. There are significant biblical theology overtones to this statement as well. Jesus demonstrates the climax of the Scriptures as being fulfilled in his person and work. That is, the goal of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, is to point to the person and work of Jesus as the central epoch of the Bible. Jesus emphasizes this reality by interpreting for these disciples “in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” By making this statement Jesus shows the cohesive nature of the Scriptures. There are clear thematic elements running through the entirety of the Bible, and Jesus explains, to these disciples, how the Scriptures focus on him. In both of these events in Luke’s gospel one observes Jesus clearly demonstrating skill in biblical interpretation.

### **Peter Interprets the Bible at Pentecost**

One of the most exciting and pivotal moments in the New Testament is the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Much attention is given to this event. The Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples who are gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4). A “sound” accompanies the arrival of the Spirit causing a crowd of people to gather around the Spirit-filled disciples (2:5-6a). The promised Helper has come to Jesus’ followers, and immediately they speak and proclaim the gospel to those who are gathered in Jerusalem for the observance of Pentecost. Strikingly, and supernaturally, the crowds comprised of people from diverse nations hear the proclamation of Jesus in their own language (2:6b-

11). The crowd is divided over what to make of this marvel. Some seek an answer for the event (2:12), while others give into skeptical mocking (2:13). Having set the stage, Luke then shifts the narrative to record Peter's response to the crowd. Peter, freshly indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, proclaims the gospel to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem for the Pentecost celebration. The content of the message is of crucial importance to the church of Jesus Christ. It is equally helpful to observe how Peter interprets and applies the Scripture. Peter demonstrates skill in biblical interpretation throughout his sermon to the gathered crowds.

First, Peter addresses the skeptical response of some in the crowd by declaring that it is not drunkenness they are witnessing, but rather a supernatural work of God (Acts 2:14-21). John Polhill notes, "Often speeches in Acts begin with a correction of a misunderstanding, a natural attention getting device."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Peter uses the opportunity afforded him by the skeptic hearts of many in the crowd to apply the Scriptures to the situation at hand. Citing Joel 2:28-32, Peter argues that what is taking place is the very fulfillment of God's promise to send the Holy Spirit. Peter is actually interpreting two things at once. On the one hand he is interpreting the spiritual event that is taking place in light of the Scriptures. Peter's lens for viewing the world is the Old Testament. Therefore, he views what is occurring around him in light of the revelation of God in the Scripture. On the other hand Peter is interpreting and applying the Bible through his declaration of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. He is proclaiming that the miracle that is occurring was foretold in the prophecy of Joel, and applying Joel's prophecy to this event. However, Peter's quotation of Joel does not stop merely with answering the skeptics about the arrival of the Holy Spirit. He presses further into a bold proclamation of the gospel. The final phrase in the passage of Joel, "everyone who calls

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<sup>17</sup> John Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 108.

on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21), serves as Peter’s transition to proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and ultimate hope for salvation. Darrell Bock comments, “Peter’s ultimate point will be that the only way to be delivered from the day is to call upon the name of the Lord and thereby seek God’s salvation.”<sup>18</sup> Peter begins his defense of the gospel by applying the Scripture to a misunderstanding in the awareness that he will have an opportunity to address the deeper need of the crowd, namely salvation.

Second, Peter proclaims and defends Jesus as the Messiah through the interpretation and application of two key Old Testament passages (Acts 2:22-36). Transitioning from the prophecy of Joel, Peter builds a case for Jesus as the “Lord” about whom Joel is writing. In 2:22-24 he observes a tightly packed statement of the person and work of Jesus. The “signs,” “mighty works,” and “wonders” served as proof that he was sent by God (2:22). Furthermore, his betrayal and death were a part of God’s plan (2:23). Finally, God raised him from the dead securing the hope of resurrection for all who would believe (2:24). What follows this declaration is another example of skill in biblical interpretation. Peter justifies his statement of Jesus as Messiah through the application of Psalm 16:8-11 to Jesus Christ (2:25-31). John Polhill writes, “Having set forth the basic Christian confession that Jesus is God’s appointed Messiah, Peter sought to support this claim with Scriptural proof from Psalm 16:8-11.”<sup>19</sup> After quoting the Psalm Peter then gives a Christological interpretation of the composition (2:29-31). He understands that David wrote Psalm 16. However, he will demonstrate that in light of Jesus the psalm must be interpreted as referring to someone beyond David, namely Jesus. Peter argues that David could not have been the subject of the Psalm as David was long dead and

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<sup>18</sup> Darrell Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 118.

<sup>19</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 113.

buried (2:29). Peter justifies this interpretation of the Psalm through the resurrection of Jesus Christ claiming that David exercised the gift of prophecy in writing these words (2:30-31). While Peter's interpretation and application of the Psalm is worthy of extended discussion, for our purpose it is essential to see that he demonstrates skill in biblical interpretation. He understands and explains the Bible as he had been trained to do by the Lord Jesus. After quoting the psalm, he then explains to his hearers a Christological understanding of the text. Commenting on Peter's application of Psalm 16 to Jesus John Stott provides three points that biblical interpreters should bear in mind. First, "all Scripture bears witness to Christ, especially to his death, resurrection and world-wide mission." Second, "[The] disciples came naturally to see Old Testament references to God's anointed or king, to David and his royal seed, as finding their fulfillment in Jesus." Third, "a Christian use of the Old Testament like Peter's of Psalm 16 is scrupulously logical and internally coherent."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Peter is demonstrating for us how to read and interpret the Old Testament. In the same way Jesus demonstrates his centrality from the Old Testament writings to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Peter demonstrates a Christological pattern of reading the Old Testament.

Peter's sermon concludes with an explanation of a third Old Testament passage (2:32-36). Having established Jesus' identity as the Messiah through his exegesis, he turns to declare the exaltation of Jesus. Peter returns to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, verified by eyewitness testimony, to establish his ascension to the right hand of God. Peter propositionally declares Jesus exaltation to the right hand of the Father, and then substantiates the claim by quoting Psalm 110:1. Given Luke's authorship of his gospel and Acts, one witnesses two different uses of this particular Old Testament verse. Additionally the passage is used in a different manner in each occurrence. The Bible is

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<sup>20</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 76.

rich with application, and one witnesses this reality as Jesus in Luke 20:42-43 and Peter here in Acts 2:34-35 use the same passage to argue two different points. Darrell Bock states concerning the Luke citation, “The point was that the lordship of the messianic figure was as important as being David’s son.”<sup>21</sup> In reference to this passage he writes, “Peter makes the explicit point that the resurrection indicates Jesus’s position at the Father’s right hand, as one who is seated at God’s side.”<sup>22</sup> Again, for our purpose it is necessary to see that the Scripture is handled and interpreted with skill. In two unique contexts we see the Bible unfolded and applied with skill. We can therefore conclude that the Scriptures are applicable to diverse contexts, and yet one also observes that skill in biblical interpretation is necessary in order to communicate biblical truth faithfully in the midst of changing environments.

### **Paul’s Ministry of Biblical Interpretation in Ephesus**

Paul’s teaching ministry was defined by biblical faithfulness. His zeal for the spread of the gospel was demonstrated through his missionary journeys where he planted and helped establish churches throughout the known world of his day. Paul’s passion for the spread of the gospel was not hindered by the fact that he met opposition at every turn. Rarely do readers encounter situations in Paul’s ministry where things went “well.” However, the undeniable result of these missionary journeys was the conversion of scores of individuals to faith in Jesus Christ. Acts records for readers much of Paul’s ministry. Coupled with Paul’s letters one beholds a vivid portrait of this first missionary of the church. Paul was converted from the murderous pursuit of Christians, and a desire to see Christianity extinguished (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-13). Furthermore, prior to his conversion Paul was in fact a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5; Phil 3:5). His knowledge of the Old Testament

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<sup>21</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 133.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

would have been extensive, a fact that is demonstrated frequently in his writing and preaching. Additionally, upon his conversion, Paul was catechized in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:19b; 22). These factors help one understand more clearly the ministry Paul is defending in his speech to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-35.

Before working through the details of the text, one must note that in this address Paul makes no direct mention of the Scriptures. However, as one works through the speech, evidences of and inferences from Scripture are visible. While the word “Scripture” is not present, what is present in the defense of Paul’s ministry among the Ephesians, and in his exhortation to the elders of the Ephesian church, is a commitment to faithful biblical interpretation as a defining mark of their (Paul and the Ephesian elders) ministry. First, Paul sums up the gospel in Acts 20:21b as “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” This summary statement represents the apostolic teaching of the gospel and their interpretation of the Scriptures referenced in Acts 2:42a. F. F. Bruce comments, “And those who are most truly in the apostolic succession who receive this apostolic teaching, along with the rest of Holy Writ, as their rule of faith and practice.”<sup>23</sup> Paul’s preaching was faithful to the interpretive tradition of the apostles, which is rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures and revealed in the New Testament Scriptures as well. The gospel was not a contrivance of Paul, but a message from the pages of Scripture. Second, Paul’s speech is clearly rooted in the prophecy of Ezekiel. Paul declares in 20:26 that he is “innocent of the blood of all.” The allusion to Ezekiel 3:18-21 is clear. Just as Ezekiel was charged as a watchmen for Israel tasked with the proclamation of God’s words to the people of Israel: a task that would result either in Ezekiel’s vindication or condemnation. Paul saw himself equally tasked with

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<sup>23</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 418.

communicating the Word of God, and equally under the resultant blessing or curse.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, multiple Old Testament passages (Ps 100:3; Isa 40:11; Jer 13:17; Ezek 34) provide the backdrop for Paul's exhortation to the elders of the Ephesian church to oversee the "flock" in 20:28.<sup>25</sup> In their oversight of the congregation, they are to function as faithful shepherds. Again, one hears the warning against faithless shepherds in Ezekiel 34 in the charge to the Ephesian elders. Clearly, though not explicitly, Paul defends his ministry through skillful biblical interpretation. Finally, Paul presents his teaching ministry as a means for the Ephesian church to judge between true and false teaching 20:29-31. Paul, aware of the reality of heresy in the church and its devastating effects, offers a warning to these elders to watch over themselves (20:28) and watch out for false teachers (20:29). The question of false teachers for Paul was not a question of "if," but "when." The false teachers would come from within and without, "not sparing the flock" (20:29). The shield Paul gives the elders is to remember his teaching (20:31). He indicates that for three years he had "admonished" the Ephesian church. Again, this is not an explicit reference to Scripture, but a defense of his ministry of faithfully interpreting the Scripture to the Ephesians. Clearly, as one explores this text the foundation stones of the Word of God lie beneath this powerful address.

Two main focal points in Paul's address show that his ministry is built upon faithful biblical interpretation and exposition. John Polhill states, "Basically the speech falls into two main portions: Paul's relationship with the Ephesians—his ministry among them, his present plans, and his future prospects—and his exhortation to them for their role as church leaders."<sup>26</sup> In both portions one learns about Paul's ministry, namely his focus of the preaching of the Scriptures. First, Paul opens his address by defending his

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<sup>24</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 596.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 596.

<sup>26</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 423.

ministry among the Ephesian church noting his humility and endurance (20:19) while not “shrinking back” from “declaring,” “teaching,” and “testifying” (20:20-21). Paul’s ministry among the Ephesian church was defined by the proclamation of the truth, which he did without respect to danger or location. In 20:19 Paul mentions “trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews,” reminding the Ephesian church of the difficulties he faced as a missionary among them, and forecasting some of what he will proclaim to them at the end of his address. However, Paul declares that in spite of his trials he “did not shrink from declaring,” a phrase he uses later in 20:27 pointing to his faithfulness to proclaim the Scriptures to the Ephesians. Like Jesus in Luke 24:27, Paul did not restrict his preaching to portions of the Scripture, but declared “the whole counsel of God.” Paul’s preaching was, to the Ephesian church, a model of comprehensive biblical declaration demonstrated in his faithfulness to preach the whole of Scripture. Polhill states, “Paul preached the full gospel, the whole will of God.”<sup>27</sup> Paul was not a mystic, but a student of God’s word. The will of God was revealed through the sacred writings, and ultimately in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that faithful ministry is defined by faithful biblical interpretation and exposition.

The second main focus of Paul’s address is his charge to the Ephesian elders. Acts 20:28 marks a shift in the address as the focus changes from Paul and his upcoming tribulation, to the ongoing ministry of the elders of the church at Ephesus. His charge to the elders is two-fold: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock.” The elders are charged by Paul to pay attention to themselves. Arguably, “careful attention” to themselves consists of a faithful Scripture centered teaching ministry as patterned by Paul in addition to moral uprightness. The thrust of this exhortation is primarily concerned with the pattern of teaching exhibited by these elders, which is verified by Paul’s later exhortation concerning the rise of “fierce wolves,” or false teachers in the Ephesian

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 426.

church. The elders will be unable to defend against false teaching if they are not first established in the truth themselves. The standard Paul appeals to is his teaching ministry while among the church at Ephesus. Likewise, the qualifications of elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 demonstrate biblical knowledge as fundamental to the office of elder. It is clear then that Paul calls these elders to keep close watch over their doctrine. In order for these elders to be faithful in their oversight, they must carefully examine themselves for wickedness and theological drifting. Additionally, the elders are called to give careful attention “to all the flock” and to “care for the church of God.” Paul shifts the focus of the address further outward as he focuses now on the health of the church. As the shepherds of the congregation at Ephesus these men were called to defend the sheep from the wolves, and to care for the church. This caring and attention the elders are called to provide is focused on teaching sound doctrine and confronting false doctrine. Paul has established in this address already the pattern of sound teaching: declaring “the whole counsel of God” (20:27). As mentioned previously, Paul was sure that false teachers would come. The first line of defense for the church at Ephesus would be the elders. It is fitting then that Paul gives a strong warning of what is to come. Darrell Bock states, “The elders should prevent false teaching at all cost. They are ‘guardians of the tradition of the apostles’ and are entrusted with the guidance of the community.”<sup>28</sup> Their role as guardians would be tested through the “twisted things” the men would speak in the church. The idea is that these men would utilize these twisted words to amass for themselves support from the congregation. They would “draw away the disciples after them” (20:30). Furthermore, these enemies would come “among” the church. There are two possible interpretations of what Paul means when he says “from among your own selves.” The first possibility is that Paul believes that the “men speaking twisted things” will actually be some of the elders. The second possibility is that Paul is warning of men

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<sup>28</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 631.

rising within the congregation. Bock notes, “It is not clear if the danger comes from the elders or the Ephesian membership, although the latter is more likely given the scope of the potential threat.”<sup>29</sup> Whether the danger is from the elders or the membership, the remedy does not change. Paul calls upon them to remember what he taught them, namely the Scriptures. He cites the duration, “three years,” and intensity, “to admonish every one with tears,” of his ministry with them as the credibility of his service. He was no fly-by-night preacher. He had loved them, instructed them, and led them to Jesus.

Paul’s farewell address was an example of what every preacher, teacher, and elder should have as their goal in ministry. He had loved the people by faithfully proclaiming the gospel to them, and even as he departed from them, he exhorted them again to faithfulness in the gospel. Paul’s ministry was defined by biblical faithfulness, and he called the Ephesian elders to that same ministry as they return to the church.

### **Elders Must Be Trained in Biblical Interpretation**

As the church grew and expanded beyond Jerusalem’s borders and new churches were planted, situations of theological and ethical failing became a reality for these congregations. Paul the archetype church planter stayed in these locations until the church was rooted in the gospel, and yet when one reads his letters, the unique challenges faced by each of these congregations is clearly visible. Paul’s love for the church is evident in his writing to the churches, and even more directly in his writing to church leaders.<sup>30</sup> These letters, known as the Pastoral Epistles, are rich with encouragement for churches and the men and women called to serve in them. Within these letters, Paul

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 631.

<sup>30</sup> Scholars are divided on the authorship of these letters. Some are convinced of Pauline authorship, while others hold that the author is unknown. George Knight argues persuasively for Pauline authorship in the introduction to his commentary. George Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 4-52.

addresses the qualifications for those who are called to lead the church.<sup>31</sup> The list of qualifications for elders found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 it is clear that the men are to be morally upright ethical Christians, characteristics shared with the diaconate, and yet they are also to be faithful expositors of Scripture. Paul states in 1 Timothy 3:2 that elders should be “able to teach.” Clearly, Paul was not simply concerned with skill, though that is certainly a key in this qualification, but also with the content the elders would teach. He was concerned both that they could teach and about what they would teach. His statement assumes that Timothy has instructed the church in a body of knowledge that these elders would be familiar enough with that they can serve the church through teaching. This teaching ministry and its content are described in more detail in Titus 1:9 and 2:1, which will be the focus here.

Paul’s letter to Titus, though brief, offers a great deal of encouragement in the gospel and guidance for the church. After the opening salutation (1:1-4) Paul immediately begins his instruction for Titus with the appointing of elders (1:5). One should not miss the importance of godly leadership in the primacy of Paul’s instruction to “appoint elders.” The church’s health and growth is dependent upon godly leadership, a point made clear in the opening of Paul’s letter to Titus and in his former letter to Timothy. Paul proceeds by listing the qualifications for elders (1:6-9). Commenting on 1 Timothy 3:1-7 George Knight notes, “The list in Tit. 1:6-9 has essentially the same pattern but is arranged somewhat differently.”<sup>32</sup> The continuity between these two lists enables us to form a more consistent picture of what a candidate for this office should demonstrate in terms of moral qualities, and more importantly, ability to interpret the Bible faithfully.

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<sup>31</sup> For the sake of clarity and disclosure, I hold to a complementarian interpretation of the relevant passages in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 2:8-3:13; Titus 1:5-9) believing the office of elder in the church is reserved for men. Therefore, in this analysis “elders” will be referred to as men.

<sup>32</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 156.

The final qualification for elders in Titus is that “he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.” Two key interpretive elements in this phrase determine how the church in Crete, and subsequently the church universal, should apply this instruction. First, Paul says that elders must hold to the “trustworthy word.” To what “trustworthy word” is Paul referring? The context and the purpose clause that follows reveal this to be the gospel. Phillip Towner interprets this phrase as, “the same gospel that determined Paul’s ministry (1:3). . . The message is ‘trustworthy’ because of its link to the apostle (which implies its source in God, 1:3).”<sup>33</sup> Elders are to “hold firm” to the gospel. Second, this gospel tradition is not assumed, but taught. These men are to “hold firm to the trustworthy word *as taught*.” Titus is directed to appoint elders who have been instructed in the gospel. The gospel is never in need of improvement, and yet a danger Paul foresees and addresses is the possibility of leaders who do not adhere to the apostolic interpretation of the Scripture, or apostolic tradition. One of the earliest groups of false teachers the church faced was the “circumcision party” (Acts 11:2; Gal 2:12; Titus 1:10), which had differing iterations in various churches. This group most commonly associated the Christian gospel with elements of ritual Jewish observance, and in the case of Titus, some Cretan philosophical notions.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the elders whom Titus appoints are to be men committed to the Scriptures as taught and interpreted by the apostles. This requirement is then explained by way of its application in the local church.

An elder’s biblical faithfulness is to be demonstrated through the two-fold aspect of his teaching ministry. Paul explains the necessity for an elder’s biblical faithfulness through the purpose clause in 1:9b, “so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it.” William Mounce

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<sup>33</sup> Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on The New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 691.

<sup>34</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 295-96.

explains, “The reason for the church leader to be devoted to the gospel as explained by the apostolic preaching is that this enables the leader to encourage the people with the correct teaching and reprove those who disagree.”<sup>35</sup> Elders are to “give instruction in sound doctrine.” The churches in Crete, as today, need men who will teach the Bible faithfully. Instruction in the gospel is one of the most fundamental aspects of church life. Christians gather to celebrate the gospel by remembering the gospel. Therefore, it is key that elders be able to serve the church through instructing her in the gospel. Furthermore, this equipping of the elders preserves the integrity of the gospel in the church. As Paul illustrates, the gospel is under attack in Crete (1:10-16). Titus and the appointed elders are called to confront this false teaching. The elders are “to rebuke those who contradict it.” There is no room for shyness or cowardice when the gospel comes under attack in the church through false teachers. Towner states, “The task of an overseer is to ‘refute and rebuke’ them. The term that describes the activity includes revealing falsehood, correction, and rebuke.”<sup>36</sup> As one would expect, leaders in the church are to be bold, and yet the boldness Paul contends for is boldness in the gospel. The elders are not those seeking confrontation, but those who will not back down from the truth when confrontation is needed in the church. Ultimately, the corrective work of the elders is restorative. Paul instructs Titus and the elders to rebuke these false teachers “that they may be sound in the faith” (1:13). The goal of both instruction and rebuke in context is that the church’s health is preserved. This emphasis is demonstrated well in Paul’s use of the term “sound doctrine.” Gordon Fee states, “It is a medical metaphor referring to the ‘healthiness’ of teaching ‘found in the gospel.’”<sup>37</sup> So when one speaks of a church’s

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<sup>35</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 392.

<sup>36</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 693.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 46.

“health,” Paul would call us to examine the church’s fidelity to the gospel. Gospel fidelity is maintained through godly men who, serving as elders, proclaim the gospel both in instruction and rebuke.

The church at Crete, like the church in every age, faced theological controversy and false teaching. As one observes, Paul has called the elders to faithful biblical interpretation and proclamation in order to stem the tide of error. Finally one sees an identical charge given to Titus in 2:1. Paul instructs Titus “to teach what accords with sound doctrine.” Since Titus has been vested with apostolic authority to appoint these elders throughout the towns of Crete, he will need to set the example for the elders and the churches in “sound doctrine.” Paul has entrusted and trained Titus in the gospel, and given the challenges to the gospel in Crete, correction is necessary. The opening, “But as for you” contrasts Titus’s teaching with that of the false teachers (1:10-16). The false teaching in the church was not simply an intellectual assault, but a deficient theology manifested in unholy living. Therefore, the teaching that Titus is called to bring will be demonstrated by, and result in, godly living. Towner notes, “ Paul urges Titus to teach the Cretan believers in such a way that their commitments and behavior will be on an entirely different level from those of the opposing teachers and from Cretan society. This will be achieved through the integration of godly ethics and sound theology.”<sup>38</sup> This simple and brief exhortation to Titus has monumental consequences for the life of the church. One simply cannot underestimate the importance of faithful biblical interpretation for the life and health of the church. Paul’s letters to both Timothy and Titus are yet another example of the necessity of faithful and accurate biblical interpretation.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly the Bible is a work of literary majesty beyond compare. However, to

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<sup>38</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 718

understand and comprehend the Scriptures, one must develop necessary skills in biblical interpretation. As shown above, the Bible provides examples of faithful and accurate biblical interpretation. Furthermore, the context of these examples reveals that biblical interpretation takes place in diverse settings among diverse people. Therefore, those who serve in the teaching offices of the church must be trained in and demonstrate skill in biblical interpretation.

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL FOUNDATIONS  
FOR TRAINING TEACHERS IN  
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

The teaching ministry of the church is greatly enhanced when the teachers are trained in good, sound methods of biblical interpretation. What the Bible teaches about the interpretation of Scripture affirms this reality. This was the thesis of the previous chapter. The central argument of this chapter is that the Bible can and must be interpreted in the context of its overarching themes and in light of its literary distinctives within the church. To support this thesis, the chapter will unfold in discussion of four main areas of discipline that should shape the training of teachers in biblical interpretation. First, the discussion considers the role of biblical theology in biblical interpretation to show how an understanding of the metanarrative of the Bible is foundational for training in biblical interpretation. The next section will show the necessity of understanding and applying interpretive principles to the biblical text that account for the literary distinctives of the Scriptures. The third section will show the necessity of the church in biblical interpretation and the life of the interpreter. The final section will show how the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture provides a foundation for confidence in understanding and interpreting the Bible. These four sections do not represent the totality of theoretical and practical issues in training teachers in biblical interpretation. Given the ministry context of this project, however, these areas represent the areas of most concern when shaping the project.

## **Biblical Theology in Biblical Interpretation**

The Bible addresses a vast number of topics. The goal of this section is to set forth a grid through which all these topics can be seen. The question that is here addressed is: what is the overarching message of the Scriptures? Current biblical scholarship has no shortage of answers to this question. There are many authors in recent years putting forth their arguments for the central theme and thesis of the Bible. The study of the themes of Scripture seeking to find an overarching theme is broadly classified as biblical theology. While the conclusions of authors in the field of biblical theology are diverse, the agreed upon fact is that the Bible contains discernable overarching themes. In fact, Thomas Schreiner notes that the diversity of conclusions in biblical theology regarding the central theme of Scripture is necessary because, as he writes, “any center chosen tends to domesticate one theme or another.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, students of the Bible and those who would teach the Bible have access to a wealth of help in seeing thematic elements within the Scripture by utilizing these various resources. Furthermore, the understanding that the Bible contains discernable overarching themes, and a basic understanding of the biblical metanarrative is essential to biblical interpretation. In this section the field of biblical theology will be explored with primary focus on how the theories behind its practice help inform the practical work of biblical interpretation.

There is no shortage of definitions for the term “biblical theology.” Authors addressing the topic of biblical theology commonly set forth their own definition for the term. This reality presents a unique challenge when seeking a common ground for the application of biblical theology to biblical interpretation. Most scholars agree, however, that the discipline of biblical theology is fundamentally concerned with interpreting the Bible through the lens of the overarching storyline. For example, Stephen Wellum offers

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), xii.

a main *locus* with which biblical theology is concerned: “Biblical theology is concerned with the overall message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole.”<sup>2</sup> Wellum later explicitly states the relationship of biblical theology to hermeneutics arguing that biblical theology is fundamentally a hermeneutical discipline.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, James Hamilton defines biblical theology as “the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors.”<sup>4</sup> Hamilton argues that one must read the Bible as the biblical authors did, embracing their interpretive perspective. By defining biblical theology in this manner, he roots biblical theology in the discipline of hermeneutics or biblical interpretation. Hamilton proceeds to define interpretive perspective as “the framework of assumptions and presuppositions, associations and identifications, truths and symbols that are taken for granted as an author or speaker describes the world and the events that take place in it.”<sup>5</sup> The authors of the biblical text invite readers to read the Bible as they wrote it. The biblical authors wrote with intentionality. They were seeking to convey a message to their readers. The proper goal of biblical interpretation is to read the Bible on its own terms, relying on the authors to guide us in our interpretation of the Scripture. Adopting a biblical theological view to hermeneutics, or biblical interpretation, allows readers to view the overarching storyline through the lens of the authors themselves. Furthermore, Graeme Goldsworthy argues that biblical theology is the key to answering the questions presented by difficult passages of Scripture. He writes,

Who of us does not find at least some parts of the Bible difficult to understand? It is

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<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 34. Wellum states, “Biblical theology as a hermeneutical discipline attempts to exegete texts in their own context and then, in light of the entire Canon, to examine the unfolding nature of God’s plan and carefully think through the relationship between *before* and *after* in that plan which culminates in Christ.”

<sup>4</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

easy to ignore the problems by keeping to the well-worn paths of familiar passages. But when we begin to take seriously the fact that the whole Bible is the Word of God, we find ourselves on a collision path with the difficulties. It is at this point that we need biblical theology to show us how to read and understand the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

Each of these authors illustrates the need for an understanding of the Bible's metanarrative in order to interpret the Scripture accurately.

Since an understanding of the metanarrative of the Bible is crucial to the process of biblical interpretation, it is necessary to train teachers within the church to identify and understand the metanarrative of Scripture. Again, identifying one central theme is challenging because of the amount of options for summarizing the overarching storyline of the Bible. James Hamilton notes, however, "In broadest terms the Bible's plot can be summarized in four words: *creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.*"<sup>7</sup> paradigm is helpful and simple for thinking about the metanarrative of Scripture.

The first term is "creation." The Bible begins with God's creative work. God created the world and all that is in it (Gen 1-2). He created humanity distinct from the rest of creation in that we were made in his image and after his likeness (Gen 1:26-27). By virtue of God's creative work he alone possesses authority and sovereignty over creation. Humans were placed in creation to enjoy, serve and worship God. Humans were created to have unbroken fellowship with the Creator. This state, however, did not remain. The second term is "fall." In the fall, Adam and Eve rebelled against God's authority seeking to supplant his reign through their sin (Gen 3). Satan deceived Adam and Eve; they willfully broke the gracious law of God. Their rebellion has passed down through every generation of humanity since, to this very day (Rom 1:18-32). The fall of humanity brought about the just penalty and wrath of God namely death. The third term is "redemption." God graciously provided a foretaste of redemption through the institution

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<sup>6</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 31.

of the sacrificial system. By allowing an animal to die in the place of the transgressor, sinful humans were forgiven for their transgressions. This sacrificial system, however, existed for a time to point beyond itself for an animal could not fully pay the debt owed by a sinful people. Therefore, in order for redemption to be accomplished fully a like sacrifice must take place. This sacrifice would come in the person of Jesus Christ. God miraculously sends his Son to take on flesh (John 1), maintain a perfectly righteous and innocent life, die a substitutionary death in the place of sinful humanity, and rise from the grave victorious over the grave securing redemption for all who believe in Him. The final term is “restoration.” God will restore the broken creation. He is making all things new (Rev 21:5). The rule of God as King, though challenged by Satan and the Fall will be perfectly restored. Another term used for this portion of the biblical story is “consummation.” God is bringing together everything to His appointed ends. The kingdom inaugurated in the first coming of Jesus will eventually be the kingdom consummated in the final return of Jesus.

Ultimately, an understanding of the metanarrative of Scripture will enhance ones ability to interpret the various portions of the Bible. For the teaching ministry of the church consideration of and training in biblical theology must be provided to equip the teachers to understand and interpret Scripture. By providing Bible study leaders with a broad overview of the Scripture, (i.e., creation, fall, redemption, and restoration), the interpretive skills of teachers are enhanced and expanded. Furthermore, instruction in the biblical theological approach to the Scriptures will likewise strengthen the interpretive skill of teachers. Therefore, training in biblical interpretation should include an introduction to and training in biblical theology. Biblical theology helps one see the clear message of the Bible, however, teachers need further training in interpretive methodology in order to develop skill in interpreting the different individual portions of Scripture.

## **The Knowledge and Skills of Biblical Interpretation**

The metanarrative of the Bible comes in diverse literary forms. The Bible is a book that was written in the midst of cultural environments and norms that are removed from our modern setting. Modern readers, therefore, have a challenge before them when they approach the interpretation of the Bible. The Bible is a book far different from what modern readers encounter in their daily lives. The symbols and words may be recognizable, but biblical interpretation can be inaccurate and flawed due to a lack of awareness of the literary distinctives of biblical literature. Therefore, a key element of training in biblical interpretation is to highlight and educate Bible study teachers in these literary distinctives.

Interpreting the Bible is equal parts science and art.<sup>8</sup> The science of biblical interpretation concerns the rules that govern the literary forms employed by the authors. Grant Osborne notes that the goal of biblical interpretation, or “evangelical hermeneutics” is “to discover the intention of the author.”<sup>9</sup> Within their contexts the biblical authors produced literary works in the literary styles of their day. Biblical interpretation therefore requires an awareness of these various literary devices in order to understand the authors intended meaning. Additionally, biblical interpretation is an art. The science can help readers to arrive at a wooden translation of the biblical data, and yet the pressing need for modern readers is to communicate that data into culturally relevant terms. The Bible is relevant to every age. As cultures shift and change, however, biblical interpreters must employ their imaginations in order to apply the timeless truth of the Bible in a timely fashion. Therefore, teachers within the local church should be given instruction in both the science and the art of biblical interpretation. The theoretical basis, or science, for this training includes the communication of principles of interpretation.

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<sup>8</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

The practical outworking, or art, of this discipline is seen both in the application of these principles to the text of Scripture, and also the application of the text to a teacher's setting in the local church.

There are two sides to this training. Both sides are universal in the field of training and education and fall directly into the purview of this project. On one side, teachers must be guided to understand biblical interpretation. The communication of information is the primary objective in this side of training. Simply put, the content of the discipline of biblical interpretation must be communicated to the teachers within the local church. The other side of this training is the application of the information or the development of skill. Both understanding and skill development are essential to train teachers in biblical interpretation effectively. First, this discussion will explore the content that must be communicated for training in biblical interpretation; then this discussion will explore how training must include the development of skill in biblical interpretation.

In order to train teachers in biblical interpretation one must first help them to see the distance between the culture that a modern reader lives in and the cultural world of the Bible. Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard note that the task of a biblical interpreter is to, "seek to bridge the linguistic, historical, social and cultural gaps that exist between the ancient and modern worlds so that they may understand what texts mean."<sup>10</sup> The problem is that many modern readers do not realize the presence of these gaps. Biblical interpretation can and does fail miserably when a teacher interprets the biblical text only in light of their present cultural context. So a primary issue in training Bible study teachers in any local church is helping them understand the gap which exists between their world and the world of the biblical authors. A biblical interpreter cannot bridge a

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<sup>10</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 5-6.

gap that they do not know exists. Therefore, the task of training people in biblical interpretation requires opening their eyes to an awareness of the gap between these two worlds. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard summarize these gaps in terms of *distance* noting that the modern biblical interpreter is distanced from the text of Scripture in four ways: time, culture, geography, and language.<sup>11</sup> The Bible teacher must learn how to overcome these four areas of distance; otherwise their efforts at biblical interpretation will be severely hindered.

One of the means for overcoming these areas of distance is to enable interpreters to see that they exist. In a practical sense, before one can begin training Bible study teachers in biblical interpretation certain assumptions must be addressed. Everyone comes to the Bible with a set of interpretive principles, and often Bible readers are unaware that they are employing these principles when they are reading and interpreting the Bible.<sup>12</sup> This subconscious action can be problematic in two ways. First, readers employ hermeneutical principles with the biblical text based often on the culture that they live in rather than the culture of the Scriptures. That is to say, readers process information, more specifically text, and then deduce meaning through the lens of their cultural setting. Often this process is done without conscious effort, but can still result in skewed interpretation of the biblical text. One contemporary example of this type of hermeneutic would be the debate over the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality. Matthew Vines in his recent work *God and the Gay Christian* defends homosexual behavior from the biblical text.<sup>13</sup> His work represents an interpretation of Scripture

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13-17.

<sup>12</sup> A key example of this reality is the rampant reader-response approach to literary interpretation. The reader-response method is addressed and critiqued in Robert Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2010), 128-29; and Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 18-36.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014).

arising out of current American cultural trends to the exclusion of the historical interpretation of Scripture. Second, the Bible teachers one has listened to and learned from shape one's principles of interpreting the Bible. In this way Bible teachers are often products of their interpretive heritage. Bible study teachers reflect the ways they themselves were taught to interpret the Bible. This second obstacle is only problematic when one adopts a teacher's interpretive grid without first measuring the grid against a faithful and accurate standard of biblical interpretation. Stated another way, every generation of Bible teachers within the local church should be acquainted with historically accepted interpretive guidelines. Therefore, in training teachers in biblical interpretation one must address these assumptions that lie underneath the surface by guiding them to see the gap between our world and the world of the biblical authors.

Once teachers understand the gap that exists between the modern world and the world of the biblical authors they must then begin to forge a foundation of solid interpretive principles. General hermeneutical principles must be articulated such as attention to context, historical and cultural background, and linguistic differences. The first two of these principles are basic to the interpretive process and somewhat easier to grasp. The third, however, requires further discussion on literary types. First, context simply refers to reading any passage of the Bible in light of its place within the Scriptures. One does not simply read passages in isolation. One reads them as the author has ordered and presented them.<sup>14</sup> Second, historical and cultural background studies can provide insight into the setting in which the biblical authors lived and wrote. Therefore, attention to resources that provide this information is necessary for teachers to be equipped to research the extra-biblical information that could prove useful in seeking the author's intended meaning.<sup>15</sup> Third, linguistic differences must be taken into

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<sup>14</sup> Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 57-58.

<sup>15</sup> Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 158-60.

consideration in order to provide adequate training in biblical interpretation. This means studying how the authors wrote in addition to what they wrote. The biblical authors utilized specific literary forms in their writing, and study of these forms is crucial to training teachers in biblical interpretation.

Ancient literary distinctives or forms are commonly discussed using the term “genre.” Thus biblical interpretation requires an understanding of the literary distinctives or genres of ancient literature. Once teachers have been led to see the immense gap that exists between our modern world and the biblical world the next practical step is to give them a bridge to cross the gap into the world of the biblical authors. The bridge in this case is a clear understanding of biblical genres. As Grant Osborne states, “Genre functions as a valuable link between the text and the reader.”<sup>16</sup> In training teachers to identify and interpret the biblical text in light of its literary genre one provides them with the necessary tools to understand the meaning of the biblical text. Robert Plummer notes, “we need to approach the Bible as sympathetic readers, respecting the various genres and authorial assumptions that accompany such genres.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it is essential that training Bible study teachers include an emphasis on the genres of Scripture. This process includes the explanation of the diverse genres of the Bible with attention to the details that are specific and unique to the various genres. The number of genres within the biblical text that are included in books on biblical interpretation varies by author. The reason for the variance is that there are overarching principles one can apply to books or sections of the Scriptures, and yet there are unique variations being employed within these compositions.<sup>18</sup> For the purpose of the local church one has the freedom to teach

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>17</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 101.

<sup>18</sup> For example Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard note nine subgenres within narrative, ten within prophecy, five within epistles etc. Each of these “subgenres” is valid and studying them is worthwhile. However, for the purpose of the local church, a more general approach is to be preferred. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, x-xii.

more broadly as many Bible study leaders will not plumb the depths of all of the literary variations and forms of Scripture nor must they be faithful biblical interpreters. For this project six primary literary genres in the Bible will be included within the material to be taught. Narrative, prophecy,<sup>19</sup> poetry, wisdom, epistle, and parable are representative of the majority of the biblical text and therefore will be the scope of the genre discussion within this project. The scope of genre discussion can be adapted given ones local context. Training in biblical interpretation, however, must include discussion of literary forms. As readers become familiar with the literary distinctives of the biblical text they are equipped to grasp, with greater accuracy, the intended meaning of the biblical authors.

Finally, the training process should include the practical application of this content. The application of the knowledge in the development of interpretive skill represents the “art” of biblical interpretation. Less will be noted about the art of biblical interpretation as these skills are developed over time within the context of teaching in the local church. Put another way, the “art” of biblical interpretation is what a teacher develops through ongoing application of hermeneutical principles to the Bible. For training to be successful it must incorporate opportunities for the teachers to apply the content and principles that have been taught in order to develop their skills as biblical interpreters. For the purposes of this project these exercises have been included in the training sessions in order to provide opportunities for trainees to apply the principles immediately. Skill development takes place over time. Teachers who are trained in the theory of biblical interpretation will be able to apply the principles to their immediate class settings thereby developing the necessary skill in biblical interpretation. Therefore, the practical outworking of this training in biblical interpretation will necessarily include an opportunity for the participants to utilize the knowledge they have gained. There are a

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<sup>19</sup> Including apocalyptic prophetic literature.

variety of ways these opportunities could take place within the local church. The most beneficial way for both the church and the teacher would be to allow them to come alongside another teacher within the church who is already skilled in biblical interpretation. While under the guidance of a skilled teacher, the trainee should be given opportunities to develop skills in biblical interpretation through increased teaching responsibilities within the group. Two benefits arise from this approach. First, there is an immediate opportunity for feedback and coaching as the trainer and trainee work side by side in biblical interpretation. Within this “apprenticeship” the new teachers would be trained and mentored by experienced Bible teachers in the science and art of biblical interpretation. Second, the church gains a level of protection. Instead of simply assigning a teacher a class without any form of accountability for the development of skills in biblical interpretation, the church develops a system wherein new teachers are given data and sent out with one who can supervise their development of skill as an interpreter.

The information that is communicated to Bible study teachers in the church ultimately yields fruit only in its incorporation into the life of the church. In fact, without integration into the life of the church sound interpretive principles will yield no lasting change. One must be cognizant of the pitfall of an individual interpreting the Bible in isolation from the influence and accountability of the church. Biblical interpretation while initiating on an individual level, must find its end within the life of the local church.

### **Biblical Interpretation and the Church**

The interpretation of Scripture begins with an individual. Faithful interpretation of Scripture requires, however, that the individual engage in biblical interpretation as a part of the church. One person reading and studying the Bible can produce good insight into the meaning of Scripture. But the fullness of what is revealed in the Bible comes when the Bible is studied as a part of the church. The Bible was given to the church, for the church and is the foundational document of the church. The Bible is

read in the church so it is essential that we interpret the Bible as part of the church. It is important, therefore; to establish a definition of the church and then show how the Bible is to be interpreted in the context of the church.

As previously noted with reference to the definitions of biblical theology, within the study of ecclesiology, definitions of the church are as diverse as the authors who write about it. This section considers the church in general categories in order to understand how biblical interpretation intersects with the church “historical/universal” and “local.” Edmund Clowney provides a short but comprehensive definition of the church: “According to the Bible, the church is the people of God, the assembly and body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> Four key aspects in Clowney’s definition are worth unpacking. First, “the people of God” reveals that the church is a defined group of people. The people of God have borne distinguishing marks throughout history not the least of which was God’s spoken revelation. Second, the word “assembly” reminds readers that the church is a gathered people. Jesus states that he will build his church, or assembly, upon the gospel (Matt 16:18). Jesus’ people will assemble upon the foundation of His life death and resurrection, which was foretold in the Old Testament and recorded in the New Testament. The church is not completely assembled, as Jesus has not returned in final judgment and restoration. The church, however, assembles in localities over the face of the globe. Third, Paul uses the metaphor of the physical body when he uses the phrase “the body of Christ” to describe the church (1 Cor 12:12-31). His use of this phrase shows the church is an interdependent group. That is to say the church is a people closely related to and dependent upon one another for proper function and growth. The growth and fellowship that occur in the church is achieved through the Word of God (Col 3:16; Eph 4:11-12). Finally, “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” reveals that the church is a connected people. The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost ushering a new

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<sup>20</sup> Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 28.

reality for believers and the beginning of a new era of the Spirit indwelling the followers of Christ (Acts 2). The presence of the Holy Spirit connects the church regardless of location. As promised by Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to the disciples enabling them to remember and proclaim the teachings of Jesus Christ (John 14-16), namely, the “faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The Spirit connects believers through the common testimony of salvation through Jesus Christ. Therefore, people can share lives with brothers that are living nearby or across the globe. The connection is not proximity, language, or culture. The connection is the Spirit of God.

Though this definition is far too broad for most, for this consideration of biblical interpretation in the context of the church, it provides the necessary parameters for the discussion. A broader definition of the church is crucial when thinking practically about the role of biblical interpretation in the life of the church. This reality is evident when one sees that biblically faithful churches can disagree over the interpretation of biblical passages. Clearly disagreements arise in the application of biblical texts to the life of the church. For example, the structure and order of the church, or the administration of the sacraments, have been sources for disagreement and yet disagreement on these types of interpretive issues would not constitute a denial of the gospel or give reason to deny the faithfulness of a given congregation. The presence of disagreement between different congregations does not deny that these various gatherings are outside of what the Bible describes as the church. A wider understanding of “church” provides room for these interpretive distinctions to coexist. Additionally, a broad definition of the church enables biblical interpreters to benefit from the church, as it has existed for centuries, across continents, and in countless cultural contexts. As interpreters see the church outside the walls of their local context, especially in terms of biblical interpretation, they are more able to think about the interpretation of Scripture across cultural boundaries. Furthermore, a global understanding of the church can open the eyes

of biblical interpreters to how the Bible speaks clearly to their cultural environment in essence allowing them to view their cultural context from a different vantage point as they read and engage with biblical interpretation from diverse cultural settings. Mark Dever notes, “The continuity of the church across space and time prevents the church from being held captive to any one segment of it.”<sup>21</sup> The church is not confined by time or location, and yet the church exists within distinct times and locations. As the church exists historically and globally it is visible in the context of local gatherings of believers called the local church. Therefore, when discussing biblical interpretation in the context of the church a distinction of these two manifestations of the church is necessary in order to relate biblical interpretation to both aspects of the church. This distinction is referred to as the church universal and local, or invisible and visible.<sup>22</sup> The understanding of the church as both universal and local provides two spheres that the biblical interpreter must be able to move between. These two spheres will be considered in turn.

First, the universal sphere of the church enables the biblical interpreter to examine the Bible in light of the combined knowledge and scholarship of the church throughout its history. Believers have been faithfully reading and interpreting the Scriptures for centuries. One of the treasures of the church is its interpretive heritage which serves as a protector and guide in biblical interpretation. Greg Allison points out the importance of historical theology in biblical interpretation as the difference between orthodoxy and heresy. He writes,

*Orthodoxy* here refers to that which the New Testament calls ‘sound doctrine’, that which rightly reflects in summary form all the teaching in Scripture which the church is bound to believe and obey. *Heresy* then, is anything that contradicts sound doctrine. It is the false belief that misinterprets Scripture or ignores some of the

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 18.

<sup>22</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 855-58.

teaching of Scripture, or that incorrectly puts together all the teaching of Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

Right theology then is rooted in sound biblical interpretation whereas heresy is rooted in faulty biblical interpretation. The church has an interpretive heritage. This heritage serves the interpreter of the Bible by safeguarding against erroneous conclusions about the meaning of Scripture. The church has engaged in faulty interpretive methods in her history. The early and medieval church's allegorical interpretive exploits are well documented.<sup>24</sup> Interpreters who have given attention to the pitfalls in the church's history of interpretation will be equipped to avoid those same pitfalls in their understanding and application of the Bible. Positively, historical biblical interpretation operates to inform interpreters of the orthodox understanding of biblical passages by acknowledging the continuity of interpretation throughout the church's history. Modern interpreters benefit from the scholarship and struggle of exegetes who have gone before them. Therefore, the modern biblical interpreter who reads and studies the Bible in light of the interpretive heritage of the church will be well served as he endeavors to discern the intended meaning of the author.

The local sphere of the church enables the biblical interpreter to read and interpret the Bible actively with other believers. Similar to the safeguards that the historical interpretation of Scripture provides, a local community of faith protects interpreters from straying into incorrect patterns of meaning or individualistic readings of the text. American readers tend to interact with text on a more individualistic level rather than in the context of a community. While this practice is not inherently problematic with most literature, the biblical text can be abused and misunderstood when interpreted apart from the context of the community of believers. For example, it is common to hear Christians ask, "What does this passage/verse/text mean *to you*?" This question fails to

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<sup>23</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-69.

consider the weight of the biblical authors intent. Furthermore, the question fails to see the implications of the biblical text beyond the reader's immediate personal context. The Bible is authoritative for all of humanity and applies to us as individuals. Biblical interpretation begins with an individual; however, one must resist the temptation to interpret the text in isolation from other believers. The interpreter must first employ the sound interpretive principles to the biblical text seeking to be faithful to context of Scripture and then bring his conclusions into the community of believers. At this point the church provides accountability and helpful correction when needed. William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard demonstrate how individualism can be a trap for most Bible interpreters. They illustrate how the local church functions as a safeguard from that trap. They state, "We require the enrichment, endeavors, and assistance of our fellow believers to check our perceptions and to affirm their validity . . . Such accountability guards against maverick and individualistic interpretations."<sup>25</sup> For believers to thrive as biblical interpreters they must be connected to a local body of believers. Church membership is essential for growth in biblical interpretation. Membership in the community of believers not only protects us from faulty biblical interpretation but also provides an outlet to share that which the Lord reveals to his children. It must be noted that the church has not always been exemplary in safeguarding against erroneous biblical interpretation. The Roman Catholic magisterium or official interpretation of Scripture is a prime example of how the church has been guilty of promoting error in biblical interpretation. On a local level, the church always runs the risk of over-emphasizing a particular interpretation or view. These concerns should not breed isolation from the community, but rather an earnest desire to see a church that is driven by and in operating in accordance with Scripture. The church is the gathering of the people of God and as such the provision of the Holy Spirit in the church provides a

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<sup>25</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 141.

context for interpretation to be shared, critiqued, or embraced. The function of the local body of believers in biblical interpretation cannot be downplayed. It is the context of the local church where brothers and sisters in Christ can engage in fruitful discussion about the biblical text. As the Holy Spirit yields insight through studying the Bible into the meaning of the Bible, the insight has wider impact and usefulness when shared with the local church. In this way the church is built up in the faith. The local church is the workshop where skills in biblical interpretation are developed and sharpened. Interpreters must then be engaged in the local sphere of church in order that they may interpret the Bible faithfully and accurately.

Biblical interpretation is inseparable from the life of the church because the Bible is inseparable from the life of the church. The church gathers under the authority of God by submitting to his authoritative Word. When one understands this link between the Bible and the people of God one sees that biblical interpretation should constantly occur within the church. Therefore, if teachers are to be trained in biblical interpretation they must understand that their effectiveness in biblical interpretation is directly linked to their life in the community of faith both past and present. This desire for effective biblical interpretation within the local church again shows the need for ongoing training in biblical interpretation, and the first place this training should occur is the local church.

### **The Clarity of Scripture in Biblical Interpretation**

One cannot interpret a text if the text is unclear. Too often people even professing followers of Christ approach the Scriptures as if they are too complex for people to understand or worse that the Scriptures are unclear. Many Christians may view Scripture as complex or unclear but would not acknowledge that they see Scripture this way. The tone of conversation in many churches, however might lead one to believe that biblical interpretation is best left to the “professionals” or an even more troubling notion that the Bible is so complex that common everyday disciples are unable to engage in

meaningful biblical interpretation. What this attitude reveals is an underlying lack of confidence in the clarity of Scripture. Certainly many factors not covered here have contributed to this current climate but reclamation of this doctrine is essential to the life and health of the church.

It is necessary to begin with a definition of the clarity of Scripture to lay the foundation for this discussion. Wayne Grudem states, “The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.”<sup>26</sup> The three components of this definition provide an excellent framework for a discussion about the clarity of Scripture. First, we see that the Bible was written for people to understand it. As will be shown momentarily this fact is clearly presented within the Scriptures. Second, the clarity of Scripture is related to the posture of the reader. While it is apparent that people who are not believers can understand the languages, syntax and grammar of the Bible; it is equally true that they cannot understand the meaning of the Scriptures apart from a belief in and reliance on God. We see this practically displayed in the discourse between Jesus and the Jews in John 5:37-47. In this exchange the Jews are condemned for their lack of belief in the Scriptures. They “search the Scriptures” and yet they have missed the Messiah who is right before their eyes. Furthermore, this error is not due to the lack of clarity of the Scriptures as Jesus says, “if you believed Moses, you would believe me” (5:46). Jesus connects their unbelief with their inability to understand the Scriptures correctly. The Jews were not relying on God’s help and they were equally not willing to follow it, which is the third part of Grudem’s definition. The Scriptures speak with clarity to those who come to the Bible in a posture of faith and obedience. The Bible is a book that is “living and active” (Heb 4:12); a fact that should inform ones approach to the Bible. One is not simply interpreting static data but one comes to this text

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<sup>26</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 108.

to be examined by it and to bring our minds and actions in to accordance with its truth.

The above definition of the clarity of Scripture serves as a backbone for discussion on biblical interpretation or hermeneutics. Furthermore, in the practical arena of the local church a robust defense and articulation of the clarity of Scripture is essential for the equipping of Christians for personal growth in godliness, and community growth which is centered around the study and comprehension of the Bible. The sad reality is that some churches neglect the Bible because of a lack of a thorough understanding of the clarity of Scripture. It is troubling when the church is a place where believers are distanced from the biblical text because of a perceived lack of ability to understand and interpret the Bible. One result then is people who believe that the Bible is authoritative but do not read it. Herein lies the great necessity for articulating the clarity of the Scripture to the people of God. In order to instruct people in how to interpret the Bible faithfully and accurately they must first be shown that it is possible.

The fact that the Bible is clear is stated repeatedly throughout the Scripture itself. In Deuteronomy 6:6-7 Moses writes, “And these words which I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” As God calls Israel to be faithful to His Word He places the discussion within the normalcy of life’s routines. The Scriptures are to be understood and discussed. In order for dialogue concerning a text to take place a level, even elementary, of understanding must be present. The assumption behind these verses is that the “words” of the law are clear enough to be understood by all types of people even children. David writes concerning the Scripture, “The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7). Studying the Bible yields an increase in wisdom for those who read it. Again the Bible is understandable and serves to increase one’s understanding of the Lord. Perhaps the most revealing text concerning the clarity of

Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Paul reminds Timothy of his training in the Scriptures from childhood (3:15). He charges Timothy to “continue” in what he had learned which in this text is clearly the Scripture (3:14). Then Paul describes the inspiration and usefulness of Scripture. The Scripture is “breathed out by God.” This text is a key in understanding the divine origin of the Scriptures, which is articulated in the doctrine of inspiration. Furthermore, Paul speaks of the usefulness of Scripture “for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness (3:16).” The inspiration and usefulness of Scripture serve as the equipping tool for the saints (3:17). Paul exhorts Timothy to be a man of the Scriptures and to equip the saints in the Scriptures. The bedrock of this charge is a belief in the clarity of the Bible. D. A. Carson remarks, “Certainly the repeated calls to hear or read or obey what is written presuppose that what is written is intelligible.”<sup>27</sup> The biblical authors wrote in a way that we would be able to read and understand what they wrote. Since the Bible serves to reveal God we should certainly take the encouragement of the biblical authors to read it and grow in our understanding of the Lord.

At this point an important nuance must be added to our understanding of the clarity of Scripture. The Scripture does not possess equality in clarity. That is to say there are portions of the Bible that are more difficult to interpret and understand than others. There are portions of Scripture that are complex rather than simple. This reality is attested within Scripture itself when Peter writes concerning Paul’s letters, “There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do other Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:16). Peter contends that there is a challenge in understanding portions of Scripture. Biblical interpretation is work. The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture does not eliminate the necessity or discipline of study.

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<sup>27</sup> D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 180.

The clarity of Scripture gives the believer a confidence that the Bible can be understood through the study of the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This nuance should not therefore undermine one's confidence in the Scripture, but motivate disciplined reading and study of the Bible. Kevin DeYoung writes, "The perspicuity of Scripture upholds the notion that ordinary people using ordinary means can accurately understand enough of what must be known, believed, and observed for them to be faithful Christians."<sup>28</sup>

One final observation must be made concerning the clarity of Scripture and biblical interpretation: while the Bible is clearly written it is not always clearly interpreted. Affirming the clarity of Scripture does not eliminate faulty understanding of the Scriptures. When inaccurate and deficient interpretations of Scripture arise, the problem is not in the Scripture but with the interpreter. The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture maintains that the Scriptures are clear. Numerous and sometimes faulty interpretations of Scripture, however, can undermine the common believer's confidence in biblical interpretation. Grant Osborne notes, "People can hardly be blamed if, after noting the numerous possible interpretations of every biblical statement they cease to affirm that the Bible is easy to understand!"<sup>29</sup> The multitude of interpretations, however, does not mean the Scripture is unclear. It is this notion that demonstrates the pressing need for skills in biblical interpretation to be taught within the context of the local church. As Osborne writes, "Basic hermeneutics can and should be taught at the level of the local church."<sup>30</sup> In teaching people the way in which they can confidently interpret the Scriptures one must articulate the clarity of the Bible laying a sure foundation that every believer can through diligent study and reliance on the Holy Spirit become a skilled

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<sup>28</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 59.

<sup>29</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

interpreter of the Bible.

### **Conclusion**

For the life and health of the church to increase and flourish, there must be ongoing training of teachers in the art and science of biblical interpretation. To achieve this goal it is necessary to demonstrate faithfulness to the Scripture from the pulpit and in smaller Bible studies. Furthermore, the church must be committed to equipping teachers with the skills necessary to interpret the Bible faithfully. While this training will look different given the unique contextual environment of a local church, the content will not. Without the communication of sound principles of interpretation teachers will not become skilled biblical interpreters. These principles can be communicated in a variety of ways but they cannot be ignored. The Bible can and must be interpreted in light of its overarching themes and literary distinctives within the church. If they are equipped to do so, teachers will interpret the Bible according to these guidelines.

## CHAPTER 4

### TRAINING THE TEACHERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Teaching the Bible is integral to the life, health, and growth of the church. Many in the church can remember the important role Bible teachers have played in their lives. Whether they are pastors, elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, or small group leaders, those who teach the Bible fill a vital and necessary role in the local church. The Holy Spirit gives teachers to the church (Eph 4:11). Likewise it is the Holy Spirit who equips certain believers with the gift of teaching (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28-29). Teachers are entrusted with the communication of the truths of Scripture from one generation to the next. Pastors and elders are to be teachers in the church (1 Tim 3:3), and yet often they are not the only teachers in the church. Teachers in the local church are often faithful believers who have loved and studied the Bible for years. As the Holy Spirit calls believers into this role it is necessary for these believers to receive training in how to interpret the Bible faithfully and accurately. The teaching office exists for the church. Teachers have been given to the church to equip every believer “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

The Bible warns to those who would teach. James writes, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (Jas 3:1). Hearing these words from James remind those who would teach in the church of the gravity of our responsibility and the accountability we have before God. James understood the teaching of the saints to be a responsibility that is undertaken with care and diligence. While there may be a variety of personality types and teaching styles, the seriousness of the task is the same for all who teach in the local

church.

This ministry project came out of a desire to take seriously the warnings and subsequent responsibilities of teachers in the local church by equipping teachers to interpret the Bible. Therefore, this ministry project unfolded in the following phases.

### **Phase 1: Preparation for Project Implementation (Weeks 1-4)**

In order to train the teachers of First Baptist Church Waynesboro certain preparations had to be made. This preparation period lasted four weeks. Though outside of the fifteen-week time period of the project, the ministerial staff met to discuss when the project execution would be most beneficial to the teachers. Based on these discussions and the input gained from them, we planned to offer the training in the autumn of 2014.

The first step in preparation, during the first week of the project, was deciding the specific dates, times and locations for the training. Therefore in the first week of the project these decisions were made. The training sessions were held on a bi-monthly basis on Saturday mornings beginning August 30, 2014, and concluding November 8, 2014. Saturday mornings were the time that most of our teachers had the most flexibility in their schedule. The sessions were planned for 9:00-10:45 A.M. in accordance with these factors. Additionally, our church facilities are normally unoccupied and available for use on Saturday mornings. The availability of facilities influenced the second aspect of preparation. Therefore, once specific dates were in place I secured the location for the training sessions in the fellowship hall of our church.

The next step of preparation was to announce and recruit trainees to participate in the project. This step involved multiple platforms of communication. An announcement and description of the course was posted on the church website, which also sent the description via e-mail to all who were subscribed to the church e-mail list.

Another means of announcement was a letter sent to our Bible study teachers, elders and deacons from the pastor outlining the training schedule and content. A final step in announcement took place in worship gatherings. On consecutive Sunday mornings leading up to the start of the training multiple announcements were made inviting teachers and those who were interested in teaching to be a part of the class.

The third step of preparation involved the planning and outlining of the curriculum to be taught in the training sessions. This preparation took place during the announcement and recruitment phase of preparation. During this period I researched and read materials relating to biblical interpretation and began to create an outline and structure for the curriculum. At this point, I met with the pastor to get his input on the outline and his opinion on the areas in need of coverage in the training. I then developed rough annotated outlines of the six sessions except for the first session, which was fully written during this time with the intention of finalizing each session of the curriculum during the time between training sessions. Preparing in this way provided the freedom to adapt the curriculum as necessary throughout the execution of the training. Additionally, with the sessions occurring bi-weekly there was sufficient time to review, expand and finalize each section of the curriculum prior to the scheduled meeting. The sessions were as follows: Theological Foundations, Biblical Theology, General Biblical Interpretation, Identifying and Interpreting Genre (part 1), Identifying and Interpreting Genre (part 2), and the Holy Spirit and Biblical Interpretation. An overview of each section will be described in the discussion of the training phase of the project later in this chapter.

The final step of preparation was the creation of a pre- and post-training questionnaire (appendix 1). This research instrument was created in order to track the effectiveness of the curriculum and training while providing concrete data regarding the effectiveness of the training. The questionnaire came from a question bank previously

created for use with Robert Plummer's *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*.<sup>1</sup> Though we did not explicitly follow Plummer's book, the topics covered in his work coincided with the topics covered in our training. Therefore, the applicable questions available through his website were reviewed and incorporated into the questionnaire.

The preparation period lasted four weeks concluding with the first training session.

### **Phase 2: Teacher Evaluation (Week 4)**

The next phase of this project, which took place in week 4, was to administer and gather the results of the pre-training questionnaire (appendix 1). Participants were given a questionnaire and asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to me for the purpose of tracking their growth in knowledge in biblical interpretation. The distribution of the questionnaire took place prior to our first training session. At this time I explained the role that the questionnaire would serve in the completion of this ministry project and how the questionnaire would serve the next group to be trained by providing statistical data and feedback which would affect the development of a strategic plan for ongoing teacher training. There were members of the group who expressed their concern over this aspect of the project due largely to fear about "failing the test." It was crucial, therefore, at this point to remind them that there was no grading taking place and that the questionnaire was designed to track their growth, not to assess their quality as a teacher or believer. While participation in the pre-training questionnaire was not mandatory it was encouraged.

### **Phase 3: Writing Curriculum and Training Teachers (Weeks 4-9)**

The third phase of the project was further development of curriculum, namely

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Plummer, "Bank of Quiz and Test Questions for 40 Questions book," accessed August 25, 2013 [www.robplummer.com/resources](http://www.robplummer.com/resources).

sessions two through six, and training the teachers with the developed curriculum (appendix 2). This section of the project had a consistent format from week-to-week. During the week leading up to each training session I would write the curriculum based on the annotated outline created during the preparation phase of the project and then submit a copy to the pastor for grammatical and theological review. I would then correct and finalize the curriculum prior to our next training session. This material was then printed and distributed at the beginning of each training session. This portion of the project lasted six weeks coinciding with the six training sessions. Each session began with a brief meditation on a selected portion of Scripture related to the topic that would be discussed in the training session.

#### **Session 1 (Week 4)**

The first training session outlined the theological foundation for biblical interpretation. The goal of this session was to familiarize the participants with the key terms and components of an evangelical view of Scripture. In order to accomplish this goal the curriculum addressed five essential areas of the doctrine of Scripture: Inspiration, Inerrancy, Authority, Sufficiency, and Clarity. The intent of this session was not to introduce anything new that the teachers did not believe or know. The participants were already operating from an evangelical view of the Scripture and affirmed each of these characteristics of Scripture. The intention was to show how a robust doctrine of Scripture will inevitably effect and enhance ones ability and confidence in biblical interpretation. Therefore, each term was examined through biblical texts supporting its claims. Each list of texts was discussed in order to connect and root the theological topic in biblical interpretation. Throughout the session participants showed a high level of interaction regarding the practical nature of these theological realities. The progression of the curriculum was designed to move from the more theoretical aspects of the doctrine of Scripture to the more practically oriented concepts. The discussion of the Bible's

sufficiency and clarity proved to be particularly helpful among the group. The session concluded with a time for questions and answers.

### **Session 2 (Week 5)**

The second training session focused on the nature and benefit of biblical theology for biblical interpretation. A goal of this session was to press the importance of understanding the overarching narrative of Scripture; to see the essential role of biblical theology in biblical interpretation. Without a clear grasp of what is going on in the “big story” of the Bible many teachers can suffer from multiple problems. First, they can feel disconnected from what is taking place in a specific passage. Second, they may not understand why certain details are included in the Bible at all. Finally, divorced from the overarching storyline of the Bible, teachers can fail to make the connections between the Bible and their lives and the lives of those they teach. This session addressed these issues by setting forth a definition of biblical theology along with a paradigm for remembering the overarching storyline of Scripture: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. Each of these terms was discussed and examined in light of key biblical texts. A final goal of this session was to root biblical interpretation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. After his resurrection Jesus unfolded the entire metanarrative of Scripture to a couple of doubting disciples displaying his own centrality from “Moses and all the prophets” (Luke 24:27). Therefore, this session stressed the importance of a Christocentric reading of the Bible. Again the session concluded with a time for questions and answers.

### **Session 3 (Week 6)**

The third training session dealt with the fundamentals of biblical interpretation. While the previous sessions focused on theological fundamentals that were both essential and practical, this session began to examine practical steps of biblical interpretation. Two

primary areas were discussed: the heart of the interpreter and the head of the interpreter. First, in discussing the heart of the interpreter the importance of prayer, reading the Bible, and obedience to the Bible was covered. The purpose for this emphasis was to remind the teachers that biblical interpretation is not simply a mechanical endeavor but can be an opportunity for great growth in Christian maturity. The importance of humility in biblical interpretation was emphasized. The second primary area of discussion was the head of the interpreter and focused on some of the basic components of biblical interpretation: key terms, authorial intent, context, and historical/cultural background. First, we covered the difference between the meaning, implications, and significance in biblical interpretation while learning the definitions of these terms.<sup>2</sup> The intent of the teachers learning these terms was to give them clear categories for them to have in mind when studying the biblical text. Next, the focus shifted to the importance of seeking the authorial intent of the text to arrive at a correct understanding of the text. The most prevalent interpretive method in modern America is a reader-response approach. That is, the reader is the sole determiner of meaning. This portion of the curriculum was written to address this incorrect assumption that some may carry to the Bible. Here we focused on studying the text to arrive at the authors intended meaning. This meaning is discernable. The third topic discussed was context. Session two established the importance of understanding the greater biblical context of a given passage. At this point, therefore, the curriculum focused on the context of a verse as a crucial determiner of meaning. Reading, studying and interpreting a passage apart from context can result in error so the teachers were encouraged to read and interpret the biblical texts as they were intended as literary compositions meant to be read completely. Finally, the role of historical and cultural backgrounds information was covered. The historical and

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<sup>2</sup> The definitions of these terms were taken from Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994) 203-4.

geographical distance between our world and the world of the biblical authors is significant and at times we must familiarize ourselves with the cultural milieu of the biblical authors in order to interpret the Bible faithfully. However, at this point we also discussed the temptation of becoming so enamored with the cultural details that we forget that these details are meant to serve the work of biblical interpretation, not replace it. The session concluded with a brief discussion of resources for biblical interpretation followed by questions and answers.

### **Sessions 4 and 5 (Weeks 7 and 8)**

Sessions four and five both focused on identifying and interpreting specific literary genres within the Bible. First, the importance of correctly identifying genre was discussed. In order for the teachers to grow as interpreters they need to become acquainted with the existence of different literary genres in Scripture. For our teachers, this way of thinking about the Bible was new for our teachers. Most have simply picked up the Scriptures with little or no thought about what they are reading. Approaching the Bible in this fashion while not flawed is simply not sufficient for those who are teachers in the church. Therefore, one of the goals of this session was to address the importance of interpreting the Bible in light of the literary devices that were employed by the biblical authors. Thus the teachers would be able to pick up the Bible with the ability to identify the literary genre and be better equipped to understand the intended meaning of the author. Second, various genres of biblical literature were discussed. At this point in the curriculum I made the decision to narrow the number of genres to six. The purpose of this decision was two-fold. One, these teachers were encountering this type of biblical discussion for the first time so it seemed best to discuss genre in broader categories for the sake of enabling them to be equipped to interpret the vast majority of literary types in Scripture. Two, due to the timing constraints for the training session it was necessary to cover the most prominent genres of Scripture. Covering the most prominent genres

enabled me to give more attention to details in each genre and thus perhaps help those who teach in their ability to identify the less prominent genres. The genres covered in these sessions were Historical Narrative, Prophecy, Poetry, Wisdom Literature, Epistles, and Parables. Each genre was described by its characteristics and examined utilizing sound interpretive principles. We then proceeded to practice using examples of each genre. This exercise provided the teachers with exposure to the principles and also an opportunity to employ the principles in a controlled environment. As the teachers worked through the practice texts they experienced some “hands-on” time interpreting the Bible. Instead of wrapping up these sessions with questions and answers, the teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions after each literary genre was covered. Having the questions integrated throughout the session facilitated a better dialogue and immediacy when the teachers had questions.

### **Session 6 (Week 9)**

Our final session focused on the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation. The goal of this session was to provide the encouragement to the teachers about the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives as they interpret the Scriptures and to examine specific way the Spirit works in biblical interpretation. To accomplish this goal we considered the work of the Holy Spirit in two ways. First, we considered the Holy Spirit as our Helper. John reveals this work of the Holy Spirit in his record of Jesus farewell discourse (John 14-16). Jesus encourages his disciples who are facing separation from their trusted teacher by comforting them with the promise of the coming Helper. Two statements in this discourse emphasize how the Holy Spirit comes alongside the disciples to instruct and guide them: John 14:25-26, and John 16:12-15. Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit will be their instructor and he will lead them into all that they need to know. The disciples will not be in need of further revelation; the Holy Spirit will give all they need to proclaim the Scriptures faithfully. Next, we considered the

illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Building upon the promise of the Holy Spirit as “Helper,” we considered how the Holy Spirit helps the biblical interpreter. The Holy Spirit works in the heart and mind of believers to confirm the truthfulness of God’s Word and to enable understanding (Eph 1:16-19; 1 Cor 2:14; Col 1:9-10). Furthermore, true understanding of the Scriptures cannot be attained apart from the work of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:14-17). Biblical interpretation is not merely a mechanical formula for arriving at meaning. While interpretive principles are essential for accuracy in biblical interpretation, the work of the Holy Spirit is equally essential for correct understanding and application of the Scriptures.

Prior to the final session the participants were asked to review their notes from the previous sessions and bring any questions that had occurred over the course of our training. The session concluded with an extended time for questions and answers.

#### **Phase 4: Teacher Re-evaluation (Week 9)**

At the conclusion of the final training session the post-training questionnaire was distributed to all of the participants (appendix 1). The questionnaire was identical to the pre-training questionnaire so the results from each person in attendance would measure the effectiveness of the curriculum and training. Each participant was asked to review his notes from the class prior to filling out their questionnaire, but to refrain from using the notes as they retook the questionnaire in order to provide accurate statistical data regarding the effectiveness of the training. Once I had received the post-training questionnaire from the participants I compiled the data and performed a t-test for dependent samples to calculate the effectiveness of the training, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### **Phase 5: Elder Review and Evaluation of Curriculum (Weeks 10-11)**

The next phase of the project was to have the elders of the church review and

evaluate the curriculum providing critical feedback and comments for improvement in the curriculum. During the teaching process the pastor reviewed the curriculum in an ongoing fashion. At this point, however, the curriculum was distributed to all of the elders along with an evaluation rubric (appendix 3). Each elder was asked to measure the curriculum in accordance with the rubric. Each rubric also contained space for the elders to provide written feedback on the material. Additionally, I met briefly with each elder independently to ask if there was any further feedback or improvements that should be made to the curriculum. The goal of this phase of the project was four-fold. First, though the elders were supportive at every phase of the project the elders had a specific measuring tool to employ as they reviewed the curriculum that in turn allowed the curriculum to be revised in accordance with their suggestions. Second, this phase involved the elders in the process of teacher training in the church and provided them with both a plan and material to train new teachers for the church. Third, their role became hands-on in order to give them ownership in teacher training. Finally, each elder would have a thorough knowledge of the training material being used to train teachers for the church, thus allowing him to fulfill the biblical obligations as elders (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:9). Upon the receipt of the evaluations from the elders I reviewed all comments and suggestions and revised the curriculum in accordance with the suggestions and direction provided by the elders where necessary.

#### **Phase 6: Creation of a Strategic Plan for Teacher Training (Weeks 12-14)**

The final phase of the project was the creation and evaluation of a strategic plan for ongoing teacher training. As Bible study groups change and the seasons of life in the church change the need for new teachers in the church is inevitable. The final phase of the project was to create and set in place a strategic plan for the ongoing training of new teachers. Additionally, not every teacher was able to commit to the training program

during this project. The strategic plan was written to address these two logistical challenges. Upon the final revision of the curriculum a strategic plan for teacher training was created. The plan included a timeline for the completion of training for all current Bible study teachers, and ongoing objectives for the training of new teachers. On one hand the plan had solid objectives that could be completed within a certain time frame and on the other hand the plan included a pattern for the ongoing training of teachers. Additionally, this plan included a plan for the review of the curriculum and revision of the curriculum by the staff and elders every three years if necessary. The plan was then submitted to the ministerial staff for review. In addition to the strategic plan each staff member received an evaluation rubric (Appendix 4). The rubric was designed to guide the staff in their review of the strategic plan by providing specific criteria by which to evaluate the strategic plan. Necessary revisions were made to the plan after receiving the finished rubrics from the ministerial staff.

### **Conclusion**

The project concluded with the compiling and evaluation of the results from the various questionnaires and rubrics. During this period I also spent time in reflection on the project as a whole which will be discussed in the next chapter. While there are things that I would have done differently, the project was beneficial to First Baptist Waynesboro, Georgia and to me.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION

The final chapter will evaluate the project to assess its effectiveness to the church. The purpose and goals will be considered utilizing the measurements outlined in chapter one. Next, the strengths and weaknesses of the project will be outlined. Finally, I will offer some theological and personal reflections from the execution of this project.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to develop and implement training in biblical interpretation for the Bible study teachers at First Baptist Church, Waynesboro, Georgia. The importance of the teaching office in the church and a desire to see teachers improve in their understanding and love of the Scriptures provided the impetus to pursue a project that would fulfill this purpose. Furthermore, at the time of this project there was no means by which the teachers of the church could grow and develop as biblical interpreters apart from self-motivated study. This project was then conceived, designed and executed to create a codified and resourced system for training teachers in the art and science of biblical interpretation. I was successful in researching, compiling and writing a curriculum, which was used to train the Bible study teachers of First Baptist Church Waynesboro, Georgia (appendix 2). There were only two adult Bible study (Sunday School) teachers who could not commit to the training schedule. However, during the preparation period, the decision was made to invite teachers from the children's Sunday school classes to participate, which added an additional four Bible study teachers to the sample group. The training was also made available to those who wished to commit to the training in order to develop their skills in biblical interpretation, or taught Bible

studies intermittently. This opening added seven additional participants. These teachers and participants were gathered and trained in the Fall of 2014 over six bi-monthly training sessions. Upon the conclusion of the training I created a strategic plan for the ongoing training of Bible study teachers that was evaluated, revised and approved. The strategic plan was accepted and approved by the ministerial staff of the church. The project was successful in accomplishing the development and implementation of training in biblical interpretation for the Bible study teachers of First Baptist Church Waynesboro, Georgia. Furthermore, a strategic plan is now in place for the ongoing training of teachers as well. Therefore, this project was successful in fulfilling its purpose.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

The first goal of this project was to develop a six-part curriculum for training Bible study teachers in biblical interpretation. This goal was achieved (Appendix 2) and the resultant curriculum has been compiled into a training manual that will be used to train future teachers in biblical interpretation. From the start of this project the creation of curriculum for training our teachers in biblical interpretation was central to the purpose of the project. In past seasons the church had simply utilized books on biblical interpretation to serve as training resources for our people. The previous opportunities given for developing skills in biblical interpretation were inconsistent and not intentionally focused on those serving in the teaching ministries of the church. Therefore, developing a curriculum that was tailored to and targeted for our teachers became a driving force of this project. One of my chief desires after participating in the previous efforts was to be a part of developing a training that was more suited to our local church. Taking these factors in mind and with the approval of our pastor I wrote the curriculum with the teachers serving in our local church body in mind. In order to further measure the effectiveness of the curriculum the pastor as the lead teaching elder in the church supervised and proofread the curriculum as it was written for consistency and theological

integrity. Additionally, once the curriculum was completed I submitted the finished curriculum to the body of elders and to the ministerial staff for review with an evaluation rubric (appendix 3). The threshold of success set in chapter one of this project was 75 percent of the indicators on the evaluation rubric marked at the sufficient or above level. After receiving the completed evaluation rubrics from the elders and ministerial staff, 97 percent of the indicators were marked at the sufficient or above level. According to the success threshold this goal was met.

The second goal of this project was to evaluate the interpretive skills of the Bible study teachers at First Baptist Church Waynesboro, Georgia. In order to create a baseline of the knowledge and skill of our teachers in biblical interpretation a pre-project questionnaire was compiled and administered to all of the trainees. This questionnaire covered the specific areas of biblical interpretation that would be covered in the subsequent training sessions. Those participating in the training sessions who were committed to attending all or most of the training sessions were asked to participate in the data gathering aspect of this project by completing a questionnaire at the beginning of the course and upon conclusion in order to measure the effectiveness of the course. Sixteen class members agreed to participate in this aspect of the project. The goal was met as the participants filled out the questionnaire and agreed to be a part of the data collection and tracking for the project.

The third goal of this project was to train the Bible study teachers in the science and art of biblical interpretation. To meet this goal six training sessions held between August 30, 2014, and November 8, 2014. Upon the completion of the training sessions participants who had agreed to participate were given the same questionnaire they had taken before the training in order to measure the effectiveness of the training through the comparison of the results. A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine if there had been a positive, significant statistical difference between the pre-

training and post-training questionnaires. The test was designed to answer the question, “Did the participants knowledge in the field of biblical interpretation increase?” The training in biblical interpretation made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their knowledge of biblical interpretation ( $T(15)=6.689, p<.00001$ ). The results of the t-test reveal that the participant’s knowledge of biblical interpretation had increased as a result of the training. Therefore this goal was met according to the measurements used in this project.

The fourth goal is to create a strategic plan for the repetition of training of teachers in biblical interpretation. As the Lord raises up new teachers at First Baptist Church they will need to be trained in biblical interpretation. In order for this project to produce lasting effect upon the church a strategic plan for ongoing training was created. This is not to say that teachers who have participated in the training will be repeating the training but that the church will have an ongoing pattern for the training of new teachers. Likewise, further offering of training will provide teachers who were unable to complete the training during the timeframe of this project the opportunity to complete the training at another time. To accomplish this goal I created a strategic plan (Appendix 5) and then submitted the plan to the ministerial staff along with an evaluation rubric (appendix 4). The success of this goal was contingent on 75 percent of the indicators marked at the sufficient or above level. Upon receipt of the completed rubrics 100 percent of the indicators were marked at the sufficient or above level thus meeting the established benchmark for success. Therefore, the goal of creating a strategic plan was met.

### **Strengths of the Project**

First, the project communicated a clear evangelical doctrine of Scripture. The curriculum outlined key points of the doctrine of Scripture in order to lay a firm foundation for biblical interpretation. Most of the participants affirmed these key theological principles, but had never taken the time to reflect on their importance. The

critical nature of the Inspiration, Inerrancy, Authority, Sufficiency and Clarity of Scripture was presented to the class, and received with gladness.

Second, The project was aimed at increasing the teacher's confidence in their ability to interpret and understand the Bible. Participants were encouraged during the project when they found that they could see and discern the intended meaning of the authors through the application of principles of biblical interpretation.

Third, a "training manual" was created for the teachers in the church. The church now has a resource that can be utilized for training new teachers in biblical interpretation. Teachers who serve at First Baptist Church will not only be trained with this resource, but it will be theirs. The nature of the manual is such that the teachers can return to it and quickly find the necessary information as needed.

Fourth, a plan is in place to train Bible study teachers. As discussed in the rationale for this project there was no plan in place for training teachers in biblical interpretation. If we saw an ability or willingness to teach we simply gave them a book, or quarterly, and let them teach. Now the church has a process for equipping teachers to understand and interpret the Bible. This plan will serve to strengthen the teaching ministry of the church.

Finally, the project gave a greater sense of camaraderie among the teachers of the church. This outcome was unplanned and unexpected. Due to the nature of their teaching responsibilities some participants would not have opportunity to be in the same room together or studying the Bible together. As the sessions progressed it was great to see the teachers interacting and encouraging one another.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The questionnaire was too technically challenging given the ministry context of the project. When compiling the questionnaire I did not stop to consider the disparity of vocabulary between the questionnaire and the participants. At multiple points

participants brought to my attention that they had never seen certain words before. While some new vocabulary is understandable as they learn new concepts and ideas, the questionnaire would have been more effective had I adjusted the vocabulary or wording of the questions to a more suitable vocabulary.

The trainees did not have enough specific time to practice employing the principles they were learning in the training sessions. With each training session we had time of reflection on specific passages, but no time for the trainees to work on developing their skills. While they were learning this new information they would have benefited from some application of the information. One assumption I made was that as we learned, the teachers would be applying the principles to their teaching contexts. While this may have been taking place, there was no part of this project that came alongside the teachers to help them as they interpreted the Bible. More practice should have been planned into our training sessions

The timing of the training sessions was an unnecessary challenge to the participants. We did our training on Saturdays, during the Fall, in the South. With football games on Friday, college football on Saturday, and the beginning of the school year at hand, some people were simply too overextended to be able to come to a Saturday morning training session. Though the response was good, this part of the project could have been better planned.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

First, I would plan a different time. In balancing the number of activities with which teachers are involved with in the church I sought to find a time that would not be too intrusive on schedules nor keep them at the church campus for an extended time when they were gathered for other functions. In hindsight, this approach proved impossible. I understand clearly that there is no perfect time, but that does not mean there could not be a better time. One option I would consider would be to do the training on

Sunday afternoons. A light lunch could be provided for the teachers, with training to follow. Additionally, instead of spacing out the training every other week, we could train the teachers for six consecutive weeks. A second option would be doing all of the training in a Friday night and Saturday morning context. Teachers would cover the first half of the material on Friday night and return the following morning for the conclusion. Both of these options, while not perfect, would represent a better logistical setup for the teachers. Also, both of these options would allow for increased offerings of the training as they occupy less calendar time for the church.

Second, I would create my own questionnaire for the project. Early on I decided to use prepared questions that matched the content I would be teaching. Upon reflection, had I written the questions myself I would have been able to better taper the questions to the level of participants. Though everyone grew in their ability as interpreters, the difficulty of the questionnaire frustrated multiple participants. What is easy for me is not easy for them. Therefore, as a help to future trainees I will be creating and editing a new questionnaire for future use in our training.

### **Theological Reflections**

First, I was reminded of the centrality of God's written word in the life of His church. As I researched and spent time in the biblical texts discussed in chapter 2 I was reminded again of the vital role the Bible plays in the life of the local church. The Bible should give shape and direction to His church. Many churches have forfeited this stance for the sake of pragmatism. Faithfulness to the Word of God has been replaced by results in many churches, so that a business model supplants the biblical model. Ezra gives us a good model. He reads, preaches, and interprets the Scripture and the people of God experience genuine repentance and faith (Neh 8:1-8). Furthermore, Paul exhorts Timothy to be devoted "to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13). The centrality of the Bible to the life and health of the church cannot be overstated.

Second, the study of the Bible brings vitality to the community of faith. As the project progressed and participants grew in their abilities as interpreters of the Bible their excitement at times was palpable. To see the joy at a new depth of understanding the Scriptures again reveals how meditation of the Scripture brings nourishment and vitality to the life of a believer. Since the conclusion of the training there have continued to be conversations with those who took part in the training about interpretive issues within certain biblical texts. As the people have grown in their ability to understand the Scripture, they have also grown in their confidence to understand the Bible. They understand that they can and should be able to read and study the Bible with confidence. They know how to use sound interpretive principles and to trust the work of the Holy Spirit.

Third, sound biblical interpretation takes place within the community of faith. Though previously stated in chapter three, during the course of this project the role of community in biblical interpretation was reinforced. God has given the protective grace of fellow believers to keeping us from veering into silliness when we handle the Scriptures. This does not always work perfectly and it is true that some churches can be too narrow in certain instances concerning acceptable interpretations of Scripture. God did not give us the Bible, however, to be read in isolation from other believers. We are to read the Bible as a community of faith employing sound interpretive principles while seeking the help of the Holy Spirit to hear and obey all God has given us in His word. As a church increasingly takes this seriously the depth of its love for God and passion for the world can only increase.

Finally, the Bible addresses every aspect of our lives. The Bible refuses to be put in a compartment. Believers often read and use the Bible for certain areas of their lives, but the Bible is given to us for all of life. Accurately interpreting the Bible will necessarily lead to an increased holiness of life. Again Paul's exhortation regarding the

nature and use of the Scripture reminds us of this unavoidable truth (2 Tim 3:16-17). Therefore, to grow as an interpreter of the Bible will mean growth in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel changes not simply our destination for eternity, but the way we drive, eat, parent, purchase etc. The Lord has not left us in the dark about how we can live a meaningful and satisfied life. He has spoken and given instruction that we might know Him, know ourselves and live well. As believers increasingly renew their minds through the Scriptures God will increasingly reveal His will to His children (Rom 12:2).

### **Personal Reflections**

Having finished my first round of seminary education some years ago, I was reminded through this project of the importance of refreshing my memory on the principles of biblical interpretation. There are areas in my preaching and teaching where I have at times reverted to old habits in dealing with the biblical texts which were not rooted in sound hermeneutics. Some of these errors occurred due to a desire to reach a “relevant” application but more often when this happened I simply had not taken the time to ask important questions about the text I would be teaching. The discipline of having to teach biblical interpretation to members of the church caused me to go back and reflect on the rules of interpreting the Bible. As a result, one change I am making moving forward is to read, or re-read, at least one work on biblical interpretation a year. The goal of this change is to rehearse and remember the art and science of biblical interpretation. If I cease to discipline myself to grow as an interpreter of the Bible, I will regress, and this is untenable for a leader in the church.

Second, I love teaching hermeneutics. By no means am I the most effective teacher of biblical interpretation but this is an area of gifting with which the Lord has blessed me. Through this project the most encouraging realization was that what I enjoyed was also something in which God had gifted me. To see people awaken to and find confidence in interpreting the Scripture through this project awakened a desire to

continue teaching this material even beyond the scope of the teachers in the church. It is my desire that every believer would be equipped with the tools of biblical interpretation. Therefore, God used this project to reveal a greater passion for His word and equipping his people to love and understand the Bible and through that to love and understand God more fully.

Finally, it is amazing to be finished with such a large undertaking. God has humbled me through the encouragement of my wife and children, and the church I serve as I worked to complete this project. He has reminded me again that I have nothing apart from what He has given me. To be finished with the project stands as another testimony of God's lavish and undeserved grace that He has poured out on me in the ability to begin, work through and complete such an undertaking.

### **Conclusion**

Time will tell the lasting impact of this project on the teaching ministry of First Baptist Church. Surely the Lord has blessed many who teach through the training offered in this project and much encouragement has been shared with me about the benefit received from this training. Additionally the strategic plan if followed and executed will yield benefit to the teaching ministry for years to come. Therefore, the conclusion of this project is a beginning of sorts. On the one hand the teachers who have been trained in biblical interpretation are now equipped to handle the Scriptures well. On the other hand future teachers will have the opportunity to be equipped in the same fashion. I pray the Lord will continue to bless his church through those who faithfully teach the Bible, and that the church will be faithful to train those who teach in the art and science of biblical interpretation.

## APPENDIX 1

### PRE- AND POST-TRAINING QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Agreement to participate:**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your understanding of biblical interpretation. This research is being conducted by Michael Godfrey for the purpose of gathering data for a ministry project. In this research, you will be answering general questions about biblical interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. The claim that that the Bible is completely truthful in all things that the Biblical authors assert is called:
  - a. Inerrancy
  - b. Infallibility
  - c. Inspiration
  - d. Neo-orthodoxy
  - e. Authoritative
2. Much of the Bible comes to us as
  - a. Situational literature
  - b. Abstract poetry
  - c. Newsreels
  - d. Autobiographical literature
  - e. Fairy Tales.
3. The Bible does not make claims about its truthfulness (T or F)

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Plummer, "Bank of Quiz and Test Questions for 40 Questions book," accessed August 25, 2013, [www.robplummer.com/resources](http://www.robplummer.com/resources).

4. The divine-human dimension of the Bible concerns its authorship, not its very nature. (That is, the Bible itself is not “divine” and should not be worshipped.) (T or F)
5. The \_\_\_\_\_ is the closed list of books that Christians view as uniquely authoritative and inspired.
  - a. Literary Group
  - b. Septuagint
  - c. Canon
  - d. Doctrine and Covenants
6. Which approach to translation is more concerned with word for word equivalency?
  - a. Dynamic Equivalency
  - b. Formal Equivalency
  - c. Word Equivalency
  - d. Grammatical Equivalency
7. Which translation approach is more concerned with accurately conveying the meaning (as opposed to a “word-for-word” approach)?
  - a. Grammatical Equivalency
  - b. Formal Equivalency
  - c. Dynamic Equivalency
  - d. Word Equivalency
8. The Bible was originally written in 2 different languages. (T or F)
9. The Holy Spirit is not always a necessary part of interpreting scripture. (T or F)
10. What does Christocentric mean?
  - a. an eccentric Christian
  - b. Christ likeness
  - c. Christ-centered
  - d. None of the above
11. Be aware of historical and \_\_\_\_\_ background issues.
  - a. Ancient
  - b. Ethnological

- c. Cultural
  - d. All of the above
12. A concordance can be helpful by:
- a. Finding every instance of a word in an English translation
  - b. Providing quotes from the Church Fathers
  - c. Explaining the text of Scripture, usually verse-by-verse
  - d. Providing extensive notes on the text of Scripture
13. In modern American culture, which of these elements of communication is favored as the determiner of meaning?
- a. Text
  - b. Character
  - c. Author
  - d. Reader
14. The definition for 'implication' is:
- a. How the reader responds to the willed meaning of the author
  - b. Those sub-meanings of a text that legitimately fall within the paradigm or principle willed by the author, whether he or she was aware of them or not
  - c. The paradigm or principle that the author consciously willed to convey by the shareable symbols he or she used.
  - d. The content or 'stuff' talked about in the text.
15. The definition for 'significance' is:
- a. How the reader responds to the willed meaning of the author
  - b. Those sub-meanings of a text that legitimately fall within the paradigm or principle willed by the author, whether he or she was aware of them or not
  - c. The paradigm or principle that the author consciously willed to convey by the shareable symbols he or she used.
  - d. The content or 'stuff' talked about in the text.
16. A typological approach to Scripture is helpful in understanding the way some NT authors quote the OT. (T or F)
17. Which of the following "organizing categories" for the whole Bible is best applied to the New Testament rather than the Old?

- a. Promise
  - b. Law
  - c. Kingdom Consummated
  - d. Old Covenant
18. The ultimate focus of God's revelation is...
- a. Law & Gospel
  - b. Typology
  - c. Covenantal theology
  - d. Jesus Christ
19. When confronted with God's ultimate standard of holiness, whether in the Old or New Testament, we should always remind ourselves of our inherent unworthiness and look to the sufficiency of Christ. (T or F)
20. "A category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content" is the definition of:
- a. Narrative
  - b. Genre
  - c. Hermeneutic
21. The author of a narrative intended the minor sections to be read in light of the whole work and vice versa. This principle refers to:
- a. Thematic Statements
  - b. Context
  - c. Genre
22. When Mark notes that Jesus' comments about food and purity should be understood as declaring "all foods clean", this is an example of:
- a. Editorial Comments
  - b. Thematic Statements
  - c. Context
23. Historical narratives in the Bible are sometimes not concerned with some of the details that modern readers might wish were addressed (for example, chronology). (T or F)
24. Biblical historical narratives, while accurate, never claim to be objective. (T or F)

25. Failure to identify the genre of a passage correctly can result in skewed theology or interpretation. (T or F)
26. What is a hyperbole?
- An exaggerated statement not meant to be taken literally
  - A parable that Jesus spoke to the demon possessed pigs
  - An statement of exaggeration meant to be taken literally
  - A statement of comparison using like and as.
27. Gospel authors gave their readers editorial clues to the proper meaning of parables by
- writing footnotes to all their parables
  - grouping similar parables together
  - spreading out the parables in each gospel
  - leaving hidden codes found within the words and symbols of the parable
28. The central section of most New Testament letters can be divided broadly into \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ instruction.
- Theological and ethical
  - Theoretical and practical
  - Systematic and informal
  - None of the above
29. It is sometimes challenging to determine whether instructions in a letter are \_\_\_\_\_.
- Culturally bound
  - Case-specific
  - Apply directly without change
  - Embody an underlying principle
  - All of the above

## APPENDIX 2

### BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION CURRICULUM

#### **Laying the Foundation: The Theological Foundation for Biblical Interpretation**

We want to grow as students of the Bible, but where do we start? If we desired to build a new home the process would start by laying a foundation. This is crucial to the stability and the longevity of the home. If there are cracks or flaws in the foundation at the beginning there will only be troubles and costly repairs to be done later.

Where we begin in interpreting the Bible is similar to where we would start in constructing a home. Laying a foundation. In order to be faithful interpreters of the Bible, we must give careful attention to the theological foundation for interpreting the Bible. Just as in building a home upon a poor foundation leads to trouble, so a poor foundation for interpreting the Bible can be disastrous. A poor theological foundation makes for unstable and dangerous biblical interpretation.

So what is a stable theological foundation? We will explore this question by considering some key words and ideas. For some this may be the first time you have heard these words applied to the Bible, but for many Christians the ideas we will explore are familiar. Words are important, the Bible is a book of words, so the words we will explore today are crucial to know and understand if we are going to be good students of the Bible. Here are the terms we will examine:

The Bible is *inspired*

The Bible is *inerrant*

The Bible is *authoritative*

The Bible is *sufficient*

The Bible is *clear*

Now lets look at each of these terms and relate them to our study of the Bible.

## The Bible is Inspired

The first term in our foundation is *Inspiration*. We believe that the Bible is inspired by God, but what does this mean? D.A. Carson gives an excellent, simple definition that we will use as our guide. He defines *Inspiration* as:

“(The) supernatural work of God’s Holy Spirit upon human authors of Scripture such that what they wrote was precisely what God intended them to write in order to communicate his truth.”<sup>1</sup>

As we can observe from this definition, the doctrine of inspiration deals with the issue of authorship. Who wrote the Bible? How we answer this question will chart our course as biblical interpreters. So, did God write the Bible? Yes! Did humans write the Bible? Yes! This sounds contradictory, but it is not. Lets explore this further.

### God wrote the Bible:

First, the inspiration of Scripture is supernatural. Inspiration of the Bible is the work of the Holy Spirit. Lets consider 2 Tim 3:16-17

### Human authors wrote the Bible:

Next, the Holy Spirit inspired human authors. The writers of the Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote exactly what God wanted written. Lets look at 2 Peter 1:19-21

We should be delighted that the Lord would speak to us in such a way. John Frame, Seminary professor and author states, “God’s purpose is not merely to convey information to us, though he certainly does that. His purpose is to do for us all that can be done by language. He means to convey not only information, but tone, emotion, perspective. He means to convey his love to us, along with the sternness of his justice. Human language is rich in this way, conveying a wide variety of content. God’s language is all the richer. And to communicate it, he employs a wide variety of writers with a rich diversity of personality and experience. And the final result is exactly what he wanted to say to us.”<sup>2</sup>

The first layer of our theological foundation is *Inspiration*. **The Bible is Inerrant**

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 31.

<sup>2</sup> John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 596.

The next term in our theological foundation is ***Inerrancy***. Simply put, we believe that the Bible is without error, or inerrant. Stated positively, we affirm that the Scriptures are entirely true. In the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, the Southern Baptist statement of faith, Scripture is said to be “without any mixture of error,” and “totally true and trustworthy.”<sup>3</sup> Another helpful definition of inerrancy is, “Scripture in its original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.”<sup>4</sup>

It is common to hear a statement like, “You can’t trust the Bible. It’s full of contradictions and errors!” Often this statement is made by someone who has had little or no contact with the Bible. However, it is also true that people who would confess Christianity sometimes make this statement. This type of thinking contradicts what the Bible says about itself, and will cripple our abilities to interpret the Bible.

The opposition and hostility to the inerrancy of Scripture is relatively recent arising during the Enlightenment. During this historical period mankind shifted his trust from external sources, in our case the Bible, to his reason. The authority and primacy of human reason defined this period in history. Suddenly, the litmus test for truth was not outside us, but was internal, what we could grasp and understand through our minds. Prior to this period in history the Bible was regarded as true. This was, and is, no more for most of humanity.

We believe that the Bible to be completely truthful. This is in fact the clear position of Scripture. The Bible declares its truthfulness throughout its pages. Therefore, Lets consider a few biblical texts that support inerrancy:

Numbers 23:19

Psalm 12:6; 19:7-11

John 17:17

Hebrews 1:1-2

When we affirm the inerrancy of the Bible, we affirm the very nature and character of God. Our God is true and speaks truthfully and without error.

### **The Bible is Authoritative**

Who has authority over you? No matter our position in this world we will be under some measure of authority. As Christians we live, move, and exist under the authority of God (Acts 17:28). Furthermore, we have authoritative revelation given to us in the Bible. Since the words of Scripture are God’s words they bear His authority. This means that the

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<sup>3</sup> *Baptist Faith and Message*, accessed August 15, 2014, [www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp](http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp).

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 90.

authority of the Bible is wrapped up in the authority of God. Therefore, the next term in our theological foundation is *Authority*.

John Frame describes this well saying, “Divine authorship is the ultimate reason why Scripture is authoritative. Its authority is absolute because God’s authority is absolute, and Scripture is his personal word to us.”<sup>5</sup>

God is our authority. He speaks authoritatively. Therefore, the Bible is unlike any other book. Since the Bible is inspired by God and inerrant in all its claims, we are responsible to hear, believe and obey the Bible. These are three implications from being under the authority of the Bible. We hear the Bible through reading, studying and listening to it preached. We then respond to what we hear first in belief. Finally, we respond to the Bible through faith-filled obedience. Through these means we affirm with our head, heart and hands the authority of Scripture.

We read and interpret the Bible seeking to obey it. Since the Bible is God’s Word, His authority is present in the text of Scripture. As interpreters we are not simply looking for a way out, or loopholes. We come to the Scriptures with hearts willing and ready to do whatever the Lord would call us to do.

We submit our mind, will and emotions to text of Scripture. We do not tell the Bible what God says. Rather we come to the Bible eager to hear what God says. This can be the razors edge to anyone who interprets the Bible. We all have baggage that we carry to the text of Scripture. This could be past experiences in churches, Bible studies, or Bible teachers we have had in the past. It also could be our emotional and physical state when we approach the Scriptures. These issues factor into our ability to interpret the Scripture. It is therefore crucial for us to approach the Bible submitting to its authority, not eager to demonstrate ours.

Finally, we communicate the truths of the Bible because He has spoken authoritatively, not us. When we stand to teach in a class, our living room, or even share the gospel with a non-believer, we are not calling people to be obedient to our testimony. The authority to command response is not one that we possess on our own. Our authority comes from God, so that when we call people to repentance we are not demanding they abandon their sin for our sake, but because God commands them in His word. Do you see how freeing this is for us? Do you sense what confidence we are given when we interpret the Bible? God allows us to herald His authoritative Words throughout the world. As we do so there will be many who refuse to listen. They are rejecting God, not us. However, we can be confident that God’s word will convict and resurrect hearts as well. There will be those who hear the authoritative voice of God in the Scriptures, and respond in praise!

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<sup>5</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 165.

## The Bible is Sufficient

Is the Bible really enough? Has God really provided all that we need in the Scriptures? Yes! The Scriptures are sufficient! The next layer in our theological foundation is the **Sufficiency** of Scripture. The question before us is, sufficient for what? Kevin DeYoung writes, “The Scriptures contain everything we need for knowledge of salvation and godly living. We don’t need any new revelation from heaven.”<sup>6</sup> God has given us full and sufficient revelation of himself.

The question of the sufficiency of Scripture is one with which many Christians struggle. Though it may not be explicitly stated, we see this in our actions when we are in the midst of trials, temptation or struggle in our lives. It is often the case that we are tempted to go outside of the Bible to find a workable solution to our situation. We look for a book about our problem, or advice from our friends while ignoring God’s written Word. This can be a subtle rebellion against God and rejection of the Sufficiency of Scripture.

As we read the Bible we see many examples of God’s people confessing their confidence in God’s Word:

**Deuteronomy 29:29** – Moses expresses confidence in the Law that had been given by God to guide the people. While confessing that the Scriptures do not tell us everything about God (i.e. “secret things”), he declares the clear guidance for life that comes in the Scriptures.

**Matthew 4:1-11** – In Matthew’s gospel Jesus responds to temptation with confidence in God’s sufficient Word. In each of Satan’s temptations Jesus responds with truth from God’s Word. In 4:4, Jesus declares that God’s word is sufficient to preserve our lives. Furthermore, Jesus corrects Satan’s faulty biblical interpretation with biblical truth.

**2 Timothy 3:15-17** – Paul writes to Timothy reminding Him of the “sacred writings” ability to make him “wise for salvation.” The Scriptures are sufficient to reveal our need for salvation. Paul also lays out the sufficiency of the Bible for our lives. In 3:16-17 he writes that the Scriptures are “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” equipping us for “every good work.”

A deep belief and recognition of the sufficiency of Scripture takes time. We begin with the theological foundation of believing the sufficiency of Scripture and move to the action of studying and reading the Bible. As we act on our belief the evidence of the sufficiency of Scripture increases. Wayne Grudem comments, “As we go through life, frequent practice in searching Scripture for guidance will result in an increasing ability to find accurate, carefully formulated answers to our problems and questions.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 44.

<sup>7</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 131.

As students of the Bible the sufficiency of Scripture gives us confidence in the Bible. We see clearly that the Bible is not mere chest of fortune cookies, but the very revelation of God given that we might know him and live according to His purposes and ways. Furthermore, when we teach the Bible we can be confident that what we teach is always what people need. We are insufficient, the Bible is not. God has given exactly what you and I need. Therefore, we serve one another best when we are committed to faithfully interpreting the Bible and sharing it with others.

### **The Clarity of Scripture**

The Bible is clear. Truthfully, there are some of us who would disagree with this statement. Any person reading the Bible has come across a passage or verse that would challenge the above statement. However, the fact remains that the Bible is clear. So the final layer of our theological foundation is the *Clarity* of Scripture.

From the start when we declare a topic or text is clear, we are not saying it is always understandable in every way to every person. Quantum physics, molecular biology, and string theory are “clear,” but relatively few have understanding of these subjects. The same analogy can be used as we think of the Bible. The Bible is often misunderstood, misquoted, and misapplied. This does not lead us to conclude that the Bible is unclear, but rather that we lack a level of understanding. One’s understanding of a text does not always reflect clarity. We will as interpreters experience levels of understanding the Scripture. However, this reality does not diminish our confidence in the clarity of the Bible. The Bible is clear and we must work to understand it.

So then what do we mean when we speak of the clarity of Scripture? We mean that the Bible is an understandable document. Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, biblical scholars write about the clarity of the Bible stating, “It [the Bible] presents a clear message to anyone willing to read it, and that is why people throughout history have understood its teachings.”<sup>8</sup> The Bible can be read by normal people and understood by normal people. Though it takes diligence, discipline and the work of the Holy Spirit we should approach the Bible confident that it can be understood.

The clarity of Scripture was the *clear assumption* of the biblical authors:

Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 6

Psalms 19:7-11

Romans 15:4

Colossians 3:16

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<sup>8</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 149.

The clarity of the Bible empowers faithful Bible study and interpretation. We gain confidence when we know that the book we come to is not some sort of secret encoded message, but God's clear testimony and revelation of himself. We were meant to read and understand. Therefore, we can be confident in our ability understand and consequently, teach the Bible.

The final layer of our theological foundation is the Bible is *clear*. Read it, study it, proclaim it!

### **Seeing the Big Picture**

Interpreting specific parts of the Bible must be informed by a clear understanding of the overarching storyline of Scripture. Without a clear grasp of what is going on in the "big story" of the Bible many teachers can suffer from multiple problems. First, we can feel disconnected from what is taking place in a specific passage. Second, as interpreters we may not understand why certain details are included in the Bible at all. Finally, divorced from the overarching storyline of the Bible, we can fail to make the connections between the Bible and our lives. If we cannot connect the text to our own lives, how can we hope to connect the Bible to the lives of those God has entrusted us to teach? This session will focus on discovering the Bible's overarching storyline, and how knowing this storyline will inform and strengthen our ability to understand and interpret the Bible.

Sally Lloyd-Jones in *The Jesus Storybook Bible* says, "There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story."<sup>9</sup> This is a very helpful thought to keep in mind as we begin this session because this is what we are pursuing. What is the "Big Story," and how do we make sense of the Bible through the lens of the storyline of Scripture?

One of the common ways of referring to the Bible when discussing the storyline of Scripture is "metanarrative." What is a metanarrative? Albert Wolters defines metanarrative as, "The overall story told by the Christian Scriptures."<sup>10</sup> Throughout this session we will be using it in this fashion.

So for our session we will concern ourselves with four questions:

- 1.) How does understanding the metanarrative, or "Big Story" enable us to interpret the Bible faithfully?
- 2.) What is the metanarrative, or "Big Story" of the Bible?
- 3.) Is there a center, or climax of the metanarrative? If so, what is it?

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<sup>9</sup> Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Wolters, "Metanarrative," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 506-7.

4.) What are some other central themes in the metanarrative?

**How does understanding the metanarrative, or “Big Story” enable us to interpret the Bible faithfully?**

Why do we have to understand the “Big Story”? This is a fair question. After all, do we not read, experience and understand books without knowing how the story ends? The answer is yes and no. It is possible to understand what is going on in a specific moment in any piece of literature (or music, plays, and movies etc). However, one can clearly see that understanding and even enjoyment of a literary work is enhanced when the significance of individual events are glimpsed through their place in the greater narrative. This is why many classic works of literature are read and reread to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the story. It is in this rereading with knowledge of the outcome that readers are rewarded with a greater understanding of the significance of smaller events that had perhaps gone unnoticed in an earlier reading.

The discipline of rereading will help us as we approach the Bible. Having a fixed understanding of the plotline of the Bible informs our wrestling with challenging texts. Cultivating this discipline is crucial as we think of biblical interpretation. We will come across texts in the Bible that are difficult to understand. If we have difficulty understanding texts, we will have difficulty interpreting and teaching these texts.

Graeme Goldsworthy helps us here:

*“Who of us does not find at least some parts of the Bible difficult to understand? It is easy to ignore the problems by keeping to the well-worn paths of familiar passages. But when we begin to take seriously the fact that the whole Bible is the Word of God, we find ourselves on a collision path with the difficulties. It is at this point that we need biblical theology to show us how to read and understand the Bible.”<sup>11</sup>*

To answer this question we start with a key term we must become familiar with, **biblical theology**. Though there is a debate among Christian authors about what exactly biblical theology is, we will approach biblical theology in two main areas.

First, biblical theology is the discipline of interpreting the events within Scripture through the lens of the overarching story. Put another way, we interpret the details of the Bible through their connection to the big story. Goldsworthy says, “Biblical theology enables us to relate any story to the whole message of the Bible, and therefore to ourselves.”<sup>12</sup>

Second, biblical theology teaches us how to interpret the Bible and our world as we see the different biblical authors interpreting earlier Scripture and the world in which they lived. James Hamilton says, “Biblical theology is...the interpretive perspective of the

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<sup>11</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 17.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

biblical authors.”<sup>13</sup> This means that the biblical authors were themselves interpreters of Scripture and as we read the Bible we can learn from their interpretive perspective in order to become better interpreters ourselves.

Again James Hamilton says,

*“(T)he Bible teaches Christians how the Bible should be read. Studying biblical theology is the best way to learn from the Bible how to read the Bible as a Christian should. By the same token, studying the Bible is the best way to learn biblical theology.”*<sup>14</sup>

On a similar note Vaughan Roberts states that the Bible demands to be read “as one book that presents the unfolding story of God’s plan to save the world through his Son Jesus. If we want to understand any part of the Bible properly, we must consider where it fits in that great plan and how it contributes to it.”<sup>15</sup>

So then, to effectively read and understand Scripture in order to teach the Bible we must view its parts in light of the whole. We must develop eyes that can see the beautiful tapestry the Lord is weaving throughout the Scripture. Furthermore we must pay attention to how the biblical authors interpreted the Scripture, and how they interpreted the world.

As we learn to employ this way of thinking about the Bible we can look at each event in Scripture with an eye to its place in the grand storyline of God. Furthermore, we have been written into this story. As we reflect on the specific biblical passages in light of the metanarrative we see where we fit into the story.

With these categories in mind we still have some further important questions the first being, “What is the metanarrative, or ‘Big Story’ of the Bible?”

### **What is the metanarrative, or “Big Story” of the Bible?**

Its not enough to simply tell someone to interpret the Bible in light of it’s metanarrative if we do not first consider what the metanarrative is. Although there are other ways to view the metanarrative of Scripture, one way that is helpful is to see Scripture through these four lenses:

***Creation***

***Fall***

***Redemption***

***Consummation/Restoration***

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<sup>13</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *What is Biblical Theology: A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbols, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>15</sup> Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 19.

Certainly we must note that these four words cannot do justice to the majesty of the Bible's beauty or literary greatness. However, they provide an excellent framework for understanding the overarching storyline of the Bible.

Lets take a closer look at each of these categories while looking at different passages of Scripture.

- I.) Creation (Genesis 1-2; John 1:1-3) – God is the Creator of all that exists including mankind made in His image. Therefore, He owns and rules all that is.
  - a. God is the sole creator of the universe, and he did so by speaking all of creation into existence “*ex nihilo*” [out of nothing] (Gen 1:1).
  - b. As Creator God exercises *Sovereignty* (Ps 115:3; Acts 17:24-25), *Ownership* (Exod 9:29; Ps 24:1) *Authority* (Exod 29:46; Jer 24:7).
  - c. God has made humanity in His image; this sets man apart as created yet unique (Gen 1:26-27).
- II.) Fall – Mankind rebelled against our Creator God, thwarting His authority, and bringing upon ourselves God's righteous wrath and judgment.
  - a. Adam and Eve rebelled and sinned willfully against God (Gen 3).
  - b. As a result of their willful sin they were exiled from the Garden and the presence of God, and humanity entered into exile with them. (Gen 3:23-24)
  - c. All of humanity inherited the sin of our father Adam (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22).
  - d. All of humanity has willfully engaged in this rebellion as Adam and Eve did (Rom 1:18-32; Eph 2: 1-3).
  - e. The Fall has placed all of humanity under the judgment of God, and deserving of His wrath and in need of Redemption (Rom 1:18; 2:1-2, 3:19-23)
- III.) Redemption – God, rich in mercy and compassion, redeemed His people and satisfied His righteous wrath against sin through the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross.
  - a. God has planned and executed redemption for His people from the beginning (Gen 3:15; Rev 13:8; 17:8).
  - b. God accomplishes Redemption throughout the Bible (Deut 26:8; Ps 136; Rom 9:10-18).
  - c. The center of God's Redemptive work with humanity is Jesus Christ (Matt 5:17; John 3:14; 1 Cor 15:3-4).
- IV.) Consummation/Restoration – God is restoring and will finally restore all things through the establishment of his perfect reign in the new heavens and the new earth.
  - a. Jesus inaugurated the “last days” and the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God in his incarnation (Mark 1:14).
  - b. Jesus will come again, gather his people, and establish his reign. (Matt 24:30; 2 Thess 2:1)

- c. The Kingdom Inaugurated will eventually be the Kingdom Consummated (Rev 21-22; Phil 2:9-11).
- d. The New Jerusalem will be the dwelling place where the children of God return from exile (Rev 21-22)

### **What is the center or climax of the metanarrative, or “Big Story”?**

Every story has main characters and a climax point in the narrative. This is true of the Bible. God is the main character of the metanarrative of Scripture. The center and climax of the story of Scripture is our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who accept the Old and New Testaments understand that Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Scriptures and furthermore is the most important framework for understanding the Bible. While the Bible is diverse, it is a text united around the person and work of Jesus.

#### **1.) Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures**

Jesus makes the bold claims on multiple occasions that he is the point of the Bible. In **Matthew 5:17** Jesus states, “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.” In this statement Jesus reveals his mission, and his mission is quite a bold endeavor. He claims in this statement to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Anyone who has read the glorious promises contained therein can understand that this is an audacious claim. The beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ is that he has delivered on the promises, and fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. Additionally Jesus states that he has **not** come to abolish the Old Testament, so that we as believers in the gospel can explore the pages of the Old Testament with confidence that Jesus has secured the realities that are revealed.

#### **2.) Jesus is the climax of the Scriptures:**

After the resurrection on the road to Emmaus Jesus explains this truth yet again. Luke records that Jesus “beginning with Moses, and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (**Luke 24:27**) In this moment Jesus proves from the Old Testament that he is the Messiah. Further it says he uses “all the Prophets”, Jesus apparently used the entirety of the Scriptures and demonstrated himself as their zenith. Jesus taught the Bible as if He was the central figure and reality that the Scriptures pointed to.

The New Testament gives us numerous examples of the centrality of Jesus Christ as well. John reveals Jesus as the “Word” of God present and active in creation (**John 1:1-3**). The author of Hebrews joins in this stating that Jesus not only acted in creation, but remains active in the very sustaining of the universe (**Heb 1:1-4**). Paul continues this song as he poetically echoes the praise of Jesus as creator, sovereign, and savior. He demonstrates that Jesus is preeminent in everything (**Col 1:15-20**). Paul again reveals Jesus as the supreme ruler when he states that Jesus is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (**Eph 1:21**). It is clearly and unambiguously stated that Jesus is the center of

God's revelation. This is how the biblical authors wrote their works under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Bible constantly points us to Jesus.

### **3.) All biblical interpretation must center on Jesus, John (5:37-40)**

As Jesus confronted his opposition in John's gospel he makes this declaration about the insufficiency of their biblical interpretation. We are helped by Jesus to see that interpreting events within the Bible just for the sake of learning facts is an empty and foolish endeavor. In fact, Jesus is confronting those who had devoted their lives to the study and witness of Scripture and yet they were missing the very point of the Bible, namely Jesus. They were looking for life in the Bible, not understanding that the Bible serves as a witness to the life that is only found in Jesus.

This is a good warning for us. When we interpret the Scriptures we must not divorce our interpretation of the Bible from the person it reveals. The metanarrative of Scripture is focused on Jesus.

How should we then read the Scriptures? I do not think this means we have to find the hidden Jesus in every text like we are playing a game of "Where's Waldo". Rather we should read the Scriptures as the authors intended them. Jesus unfolds the Old Testament in such a way that he is revealed. ***We should do the same.*** Reading the Scripture in the awareness of the Advent of Jesus Christ. Jesus is central to the narrative we don't have to "find" him, because he is not hidden. This means we approach the Scriptures in light of Jesus, so that we see God's saving works in Israel through the lens of his ultimate saving work in Jesus Christ. We see the expansion of the gospel through the church as the victory promised in Jesus Christ. We see the New Heavens and New Earth as the moment when we will see Jesus face to face.

### **What are some central themes that are present within the metanarrative of Scripture?**

We have spent most of our time tying together the metanarrative of Scripture. Lord willing, we have grasped the central storyline of Scripture. Now, with our interpretive grid in place we must spend our closing minutes considering some other paths that could deepen our enjoyment and delight in the Bible. We will do this by considering the "theme(s)" of Scripture.

Is there one central theme to Scripture? This is a question that is contested by many within the literature on biblical interpretation and biblical theology. Dr. Robert Plummer shared an excellent illustration in class once, which will be helpful to us:

*Have you ever seen a tapestry from the back? Of course, on the front of the tapestry we see the beautiful artwork and completed piece that has been woven together. However, when you look at the back you see colors mixed and threads overlaid throughout the tapestry. Now, if I were to say a color of thread such as "green," "red," or "brown" it is likely that your eyes would be drawn to the color I was saying so that it would appear to*

*you that that color was all over the tapestry, perhaps even the central color, which it may be! However, focusing in on one color in the tapestry, even if it is the dominant color should not cause you to write off the other colors, which contribute to the beauty of the tapestry.*

So while there are pronounced themes in Scripture that have Jesus at the center we need not settle on just one to the exclusion of all others.

This last section will be focused on whetting your appetite to explore the themes of the Bible. It should be noted that for as many books on biblical theology that have been written there are an equal amount of opinions about what biblical theology is and what the central pattern, or theme of Scripture is. Therefore, I will be simply introducing you to paths that I would encourage you to walk down for a while with the respective authors. It is worth the effort and rewarding to your understanding of the Bible.

God is the King over all creation and all humanity. He ruled supremely in the Garden of Eden. That kingdom was challenged through the fall of humanity. However, He is building and establishing his perfect rule and reign throughout history, and will one day finally restore the Kingdom fully.

- Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*
- Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*
- Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*

Throughout the Bible God is relentless in his pursuit of His people in order to dwell with them that they would be His people and He would be their God.

- T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*
- G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*

The central thought of the Bible presented as “God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment.”

- James M. Hamilton Jr. *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology.*

The covenants between God and his people form the backbone of the Bible and should therefore serve as the lens for how we read and understand the Bible.

- Peter Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants.*

### **Basics of Biblical Interpretation**

We are constantly interpreting the world around us through our senses. When we open our eyes in the morning and see numbers displayed on a clock or phone next to the bed, we interpret those numbers, coming to a conclusion about the time we see (some us

further calculate how much longer we can sleep by hitting the “snooze” button). As we encounter smells in the air we interpret what we smell and categorize the smells in our minds. The same practice occurs in many other areas of life: music, movies and television, sports, and the texts (books, magazines, blogs etc.) we read. The vast majority of the time we are not even aware that we are interpreting the world around us we just do it.

For example, the other day in a conversation discussing someone who had arrived late for an appointment a friend made the comment “he must’ve gotten tied up.” I did not respond by running to my car and getting my pocketknife and asking where the tied up individual was in order to go and cut him loose. Instead, I understood that my friend meant that an event had taken place that delayed his appointment from showing up on time. I didn’t even have to think about what he said, I simply knew how to interpret what he was saying.

We are all interpreters. We make conclusions about meanings, implications and the significance of what we see in the world around us. Therefore, when we read the Bible we are interpreting what we read. The question then is not are we interpreting the Bible, but rather are we interpreting the Bible well?

In our previous sessions we laid a theological foundation and unfolded the blueprint of the Bible. Today, we will grab our tools and materials to build the framework for faithful and accurate biblical interpretation.

Today we will consider three general areas of biblical interpretation to help us grow in our ability to study, interpret, and apply the Bible.

- 1.) The Heart of the Interpreter
- 2.) The Head of the Interpreter
- 3.) Practical resources for the Interpreter

### **The Heart of the Interpreter**

In order to become a better student of the Bible and one who is better equipped to teach the Bible, certain habits and practices must be developed. Some of this first section will sound incredibly elementary to you, and yet many would-be students of the Scripture skip these essentials and by doing so sabotage their development as students of the Bible.

Faithful biblical interpretation starts with the heart of the interpreter. To think of Bible study only in terms of intellectual or academic exercise without allowing the Scripture to take hold of our hearts will lead to frustration. Bible study will become rigid and boring. Furthermore, we will find our passion to know and understand the Bible waning as we see the text relating very little to where we are in life.

So, how do we ignite our hearts in Bible study? Through prayer, reading, and obedience.

**Prayer:**

We come to the Bible needy for help. This is true whether we acknowledge it or not. Though we may certainly comprehend Scripture with our minds, apart from the help of the Holy Spirit we will likely misunderstand and twist the Scriptures. Certainly we will not know the weight of conviction or the joy of encouragement God brings by applying the word to our hearts. Because we approach the Bible far from neutral it is necessary to approach Bible study in prayer. Throughout Psalm 119 David models for us an appropriate prayerful approach to the Bible:

*Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! (Psalm 119:12 ESV)*

*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (Psalm 119:18 ESV)*

*My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word! (Psalm 119:25 ESV)*

*Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works. (Psalm 119:27 ESV)*

*Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! (Psalm 119:33-36 ESV)*

*You are good and do good; teach me your statutes. (Psalm 119:68 ESV)*

*It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. (Psalm 119:71 ESV)*

*Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your rules. (Psalm 119:108 ESV)*

*Your testimonies are righteous forever; give me understanding that I may live. (Psalm 119:144 ESV)*

*Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. (Psalm 119:173 ESV)*

We, like David, need the help of the Lord to understand the Bible. Gloriously, our God answers such prayers and instructs us in His Word.

**Read the Bible:**

To interpret the Bible you must read it. There is no shortcut, study help or devotional material that can substitute for reading the biblical text. Too often it seems that people who want to understand the Bible better look first for something outside of the Bible to help them in their study rather than simply reading the Bible.

*“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:1-9 ESV)*

*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8 ESV)*

*For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. (Ezra 7:10 ESV)*

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17 ESV)*

It is plain from the Bible that we are to read the Bible. Furthermore, we are promised that in reading the Scriptures we find great blessing and reward. To grow in our Bible study we must pray and read.

### **Obey the Bible:**

Finally, our ability to faithfully interpret the Bible is linked to our obedience of the Scripture. Our willingness to submit to the Bible will increase our ability to faithfully interpret Scripture. If we are unwilling to submit to the authority of the Bible (Session 1) our ability to rightly handle and interpret the Bible will suffer greatly. If we approach the Bible as a textbook to be mastered we have missed the point of the Scripture. The Bible is a book to be obeyed not mastered.

*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13 ESV)*

The author of Hebrews tells us that the Bible is not a text that functions outside of believers, but rather invades our hearts to the deepest areas. The Bible is a living book. The Holy Spirit like a loving and careful doctor applies the Bible to our hearts calling us to greater repentance and faith through reading the Scripture.

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:22-25 ESV)*

James reminds us that in order to understand and retain any knowledge of the Bible we must be those who rise up from our study to do what is said in the Scriptures. Furthermore, we see in James that faith and obedience is blessing in the life of believers. Not to say that everything goes well in every circumstance, but rather that in our study of the Scripture we are prepared for any circumstance we face. Therefore, we must, as James writes, be doers of the Word not merely hearers.

### **The Head of the Interpreter**

Beyond the basic ways we grow, as interpreters of the Bible, there are some further general helps for becoming a more faithful interpreter of the Bible. We can call these “tools” for biblical interpretation. As in construction, there are certain tools that are used generally, meaning they are not trade specific, we have some general principles or “tools” that will help us understand the Bible better no matter where we are reading in the Scriptures. For this section we will discuss some tools that every good student of the Bible keep at the ready in their toolbox.

#### **Tool #1 – Clear Categories**

The first tool in our toolbox is an understanding of the difference between *meaning*, *implication* and *significance*. Each of these categories can be applied to any passage of Scripture. Every text has meaning, implications and significance. Robert Stein provides good definitions of these terms, which will guide our use of them.

**Meaning** – the pattern of meaning the author willed to convey by the words (shareable symbols) he or she used.

**Implication** – Those meanings in a text of which the author was unaware but nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern (or type) of meaning he or she willed.

**Significance** – How a reader responds to the meaning of a text.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 203-4.

We must address a key question about these terms that shapes the way we interpret the Bible. ***Who determines meaning, implication and significance?*** Based on the definition above, the author determines the meaning. This is the view that is most consistent with common rules of communication. In conversation we use words, gestures and facial expressions to communicate. When we speak we are seeking to convey meaning to one another using these means. The biblical authors certainly had clear intentions behind what they were writing. They carefully chose the words they used in order to communicate their intended meaning.

Furthermore, if we are attentive to the text of Scripture we realize that the majority of the Biblical authors wrote their works in light of current events. Rob Plummer states, “Much of the Bible comes as ***Situational Literature*** (documents addressed to specific persons facing particular historical situations).”<sup>17</sup> As the authors sought to address the situations they were facing, and the truths they knew from earlier Scripture, they composed works in light of these influences, not apart from them. Again, the author determines the meaning of what he wrote.

We must note: *not everyone approaches the Bible in this fashion*; in fact, authorial intent is often jettisoned in favor “text” or “reader” determining the meaning. Reader response can be seen in the question, “what does this verse mean to you?” That is not a beneficial question when reading the Bible. As the meaning of the Bible is contingent on whoever is reading it. Or one could say, “it doesn’t matter who wrote the verse, or his/her intentions, we must just look at the verse apart from who wrote it.” Again, this is not beneficial because the biblical authors had reasons for their writing, which include the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The biblical authors expressed their intended meanings through the words they wrote.<sup>18</sup>

Group Discussion:  
Ephesians 5:18

### **Tool #2 – Context**

The second tool in our toolbox is ***context***. In order to understand the meaning of a text we must move our eyes beyond the actual verses we are exploring to consider the surrounding material. What comes before this text? What comes after it? Where does it fit in the overall flow of this paragraph, chapter, and book? Robert Plummer writes, “Attempting to understand or apply a particular biblical phrase or verse without reference to the literary context is virtually guaranteed to result in distortion.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, as we read and study individual portions of the Bible we must do so in light of the surrounding context.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel 2010), 33.

<sup>18</sup> Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 18-21.

<sup>19</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 104.

For example let's consider: Matthew 18:20 – In the church where I grew up this verse was commonly quoted during group prayer times. Usually, the person quoting the verse used it as a means of emphasis for a request, or closer presence with Jesus in that moment. While these truths may be taught in Scripture, the context of this verse is the discipline and removal of an unrepentant church member. While the verse sounds good in a prayer circle, the context of the verse does not warrant using it in that manner.

### **Tool #3 – Historical/Cultural Background**

A final tool in this section of our toolbox is *historical/cultural background*. Historical background, like biblical context has to do with what is happening around the text. The biblical authors at times help us with the background within their writings, for example let's look at *Mark 7:1-8*.

However, unlike looking at the surrounding verses, one must sometimes read outside of the biblical text for information about the historical context. The biblical authors often assumed certain understanding from their readers. They communicated and wrote their compositions with certain assumptions about the knowledge of their readers. Therefore, we as readers must sometimes do research beyond the immediate context in order to gain the necessary insight for interpretation. This challenge is not equal in every book of the Bible. Some books are very accessible to readers. Often the gospel of John is distributed as an evangelistic tool because of its clarity.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand the Minor Prophets (Hosea – Malachi) can present a greater challenge to the modern reader. In the face of this challenge we must read more widely about the cultural assumptions and historical backgrounds that the authors had as they wrote.

When tools are used inappropriately they become ineffective and sometimes dangerous. This is true when using the “tool” of historical/cultural background. While studying the historical background can be fun and interesting, it is not the point of Bible study. The tools on a construction site, no matter how impressive, only serve to accomplish the goal of building a structure. Therefore, we should treat historical/cultural background in the same way: as a resource to inform and deepen our study of the Bible.

### **Practical Helps for the Interpreter**

Finally, let's explore some practical helps for our hearts and heads as interpreters. We will consider Bible translations, Study Bibles, and extra-biblical resources. Every student of the Bible will do well to pay careful attention to these resources. In fact, our ability to study and interpret the Bible will be drastically affected by the choices we make in these categories.

#### **Bible Translations:**

The Bible was not written in English. The Bible was written in three ancient languages Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Most of us are not familiar with these languages and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 102-3.

therefore we are dependent upon translations. Translation is the most basic level of interpretation. Translators are communicating their thoughts and assumptions when they translate the biblical words to English words. This is a weighty task and responsibility. However, one glance at the Bible shelves in any Christian store will reveal that there are many English translations to choose from (for which we should praise God!). How does one make a wise choice regarding Bible translation? To answer this question we have to consider the method of the translation.

There are two predominant methods of Bible translation: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Both of these methods can be applied faithfully and produce good translations.

**Formal Equivalence** – “word-for-word” – Translators seek to remain as closely tied to the actual biblical words as possible (Ex. ESV, KJV, NASB).

**Dynamic Equivalence** – “thought for thought” – Translators are less concerned with the number of words, but rather communicating the intended meaning of the biblical phrases (Ex. NIV, NLT, The Message).

For the purpose of Bible study and interpretation a formally equivalent translation is better suited to the goal. We want to be as close to what the author actually wrote as we can be, and formally equivalent translations allow us to do this.

### **Study Bibles:**

Once you make a decision about the translation you are seeking a good study Bible can help you in the areas we have discussed today. Here are some guidelines for choosing a good study Bible:

- 1.) A Study Bible should increase your ability to understand the biblical text while allowing you to come to your own conclusions about the meaning of a text.
- 2.) A Study Bible should have contributions from a diverse panel of scholars.
- 3.) A Study Bible should offer clear guidance without forcing an interpretive framework.

What about concordances, commentaries, Bible software?

- Concordance – a book designed to compile the various uses of words throughout the Bible.
  - Many study or reference Bibles will have some sort of concordances, which can prove helpful.
  - An exhaustive concordance lists every occurrence of a given word.
  - Concordances are helpful tool for further exploration of words or phrases, but don't forget the context!
- Commentaries – An explanation of the biblical text.
  - A commentary is only as good as the one who wrote it.
  - It is better to look for the best commentaries on the books you are preparing to study rather than getting a general one-volume or one-author set.

- D.A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey*
- Tremper Longman III, *Old Testament Commentary Survey*
- John Glynn, *Commentary and Reference Survey: A Comprehensive Guide to Biblical and Theological Resources*
- Software
  - Computer software is good for those who love computers and can leverage technology to benefit their Bible study.
  - If you don't like to read digital books, or study the Bible on the computer, Bible software is not likely to benefit you.
  - However, there are some great programs available:
    - Logos – The benchmark for comprehensive Bible study, with a hefty price tag.
    - BibleWorks – Heavy on the Biblical languages.
    - E-Sword – Free and useful, but you get what you pay for.

Any Bible study tool you choose should be just that, a tool. One you use to help you better understand the treasure of the Word of God and equip you to communicate it effectively to others.

### **Identifying and Interpreting Genre (Part 1)**

The general contractor on a job site is able to oversee the progress of the building of a structure. However, there comes a time when sub-contractors who are skilled in specific areas are called in to work in specific settings. Today we will call in the sub-contractors of biblical interpretation.

The Bible is a unique book for many reasons, but one key reason is the diverse types of literature. Simply put, the Bible is written in more than one style. Commonly in biblical studies the types of literary styles in the Bible are referred to as **Genre**. The word “genre” is not a term exclusive to biblical studies. Genre can be used when speaking about books (fiction, non-fiction, poetry etc.), music (classical, jazz, blues etc.), or movies (action, drama, documentary etc.). However, as Robert Plummer points out, in biblical interpretation, “we are concerned primarily with literary genres, and more specifically, the literary genres of the Bible.”<sup>21</sup>

The goal for our next two sessions is to equip you with the ability to identify the literary genres of the different biblical compositions, and to provide you with some basic guidance about how to interpret the individual literary genres of the Bible.

For this session we will be concerned with how we identify literary genre in the Bible, and then proceed to look at genres that are found in both the Old and New Testaments. So the outline for today is as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 185.

- 1.) Identifying the Genre
- 2.) Interpreting Historical Narrative
- 3.) Interpreting Prophecy
- 4.) Interpreting Poetry

### **Identifying the Genre**

Now that we have a definition in place for genre we can begin to explore how we can identify specific genres in the Bible. This is a key step in biblical interpretation. Incorrectly identifying the genre of a biblical work can lead to strange and incorrect assumptions about what the author is saying.

As we covered in our last session, we are seeking to know what the author is communicating to us in his writing. This includes the *way* the authors chose to write. Within each literary style there are certain identifying marks that the authors have given us in order to clue us in on how to interpret the message they are writing.

Our job as interpreters is to learn to discover these clues.

Robert Plummer notes, “One way to identify the genre of biblical book is to read it and note significant literary details and authorial comments that cue the reader as to how it should be understood.”<sup>22</sup> Often the author reveals the type of literature through commenting about what he is doing. Therefore, this is not only one way, but also the most effective means for identifying literary genre.

Some examples:

Luke 1:1-4 – what does Luke tell us about the *type of book* he is writing?

Galatians 1:1-2 – Based *on this introduction* by Paul how would we identify the genre of this book?

Jeremiah 1:1-3 – How would we use this introduction, *along with the rest of the book* to identify the genre of this book?

The authors were not playing games of cat and mouse with us in what they were writing. They were employing these various literary genres in complete knowledge that we would interpret them according to the characteristics present within those genres.

As mentioned in the final section of the previous session, there are tools available to help us identify literary genre when we find ourselves unable to do so on our own. Study Bibles and Commentaries can be a valuable resource for answering questions about literary genre.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 186.

Now that we understand the importance of knowing the literary genre, let's begin to learn some tools for interpreting the various genres. **Interpreting Historical Narrative**

The most prominent genre of literature in the Bible is Narrative. Robert Stein notes, "Over 40 percent of the Old Testament and nearly 60 percent of the New Testament consists of narrative."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, this is a worthy starting point for our discussion of interpreting specific genres of the Bible.

A key to understanding biblical narrative is to consider that the biblical authors had an agenda. While they accurately reported historical events, they did so in order to persuade our belief. They are writing to convince us of the Truth. They want us to read their word and respond in faith. Therefore, we must interpret the narratives in light of this agenda.

Within the historical narrative books of the Bible we will discover different types of literary devices employed by the authors such as poetry, parable, and exaggeration. So we cannot be so rigid in our application of interpretive principles of one genre to keep us from allowing the authors to speak to us through their intended style at times. However, when those styles occur within larger narratives there are principles that should govern our reading and interpretation of narrative.

Robert Plummer provides *5 principles* for interpreting Historical Narrative:<sup>24</sup>

- 1.) **Context** – "The author of the biblical book did, in fact, intend his audience to read the whole account, so each minor section needs to be read in light of the whole and vice versa." The authors of historical narratives arranged their accounts with intent that we would read and interpret them as such.
- 2.) **Editorial Comments** – The author of the biblical texts will at times make direct statements, which serve to clarify our understanding of a given event.
- 3.) **Thematic Statements** – "Sometimes an author will begin his work or a section of his work with a thematic statement that helps us understand the remainder of the work."
- 4.) **Repetition** – Biblical authors did not have the option of **boldfacing** certain words or *italicizing phrases for emphasis* so they used repetition as a means of emphasizing important details.
- 5.) **Trustworthy Characters** – "Whether directly or indirectly, the author clues the readers as to which characters are to be believed or imitated."

Now let's apply these principles to a few examples:

- John 20:30-31
- Mark 7:1-13
- Joshua 1:6, 7, and 9; 1:5 and 9
- Luke 15

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<sup>23</sup> Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 151.

<sup>24</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 193-94.

## Interpreting Prophecy

The Bible is filled with prophets and prophecy. This genre of literature is found in both the Old and New Testaments. Our English Bibles even divide the prophetic works of the Old Testament into separate categories of “major” and “minor.” To some prophecy is scary, or unsettling. The words and images are strange, and the prophets themselves are odd characters to boot. To others prophecy can be an obsession. The symbols, images and pronouncements present a massive “biblical jigsaw puzzle” that they must be able to figure out through charts, diagrams and Internet research.

Good biblical interpreters will *avoid these extremes*. Therefore, let's find our footing and press on.

Robert Stein addresses a common assumption that many modern Bible readers make about prophecy namely, “prophecy is a synonym for prediction.”<sup>25</sup> Biblical prophecy has much broader boundaries. We should think of prophecy in terms of proclamation of a message from God to people. Prophets then are not restricted to only prediction, but rather can bring God's word to his people in diverse settings and situations. Stein further notes that biblically a prophet “was understood more as a *forthteller* of the divine message than a *foreteller* of future events.”<sup>26</sup> While Prophets at times made predictions, we must guard ourselves against reading a predictive interpretation into every prophetic message. Prophets in the Bible are God's messengers, communicating God's message. Therefore, we must endeavor to understand the message they have communicated.

Again, Robert Plummer provides some *general guidelines* to help us interpret prophecy:<sup>27</sup>

1. **Investigate the book's background, date and author.** Sometimes this data is provided within the book itself, but there are many times you must turn to outside sources to aid in answering these questions about the book.
2. **Pay attention to the context.** How does the section you are reading fit with the overall book? Is this a group of similar themed oracles?
3. **Expect figurative language.** Biblical prophecy encompasses the whole range of human emotion, and as such contains emotive language. We should expect, and allow ourselves to identify with, figurative and descriptive language, that does not demand a strict literal interpretation. A great deal of biblical prophecy is also written poetically, and Hebrew poetry is quite different from contemporary poetry. Therefore, we must acquaint ourselves with how to interpret biblical poetry.

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<sup>25</sup> Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 199-202.

4. **Distinguish conditional and unconditional prophecy.** Conditional -Jeremiah 18:7-10; Jonah. Unconditional Gen 12:1-3; Gal. 3:15-18.
5. **Seek the meaning for the original audience before determining contemporary implications.** We must avoid the common error to read every prophetic word through the lens of the nightly news. Our first goal is to study what it meant to the original hearers before we jump to modern contemporary parallels.
6. **Fulfilled or unfulfilled?** As we read prophetic predictions we can ask the question of fulfillment. (Isaiah and Cyrus) This question can be difficult at times when a text either clearly speaks of eschatological (end-time) events, or hints at them. However, we can still ask the question of fulfillment. Additionally, the New Testament can aid us in our reading of prophecy as the biblical authors can point us to the fulfillment of prophecies previously made.

If we are grounding our study of the prophets in these guidelines we reap multiple benefits:

- We will gain better understanding. By doing the necessary digging into the text and asking specific questions we become far better at grasping the message God has spoken.
- We will be protected against overzealous prophetic silliness. More than any other biblical genre, prophecy has been the victim of interpretive acrobatics. If we rehearse and practice these guidelines we will be better equipped to spot faulty prophetic utterance when we encounter it.

Our confidence in our glorious God will be deepened. We see God promise and then fulfill time and time again in the Bible. Studying prophecy then increases our faith as we see who God is.

### **Identifying and Interpreting Genre (Part 2)**

Having begun our discussion about genre last session by demonstrating the importance of identifying the literary genre, and continuing to explore some of those genres, we turn this week to further exploration of the genres of biblical literature.

It is worth returning to the importance of correctly identifying the genre of biblical literature we are interpreting. If we fail to take this crucial step we run the risk of missing the author-intended meaning of the text, which is our goal as interpreters of the Bible. When we see what type of literary device the author employed in his writing we will be on the path to correctly understanding what the biblical text actually means. Furthermore, by correctly identifying the genre we are studying we can apply sound interpretive principles to aid us in our understanding of the biblical text.

This session will include discussion on four separate genres of Scripture. This will be challenging in that each genre brings with it unique ways to interpret them. This will be wonderful as we move through different styles of literature we can begin to recapture some amazement at how wonderful the Bible actually is. In the Scriptures we behold literary beauty like no other book that has ever been written.

The four genres covered in this session are as follows:

- 1.) Interpreting Biblical Poetry
- 2.) Interpreting Wisdom Literature
- 3.) Interpreting Epistles (Letters)
- 4.) Interpreting the Parables

### **Interpreting Biblical Poetry**

What do you think of when you hear the word “poetry”? It is likely that what comes to many of our minds looks and sounds much different from what the Bible presents as poetry. Many of us think of songwriters, or rhyming and rhythm, which characterize a great deal of the modern poetry that we encounter. The poetic language of the Bible is quite different, but understandable! The first biblical book that comes to our mind when we think of poetry is likely Psalms, which is an entire book of poetry. However, poetic language occurs throughout many different genres of Scripture.

One key benefit of most modern Bible’s is the way that poetic text is displayed on the page. In contrast to the way narrative is printed (blocks of text, and paragraphs), poetic language in the Bible is often surrounded by more “white space.” The text is set and spaced differently keying the reader in on the fact that what is being read is poetic speech. Not every poetic statement is given this different typeset, but sections of poetry are often noted by their presentation in our Bibles.

The most important term for us to know when thinking about the poetic language of the Bible is *parallelism*. Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard define parallelism as, “that phenomenon whereby two or more successive poetic lines dynamically strengthen, reinforce, and develop each other’s thought.”<sup>28</sup> Far from simply saying the same thing over and over again, which would represent an over simplistic reading, parallelism was employed by the biblical authors to drive home their message. We are meant to hear the emphatic message through poetic restatement.

There is some difference of opinion regarding how many types of parallelism we encounter in the Bible. However, most scholars agree on a few basic forms that account for the majority of biblical parallelism. As we acquaint ourselves with these poetic devices, we become more adept at recognizing the intended meaning of a text.

#### **Forms of parallelism:**<sup>29</sup>

**Synonymous Parallelism** – two poetic lines that are very close in meaning if not synonymous.

**Antithetical Parallelism** – the second line contrasts with the first asserting the opposite truth.

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<sup>28</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 284.

<sup>29</sup> These definitions are taken from Robert Plummer’s, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 245-47.

**Synthetic Parallelism** – the addition of information or emphasis in the second line to the degree that the second line can no longer be called synonymous.

**Chiastic Parallelism** – a series of two or more elements followed by a series of corresponding elements in the reverse order.

**Parallelism exercise:**

Psalm 95

Isaiah 6:9-10; 53

Genesis 1:27

As we observed a few moments ago, the book of Psalms is a book of biblical poetry. Understanding the different types of parallelism will impact your study and understanding of the Psalms. Therefore, the general principles of parallelism are key in developing skill in understanding the Psalms. However, as Grant Osborne points out, there are some further principles that should guide your interpretation of the Psalms:

- 1.) **Note the stanza patterns** – our English translations are a great help in their divisions between lines and stanzas, but we must look at the development of pattern throughout the Psalm to interpret it accurately.
- 2.) **Study the metaphorical/figurative language** – we must seek to understand the images the psalmist is employing and what the images mean.
- 3.) **Note the psalm title/superscription** – though there is disagreement about how accurate the superscriptions are, they are often an excellent tool for interpreting the psalms as they provide some historical background to the Psalm.
- 4.) **Study the original setting and the Messianic implications** – We must first consider what the Psalm meant to its original audience, but we must also be open to the possible Messianic markers that are present within the Psalms.
- 5.) **Study the whole Psalm before drawing conclusions about meaning.**<sup>30</sup>

### **Interpreting Wisdom Literature**

The Bible's wisdom literature is appreciated both by people inside and outside the Christian faith. Even a cursory reading of the Proverbs yields advice for relationships, investments and general conduct. However, to the trained interpreter the proverbs yield much more than tips and tricks for a prosperous life. The principles found in the wisdom literature reveal a way of living that honors God, and demonstrates confidence in His ways.

The wisdom literature of the Bible brings helpful balance to the life of believers. We have difficulty translating truth to action. Henry Virkler notes, "One of the greatest problems of religion is the lack of integration between our theological beliefs and daily living. It is possible to divorce our religious life from practical decisions we make each day."<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 238-41.

<sup>31</sup> Henry Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 161.

attitude that church life and the “real” world are separate arenas is a notion that is completely foreign to the Bible. The biblical authors did not divide their lives into “spiritual” and “not spiritual,” but rather only considered life. Wisdom literature addresses this imbalance demonstrating what theology looks like in daily life.

Some entire books in the Bible are classified as wisdom literature: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and by some, Song of Solomon. However, wisdom literature and proverbial statements occur within other biblical books as well. When we encounter this type of literature in any biblical book our first recourse is to consider how the author is using the proverb, or wisdom statement, in the context of his literary work. Again, the biblical authors communicate how we should interpret what they are saying if we are attuned to what they are writing.

#### Keys to interpreting wisdom literature:

- 1.) Most proverbs should not be interpreted as promises. Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard note, “Proverbs teach probable truth, not absolute truth.”<sup>32</sup>
- 2.) Wisdom literature describes life in terms of that which is generally true. Most proverbs assume exceptions.
- 3.) As Robert Plummer notes, “proverbs are situational and occasional.”<sup>33</sup> This principle can also be applied to Job and Ecclesiastes, as they must be interpreted in light of their background and thematic elements.
- 4.) Wisdom literature can be universally true when instructing us about the nature and character of God.

#### Group Discussion:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Job 37:1-13

Proverbs 1:7; 10:4; 11:4; 12:1; 13:20; 13:24; 15:1; 16:9; 26:11; 27:6

### **Interpreting Epistles**

First, the term “epistle” refers to the letters of the Bible. While there is correspondence throughout the Bible, our focus will be upon the literary distinctives of epistles in the New Testament. There are 27 books in the New Testament, 21 of them are letters. Additionally, Acts and Revelation contain letters. Therefore, understanding how to interpret epistolary literature is crucial to understanding the New Testament. Furthermore, A simple comparison between our modern letters and the epistles of the biblical text reveal that while similarities exist between our modern letters there is a noticeable difference between the length and styles. So we will look at the structure of New Epistles and then turn to interpretive guidelines for epistles.

#### **Structure of New Testament Epistles:**<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 389.

<sup>33</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 237.

- I. Opening Greeting (Eph 1:1-2; Rom 1:1-7)
- II. Thanksgiving/Prayer (Eph 1:3-23; Rom 1:8-15)
- III. Body
  - a. Theological (Eph 2:1-3:21; Rom 1:16-11:36)
  - b. Ethical (Eph 4:1-6:20; Rom 12:1-15:33)
- IV. Concluding Remarks/Benediction (Eph 6:21-24; Rom 16)

There are a couple considerations to keep in mind when examining the structure of an epistle. First, *do not be too rigid with structure*. We must allow the author to dictate the structure. There are times when this pattern is not divided so clearly. So we must be flexible with these categories. Second, *when the author deviates from structure norms we should ask why*. For example, Paul’s letter to Galatians omits the “thanksgiving/prayer” section, we should ask why?

Now that we have familiarized ourselves with the way that New Testament letters are laid out we can look at some helpful guidelines for interpreting epistles. These guidelines assume the basics we have already covered to this point, so the following tips build upon that foundation.

- 1.) Seek to understand the reason/situation/setting of the letter. One way to do this is to read the letters carefully, trying to discern the situation(s) the author is addressing.
- 2.) Break the letter up into manageable parts.
  - a. Often letters can contain complex arguments, so separating the letter into sections can prove very helpful in interpretation.
  - b. Compare translations to see where the translators have chosen to break up the text. This can be a helpful indicator of when the author is shifting his focus.
- 3.) Follow the author’s argument.

If we employ these interpretive guidelines we will find that the epistles are treasure troves of truth for our hearts and lives. Furthermore, as we carefully study the epistles we gain a greater understanding and love of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Interpreting Parables**

The most common teaching method employed by Jesus was the parable. Throughout church history there has been no shortage of discussion about the interpretation of Jesus’ parables. The dominant method for interpreting the parables was allegory; meaning that characters or elements within the parable correspond to real world biblical characters and elements. However, as people are prone to do, interpreters got carried away with this way of reading the parables thus inventing complex and sometimes absurd interpretations of the parables. Modern interpreters have seen the error in this way of thinking, and so now there are excellent helps in understanding the parables of the Bible.

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<sup>34</sup> For further discussion on structure of New Testament epistles, see Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 279-84, or Stein, *A Basic Guide for Interpreting the Bible*, 169-71.

### **What is a “parable”?**

Many may have heard the common definition for parable as, “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” This is helpful, but is not the best way of thinking about parables. We should be thinking more generally when defining parables. “Parable” covers far more than stories. Robert Stein defines parables as; “a figure of speech in which there is a brief or extended comparison.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, when we are interpreting the parables we should be thinking in terms of comparison. Where we see Jesus using comparison in teaching he is often speaking in parable language, “something is likened to something it is not.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Guidelines for interpreting the Parables:**

- 1.) **What is the one main point?** When we are reading a parable we are seeking the one main point of the parable through the comparison that is being made. Robert Stein lists questions that help us discover the main point:
  - a. Who are the main characters?
  - b. What occurs at the end?
  - c. What occurs in direct discourse?
  - d. Who gets the most space?<sup>37</sup>
- 2.) **Avoid an over-emphasis on the details.** Details in parables are meant to serve the point of comparison, not as intricate keys for understanding. This was the pitfall of allegorical interpretation in the history of the church.
- 3.) **Is the parable explained?** Sometimes the authors record a parables explanation in the following section of his narrative (Matt 13:18-23; 36-43).
- 4.) **Was the parable prompted/introduced?** At times when the gospel writers record the story parables of Jesus, there is a prompt from a real life situation or question (Matt 18:21-22, 21:23-27; Luke 15:1-2, 18:1, 18:9).

The Parables show us how dynamic Jesus was as a teacher. The fact that the parables still pierce us with their honesty and vividness speak to the beauty of God’s Word. Jesus often taught in parables. If we are to understand and hear what our savior says we much apply sound principles to interpreting the parables.

### **The Holy Spirit and Biblical Interpretation**

Our focus to this point has been learning the information and skills necessary for faithful and accurate biblical interpretation. Now we turn to arguably the most important topic in biblical interpretation. In fact, without our discussion in this session the rest of what we covered will be at best ineffective, and at worst a source of hubris in our hearts. As we study and interpret the Bible we need help. Praise the Lord that he has both promised and provided help by sending the Holy Spirit. Robert Plummer reminds us, “While showing

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 22.

<sup>36</sup> Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 137.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-49.

due diligence in reading, studying, researching, and thinking, the Christian ultimately must bow before the divine author of Scripture to confess his sinfulness and seek supernatural aid.”<sup>38</sup> Even as believers we come to the Bible tainted by our sin. Though we may come with good intentions we are limited through the reality of our fallen natures and we are, therefore, in need of help. This is the help the Holy Spirit provides.

So we return, in part, to the topic of our first session. We began by laying the theological foundation for biblical interpretation. In that session we saw the work of the Holy Spirit through the doctrine of Inspiration. In this session we will turn to the ongoing work of the Spirit in bringing understanding to us as we study the Bible, and prepare to teach it to others.

This session will be focused on the work of the Holy Spirit as our guide and helper in biblical interpretation. The goal for our time is to gain a better understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation. To this end we will consider two key ways the Holy Spirit’s works in us as biblical interpreters.

- 1.) The Holy Spirit: Helper and Guide
- 2.) Illumination: the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit

### **The Holy Spirit: Helper and Guide**

The skills and information that we have talked about over the past couple months will help us become better interpreters of the Bible. However, all the study helps we could cover and all the information we could cover will not be enough to make us good interpreters of the Bible. Accurate biblical interpretation occurs through the guidance and work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, this is the promise to all who would seek to proclaim humbly the truth as disciples of Jesus Christ.

John records this truth for us in his gospel, as he recounts the teaching of Jesus about his imminent death, resurrection, ascension and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit (John 14-16). For this first section we will consider specific statements within this discourse, which point us to the Holy Spirit as our guide and teacher in biblical interpretation.

*“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:25-26 ESV)*

First, in 14:26 the Holy Spirit’s work is two-fold. He will “teach you [the disciples] all things” and he will “bring to your [the disciples] remembrance all that I have said to you.” Leon Morris says, “The particular function of the Spirit stressed here is that of teacher. ‘All things’ is comprehensive and probably means ‘all that you will need to

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<sup>38</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 149.

know”<sup>39</sup> As disciples walk through the death and resurrection of their teacher, the Holy Spirit will help them understand the importance of what they are witnessing. The comprehensive teaching of the Holy Spirit does not include, however, *new revelations* but *understanding* of what the disciples were beholding in Jesus. This point is further demonstrated through the second aspect of the Spirit’s work in bringing “remembrance” to the disciples. The Holy Spirit will enable them to remember the life and teaching of Jesus, a point that has direct relevance for the disciples who will be inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the gospel narratives.<sup>40</sup> Biblical interpretation will be possible for the disciples due to the presence of the “Helper” in them.

Later in this discourse Jesus says,

*“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12-15 ESV)*

What Jesus states in 16:12-15 further reveals this work of the Holy Spirit. These two sayings when considered together bear similar elements to one another. In 16:13a the Spirit will guide the disciples “into all the truth,” which is similar to the phrase “teach you all things” in 14:26. Though the terminology is different the ministry is similar in these two sayings. The Holy Spirit will be the instructor of the disciples, and his instruction will lead them into all they need to know. There is completeness to the ministry of the Spirit in the disciples. The disciples will not be in need of any further revelation; the Holy Spirit will give all they will need to faithfully proclaim the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus. Here the Holy Spirit acts to “guide” the disciples “into all truth.” The disciples can rest confidently in the Spirit’s ongoing guidance of their understanding of Jesus, and by extension the Scriptures. The disciples will understand the truth through the guiding work of the Holy Spirit.

So we see that Jesus’ description of the impact the coming of the Holy Spirit is related to how the disciples, and now we can understand and grasp what we read in the Bible. The Holy Spirit will be their helper and guide. They will not be without a teacher in fact they will continue to have God himself as their teacher. Just as Jesus, the Son of God had walked with them and instructed them in the Scriptures, they will now have the Holy Spirit of God to bear witness to them and Help them in their understanding of His revelation. Furthermore, we can see how this is an astounding and wonderful gift from God. To hear the teaching of Jesus the disciples had to be near and with Him (physically present). Now the Spirit would be in them so that wherever they were the Spirit would guide and help them in understanding and applying the Word. This *same grace is given*

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<sup>39</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 583.

<sup>40</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 442.

**to every believer no matter location.** The Holy Spirit is not physically restricted to one place, but invades the globe with his presence.

### **Illumination: the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit**

The word that is most commonly used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation is **illumination**. The Holy Spirit “illuminates” the believer who is studying the Bible seeking the guidance the Spirit brings. This has also been called, in the past, the “internal witness” of the Spirit. Grant Osborne says, “The ‘illumination’ of the interpreter is one aspect of the larger ministry of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to regeneration and daily growth in their Christian life. It is that portion of ‘internal testimony’ that relates to understanding and applying God’s revealed Word.”<sup>41</sup>

Lets consider where we see this in Scripture:

*I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may **give you the Spirit of wisdom** and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts **enlightened**, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might (Ephesians 1:16-19 ESV)*

*The natural person does not accept **the things of the Spirit of God**, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they **are spiritually discerned**. (1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV)*

*And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in **all spiritual wisdom and understanding**, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:9-10 ESV)*

*For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But **when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Corinthians 3:14b-17 ESV)*

We see that the Holy Spirit works in the heart and mind of believers to confirm the truthfulness of God’s Word and to enable understanding. He does this in conjunction with, not apart from, disciplined Bible study. Therefore, we employ the tools of biblical interpretation while trusting the Holy Spirit to guide us in our understanding and application. He does not sprinkle magic Bible study dust on us, but works through our work to confirm and enlighten us in the Scriptures. Illumination is the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit that accompanies our use of sound interpretive principles. When we do

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<sup>41</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 436.

the digging in the Scripture, the Holy Spirit guides us to the treasures in God's Word.

APPENDIX 3

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate the content of training curriculum. This research is being conducted by Michael L. Godfrey for the purpose of gathering data for a ministry project. In this research, you will be reading and evaluating curriculum on the topic of biblical interpretation. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient    2= requires attention    3= sufficient    4= exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The curriculum faithfully adheres to an evangelical understanding of the <i>Inspiration</i> of Scripture.					
The curriculum faithfully adheres to an evangelical understanding of the <i>Inerrancy</i> of Scripture.					
The curriculum faithfully adheres to an evangelical understanding of the <i>Sufficiency</i> of Scripture.					
The curriculum communicates and demonstrates the importance of accurate biblical interpretation.					

The curriculum explains what “metanarrative” means and why this is crucial for biblical interpretation.					
The curriculum teaches the importance of recognizing “themes” in Scripture and the application of these themes to biblical interpretation.					
The curriculum explains the importance of understanding literary genre in Scripture.					
The curriculum illustrates and explains methods for biblical interpretation?					
The curriculum displays and explains the necessary tools for biblical interpretation.					
This curriculum presented in a manner that will benefit and challenge the teachers of FBC Waynesboro.					
The curriculum makes clear the vital importance of ongoing improvement in biblical interpretation?					
The curriculum is “accessible” overall.					

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX 4

STRATEGIC PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a strategic plan. This research is being conducted by Michael L. Godfrey for the purpose of gathering data for a ministry project. In this research, you will be asked to read and evaluate a proposed strategic plan for training Bible study teachers. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Strategic Plan Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2= requires attention 3= sufficient 4= exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The strategic plan represents a beneficial change to the teaching ministry at FBC Waynesboro.					
The steps of the strategic plan are clearly outlined, and stated.					
The steps of the strategic plan unfold in a logical and progressive manner.					
The frequency of this strategic plan beneficial to the Bible study teachers at FBC Waynesboro.					

The frequency of the plan is realistically achievable at FBC Waynesboro.					
The strategic plan represents an improvement to the current plan for training Bible study teachers.					
The strategic plan is consistent with the overall vision and goals of FBC Waynesboro.					
The strategic plan achievable for FBC Waynesboro.					

Additional Comments:

## APPENDIX 5

### STRATEGIC PLAN

The pattern followed for this strategic plan was adapted from an online community toolbox.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Vision**

Our vision is to see the Bible study teachers of First Baptist Church Waynesboro trained in the art and science of biblical interpretation.

#### **Mission**

Our mission for the teaching ministry of First Baptist Church Waynesboro is to equip every Bible study teacher to interpret the Bible faithfully and accurately through providing them with training in the art and science of biblical interpretation.

#### **Goals**

- Current Bible study teachers will be trained utilizing the curriculum in biblical interpretation.
- New Bible study teachers will be trained utilizing the curriculum in biblical interpretation.

#### **Strategies**

The following strategies will be utilized to achieve the stated objectives:

- Deacons, Elders and ministerial staff will pray and actively seek teachers who are passionate to know how to interpret the Bible.
- Create a training manual for teachers with the curriculum developed from this ministry project.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Kansas, community toolbox “Developing a Strategic Plan,” accessed December 11, 2014 <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning/vmosa/main>.

- Offer teacher training bi-annually.
- Require new Bible study teachers to attend a training session.
- Equip those who have been through training to facilitate future training sessions.
- Review the curriculum annually to address changing culture and needs of First Baptist Church Waynesboro, Georgia.

### **Action Plan**

- The ministerial staff will calendar training sessions for twice a year.
- One month prior to the start of training the session leader will promote the upcoming training through e-mail, website announcement, bulletin announcement, social media announcement, and a sign-up in the welcome center.
- Teachers will be trained in biblical interpretation through bi-annual training sessions.
- The elders and staff will review and revise (as needed) the material yearly.

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A TRAINING IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION FOR THE BIBLE STUDY TEACHERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, WAYNESBORO, GEORGIA

Michael Lewis Godfrey, D.Min  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Russell T. Fuller

The purpose of this project is to develop and implement training in biblical interpretation for the Bible study teachers at First Baptist Church, Waynesboro, Georgia. Chapter 1 presents the purpose, goals, ministry context, rationale, definitions, limitations, delimitations and research methodology for this project. Chapter 2 presents the biblical and theological foundations for training in biblical interpretation through the exegesis of Old Testament and New Testament passages. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and practical foundations for training teachers in biblical interpretation through the consideration of biblical theology, hermeneutical principles, membership in the church, and the clarity of Scripture. Chapter 4 gives a detailed presentation of the way in which the project was carried out by laying out the six phases of this project. Chapter 5 examines and presents the results of the project, includes changes I would make, and theological and personal reflections from the execution of this project.

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