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IMPROVING BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION  
AT CORNERSTONE CHURCH IN  
WATERLOO, WISCONSIN

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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 Educational Ministry

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by  
Onwuka Johnson Ugorji  
May 2020

**APPROVAL SHEET**

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WATERLOO, WISCONSIN

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I dedicate this project to all pastors, missionaries, evangelists, professors, and church workers who work relentlessly to study and teach God's Word accurately to their congregations and students.

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## PREFACE

First, my profound gratitude goes to Almighty God for the grace to do the program from the beginning to its conclusion in this great institution, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I am grateful to all that contributed to the completion of the project. Second, a big thank you goes to my excellent professor, doctoral supervisor, and mentor, Danny Bowen. His encouragement, understanding, prayers, and mentoring will always be appreciated. It is of great joy to have him as part of my academic, spiritual, and ministry life. Third, I appreciate all faculty members and non-academic staff of Southern Seminary, including Amy Crider and all the good people in the Writing Center and the Professional Doctoral office. May God bless you and your families richly.

Special thanks to my friends Rick, John, Brent, Matt, Dan, and their families; my expert panel and curriculum and training evaluators Rick, Caleb, Brian, Joe, Aaron, Brad, Bill, and Andy. Also, my profound gratitude goes to Dr. Chris Dolson and Blackhawk Church, Dr. Mark Millman, my pastor Aaron Sturgill, the leadership team, Jeannette DeGrow, and all members of Cornerstone Church Waterloo, Wisconsin. They accepted us as their family, gave us a new home in the US, and supported my education and family financially. Besides, they made the training a huge success through their participation even in the pre-and post-project surveys. Lastly, I thank God for my wife, Faith, and our children, Rick, Benjamin, and Emmanuel, for their patience and immense support to me to this day. May the good Lord bless them richly.

Onwuka Ugorji

Marshall, Wisconsin

May 2020

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Bible is an invaluable asset given to humanity by God. Christians have appreciated it for many centuries because of its usefulness for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living so that the man of God will be completed and equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Puritans typified this appreciation. As J. I. Packer asserts,

To the Puritan, the Bible was in truth the most precious possession that this world affords. His deepest conviction was that reverence for God means reverence for Scripture, and serving God means obeying Scripture. To his mind, therefore, no greater insult could be offered to the Creator than to neglect his written word; and, conversely, there could be no truer act of homage to him than to prize it and pore over it, and then to live out and give out its teaching.<sup>1</sup>

This great book is read by many people who think that “a person does not have to interpret it but to read and do what it says,”<sup>2</sup> while others believe they need to read, interpret, and apply it. The latter category alludes to the thesis of this project, which emphasizes biblical interpretation that is in line with the author’s intent. An interpretation that is not in line with the author’s intent is not biblical but a shared idea. Alas, the proponents (teachers and preachers) of the “shared idea” unknowingly present their messages as biblical interpretations to people. In society, there are many proponents of “shared ideas,” both inside and outside the church. Consequently, their teachings spread heresies, increase the population of heretics, and enhance spiritual nominalism in

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<sup>1</sup>J. I. Parker, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision for the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 98.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 21.

Christendom.

The existence of spiritual nominalism among Christians is worrisome, particularly in studying and teaching the Scriptures biblically. This lukewarm attitude is in contrast to the biblical command to study Scripture in order to present oneself as an approved worker who need not be ashamed of rightly dividing the Word of God (2 Tim 2:15). Notably, the inability to understand Scripture at face value often leads to a lack of interest in reading, studying, or teaching Scripture biblically. In light of that, this project presented a hermeneutical training program to address the lukewarm attitude in reading, studying, and teaching Scripture accurately. This ministry project was intended to significantly ignite Christians' interest in the Scriptures and assist them in studying and biblically interpreting the Scriptures.

### **Context**

This ministry project took place in the context of Cornerstone Church in Waterloo, Wisconsin.<sup>3</sup> In 1972, a small group of believers formed Fellowship Baptist Church. It struggled with low attendance between 1972 and 1990 until the church called Todd Thelen to serve as the Senior Pastor. The commitment of Thelen to his call as the Senior Pastor brought several reforms: a fresh passion to biblical preaching and purposeful leadership, a change in the church's name to Prokopay Baptist Church (in 1992), and the growth of the church both spiritually and numerically with a new sense of the church's vision. Pursuing a biblical, independent, and non-denominational future, Pastor Thelen and the leadership team proposed another name change in 1999: Cornerstone Church of Waterloo, Wisconsin (CCWW). A year later, Thelen resigned after Cornerstone Church was constituted. The church then called Keith Doyle to serve

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<sup>3</sup>The drive to write on biblical interpretation began in Nigeria, where I witnessed the havoc caused by unbiblical interpretation in the lives of naïve and uninformed Christians, the church, and society. The project was intended to be relevant and helpful to the Nigerian church and to Cornerstone Church. For the sake of this ministry project, the context was Cornerstone Church in Waterloo, Wisconsin.

CCWW as the Senior Pastor.

Under the leadership of Doyle during the next ten years, the church continued to grow until Doyle resigned in 2010. During Doyle's tenure, the church built a worship facility. Pastor Aaron Sturgill took over for Doyle as the Elder of Teaching and Preaching after the church's forty-year-anniversary celebration of God's faithfulness. To God's glory, CCWW continues to maintain the heritage of expository preaching and teaching within a Christ-focused ministry and proclaims the gospel of Christ throughout the city, region, and beyond.

CCWW is a Bible-based Christian community, committed to exalting Jesus Christ and fulfilling his expectations for the church as revealed in the Scriptures. Therefore, it seeks to glorify Christ, edify believers, and testify to the lost.<sup>4</sup> In fulfilling this commitment, CCWW holds to Scripture as to how God reveals himself to believers. CCWW believes the Bible to be the inerrant, sufficient, and authoritative Word of God for all of life. Moreover, the Scriptures instruct believers on how they should live in right relationship with God and one another as people created in God's image and for his glory. Church leadership teaches God's Word in a simple and comprehensible manner through the power of the Holy Spirit so that members become doers and not just hearers of God's Word.

Furthermore, every Sunday, church members enjoy a great worship experience in the presence of God with spiritual worship that flows from the heart to the Lord. The services minister to believers and non-believers through the songs, sermon, and every other segment of the service. People worship God in the Spirit and in truth as the only God whom they must love and worship above all else. The genuine worship results in people being fed spiritually and encouraged to live for Christ, some coming to a saving

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<sup>4</sup>Cornerstone Church Waterloo Wisconsin, "A Community Bible Based Ministry," accessed December 9, 2017, [www.cornerstonewi.org](http://www.cornerstonewi.org).

knowledge of Christ, and the regular addition of many souls to the church. Notably, the church understands the theology of the priesthood of all believers. The members grasp the teaching of every believer being gifted by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the body of Christ. Hence, everyone plays a vital role in using his or her spiritual gifts in the development of the church.

CCWW is a mission-minded family church. She embraces the Great Commission to engage the world with the gospel of Christ both nationally and internationally and has missionaries in Africa, Asia, and North America. She encourages, empowers, and expects every member to be personally involved in proclaiming the name of the Lord and what God has done through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Another strength of CCWW is the existence of mature, dynamic, and purposeful leadership. The teaching and preaching elder coordinates and presides over the congregational meetings without exchanges of abusive words, blows, or unnecessarily prolonged arguments on any issue presented for discussion. The meetings begin peacefully and end smoothly to the glory of God. The budget proposal and its presentation to the church are done properly, including the quarterly financial reports of the church. Also, a free flow of information and good communication exists between the leadership team and the members concerning the affairs of the church.

Despite these strengths, there are weaknesses. The chief weakness is the inability of many in the church to interpret Scripture rightly. Currently, the church offers no training program that can take care of this deficiency. The absence of training members to interpret Scripture accurately weakens CCWW. Such training could spark members' interest in studying the Scriptures, cause them to be well informed, and allow them to experience spiritual growth individually and collectively as a church.

### **Rationale**

The project exists as a necessity due to the importance of biblical interpretation

in the life of a Christian, the church, and in view of the society in which we live. Christians are living in a society that is saturated with religious beliefs and activities that are out to attack and discredit the Christian faith and its teachings. Even within Christendom, there are so-called preachers and teachers whose teachings are contrary to the Scriptures; yet, they have a high number of followers. False teachings have gone viral in society. They are peddled in electronic and print media: television, radio, newspapers, internet, shopping malls, churches, fellowship meetings, and even in liquor bars. Consequently, Christians with no knowledge of biblical interpretation conclude that there is no correct interpretation of a scriptural passage but the interpretation a person gives based on his or her understanding of the passage under discussion. James Davies affirms,

When it comes to making claims about what the Bible means, sometimes we hear comments from Christians or non-Christians like the following: “Well, that’s just your interpretation.” “The Bible can be made to say anything you want.” “You can’t really understand the Bible. It is full of contradictions.” “No one can understand the true meaning of *anything anyone* says.” Or, someone sitting in a Bible study might say, “This is what the Bible means to me.”<sup>5</sup>

However, this project exists to combat the wrong views by teaching biblical interpretation. The church’s pulpit ministry is faithful in expounding the Scriptures. Bible-study meetings at various levels are well attended, and a hunger for God’s Word is showcased; yet, there is room to improve members’ ability to interpret the Bible accurately as they engage in Christian ministry. For example, a member argued forcefully that baptism is not compulsory in the life of a Christian; therefore, it should not be an ordinance for the church today. This idea was a holdover from his days in a parachurch organization, and every effort to correct him from Scripture fell on deaf ears.

Second, this project serves as an easy-to-read manual for interpreting the Scriptures accurately. To that extent, it gives foundational tools for biblical interpretation

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<sup>5</sup>James Davies, “Lesson 6: Principles of Bible Interpretation,” Bible.org (blog), November 6, 2013, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-6-principles-biblical-interpretation> (emphasis original).

to laypeople in an easy-to-read format. Hence, laypeople would be spared from spending so much time in reading many incomprehensible theological books for the sole purpose of learning biblical interpretation.

Third, this project dispels the notion that the ability to interpret Scripture lies mainly with those who have a special calling or have passed through theological institutions, such as pastors, missionaries, evangelists, or professors. Thus, the project serves as a handy tool to laypeople in helping them develop a good grasp of the passages in the Bible. It helps laypeople to ensure that they understand the passage well according to the author's intent before applying it. Laypeople should first observe the text, then interpret it, and finally apply it. According to Jason DeRouchie, "Biblical interpretation is not complete until it gives rise to an application through a life of worship."<sup>6</sup>

Fourth, the tools offered in this project were intended to spark and deepen within believers their love and desire for the Scriptures as they understand how to interpret the Bible. Biblical interpretation is a broad framework (i.e., big picture). The framework is the biblical history of redemption. The Bible is one big story of an event, not individual books standing on their own. The particulars (i.e., individual books) fill in the whole, and the whole helps readers understand the particulars. The books are connected to explain the whole of Scripture. Though at least forty authors wrote the Bible over more than 1500 years, it does not mean that it is fragmented or haphazard. The sixty-six books of the Bible intertwine to tell a glorious story of God's creation, the fall and the sinful nature of man, and the provision of God for the redemption of his people through Jesus Christ. God's covenant with humanity is the spine that ties the storyline together.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Jason DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), introduction, para. 4, Kindle.

<sup>7</sup>Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Rose, 2015), 20.

After the disobedience of Adam and Eve, God sets in motion plans to restore what the fall destroys, according to Genesis 3:15. The Bible tells one story of the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 on the cross to reconcile people to God. The reconciliation happens in the lives of those who have a relationship with Christ as their Lord and Savior. The biblical storyline ends with Christ's victory over evil on earth and the restoration of the garden of Eden with the new heavens and new earth. God points to the redemption of humanity through Jesus from Genesis to Revelation. An understanding of Scripture's broad framework and teachings enhances the joy, knowledge, and application of the Scriptures, draw a person closer to God, and propel him or her to teach others God's Word.

Fifth, this project serves as a training tool for church members, including the leaders, since the elected leaders are drawn from church membership. Hence, this project was utilized for training laypeople in biblical interpretation. It presents a handy tool that emphasizes the need for readers to allow the text to speak for itself, not manipulating it to fit one's preconceived message. When a text fits into a preconceived message, it is an idea that is shared, not the Word of God that is proclaimed. The understanding of the tool enhances the reading and comprehension of Scripture as well as people's teaching it to others. This project, therefore, was intended to increase disciple-making within and without the church, make pastoral work easier for the leadership team, and reduce the influence of false teachers in spreading heresies in society (Matt 28:19-20).

Sixth, this project promotes the place of the Holy Spirit and his role in using the ability of an individual to interpret Scripture accurately. The excellent and enabling work of the Holy Spirit on biblical interpretation cannot be undermined since he is behind the illumination of human hearts to understand Scripture and embrace Christ as a Savior (Acts 8:26-35). The Holy Spirit illuminates a person's mind to understand the Scriptures while they are reading it and to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading. In his discussion with the Jewish religious leaders in this statement Jesus affirms that

the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life (John 5:38-40)

Jewish theologians, the world-class experts in interpreting the Bible, missed the point about Christ being the Messiah whom they had been expecting because the ministry of the Holy Spirit was absent from their lives.<sup>8</sup> The absence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life makes it difficult for him or her to understand the things of God, including having the ability to interpret the Scriptures accurately. Timothy Paul Jones says that reading the Bible without the Holy Spirit is like reading a map in a cave without a source of light; the map may be right in front of the person, but he or she will not figure out which way to go.<sup>9</sup> When a believer reads the Scripture, the Holy Spirit reveals the meaning of the Word and uses it to reshape his or her life.

However, the presence of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life does not negate the need to learn the principles of biblical interpretation. In addition, this project was intended to strengthen the role of the ministers of the gospel to a society that celebrates heretics and false teachings. The responsibility of ministers is to teach the truth through biblical interpretation and to live it, not to engage in worthless arguments with false teachers for the sake of wooing them back to God (2 Tim 2:14-15). Moreover, this project was intended to raise the consciousness of believers to the realization that it is their responsibility to have the ability to interpret the Scripture rightly, which enables them to discern the truth from falsehood, avoid being tossed by waves of false doctrines, and grow to maturity (Heb 5:11-14).

Lastly, this project teaches how interpretation connects to the canonization of the Bible, the basic principles of interpreting Scripture, and the method of interpreting

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<sup>8</sup>Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 19.

<sup>9</sup>Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 19.

narrative in Old Testament and New Testament literature. Given the nature of the Bible, it is a necessity to know the rules that are deployed in biblical interpretation since the Bible was written by people from different backgrounds, in different languages, to people with different cultures and histories that lived at different times. Therefore, the reader needs to know the literary context of the writings, the historical-cultural background, the meaning of the words used to convey thoughts at their time, the grammatical relationship of the words in each sentence they rendered in a conversation and in writing in order to give an accurate interpretation of Scripture. Moreover, biblical interpretation involves knowing the different genres in the Bible and how to interpret them correctly because the principle of interpreting a particular genre differs from others. For example, the principles of interpreting narratives are not the same as that of poetry, prophecies, or apocalyptic literature. This project is essential to Christians, the church, and society because it teaches biblical interpretation, serves as an easy to read manual for biblical interpretation, training tools for church members, including leaders. It sparks and deepens believers' love for the Scripture, dispels the notion that biblical interpretation is for those that have special calling, and promotes the place of the Holy Spirit in using the ability (gift) of an individual to interpret Scripture correctly.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to improve the ability of select adult members of CCWW to interpret the Bible accurately.

### **Goals**

The following goals reflect the steps that were necessary to improve the adult members' ability to interpret the Bible accurately:

1. The first goal was to assess the current ability of select adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately.
2. The second goal was to develop a curriculum to train select adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately.

3. The third goal was to improve the ability of select adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately.

### **Research Methodology**

The first goal was to assess the current ability of select adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture rightly. This goal was accomplished by administering a pre-project survey used to measure ten to fifteen selected adult members' current ability to interpret Scripture correctly (see appendix 1). The goal was considered successful when the adult members took the pre-project survey, which graded for accuracy of interpretive ability.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum to train selected adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. This curriculum was designed using several hermeneutics books and other relevant books (see appendix 3). The goal was measured by the teaching pastor and the leadership team of CCWW's using the rubric to evaluate the teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum (see appendix 4). This goal was considered successfully completed when a minimum of 85 percent of all the rubric-evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the minimum requirement was not achieved, the curriculum was reviewed to address the weaknesses identified by the evaluation.

The third goal was to improve the ability of select adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. The goal was measured by administering the post-project survey to the same members who completed the pre-project survey (see appendix 2) and then comparing the results using a *t*-test (see appendix 5). The goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-project surveys. The expert panel reviewed the survey instruments for the pre- and post-project surveys.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

In this project, the definitions of the following key terms were used:

*Exegesis.* Mikeal C. Parsons asserts that exegesis is the process whereby interpreters infer meaning(s) from biblical texts within their historical context.<sup>10</sup>

*Biblical hermeneutics.* This project took into consideration practical, not philosophical, hermeneutics. Berkeley Mickelsen defines hermeneutics as

the science and art of biblical interpretation, is of primary concern to evangelicals because of their commitment to the inerrancy and authority of the Bible. The task of Bible interpreters is to seek to ascertain the meaning of Bible passages to their original hearers and readers and to determine how that meaning relates to readers today<sup>11</sup>

*Nominalism.* “Nominalism” is a curse to the church. According to Roger Hedlund, it means having the name of Christian without the power and life of Christ.<sup>12</sup> It depicts professing Christ as one’s Lord and Savior but living a life contradictory to such a profession. In other words, it is faith without works.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the surveys was dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their ability to interpret Scripture accurately. To mitigate this limitation, respondents were assured that their answers remain anonymous. Second, the inconsistency of the participants in attending the training could have limited the effectiveness of the training. Hence, if the participants did not attend all of the training sessions, it would be difficult to measure how beneficial the training had been to them. To mitigate this limitation, each week of the teaching sessions was arranged to fit into participants’ schedules.

There were three delimitations placed on this ministry project. First, the project

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<sup>10</sup>Mikeal Parsons, “Making Sense of What We Read: The Place of Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Southwestern Baptist Journal of Theology* 35, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 13.

<sup>11</sup>Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 5.

<sup>12</sup>Roger Hedlund, *A Biblical Theology: The Mission of the Church in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 90.

addressed practical hermeneutics, not the philosophy of hermeneutics. Practical hermeneutics focuses purely on the process of understanding and interpreting Scripture rightly for the spiritual growth of individual Christians and the church of Christ. Second, the hermeneutical training discussed a specific genre (narrative) and certain methods of interpreting it both in Old Testament and New Testament literature. Third, the project was confined to a twenty-week timeframe, which gave adequate time to prepare and teach the six-week training series and conduct the post-project survey<sup>13</sup> after the sessions were completed.

### **Conclusion**

Every Christian has the responsibility to study Scripture to know what it teaches as well as to be able to teach others. The Bible commands believers to contend for the faith entrusted to them and to stand firm in the faith in light of the spread of false teachers and teachings prominent in society (Jude 3). Christians can neither contend for the faith nor stand firm in the faith if they do not study to know and interpret the Scriptures rightly. Hence, the congregation of CCWW is not exempted from this responsibility, and their growth in this area will benefit the body of Christ. Chapter 2 of this project outlines the biblical and theological foundations for rightly interpreting Scripture for the spiritual growth of the church of Christ.

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<sup>13</sup>The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Ethics Committee approved the survey instruments prior to its usage in this research project.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR ACCURATE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Accurate biblical interpretation is essential in the life of every believer, the church, and Christendom due to the devastating consequences on the church of Christ when it is missing. The absence of accurate biblical interpretation destroys the church, the preacher or teacher's life, and their reputation.<sup>1</sup> Hence, Paul warned Christians in his letter to Timothy (1 Tim 4:16) to think carefully about what they teach and how they live because of the effect not only on them but also on others, especially those within society. The art of interpreting the Scriptures accurately in clear terms must be one of the goals of every growing believer despite the difficult nature of the Bible. The local church can and

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<sup>1</sup>The inaccurate preaching and teaching of the Scripture has destroyed preachers and the church. For example, Wale Odunsi presents an interview on the faceoff between Tunde Bakare, the founder of Latter Rain Assembly in Nigeria and the General Overseer of Winner's Chapel, and David Oyedepo. A standoff ensued due to wrong interpretation of the scriptural concept of anointing oil and the Holy Spirit in the book written by Oyedepo. According to the book, anointing oil is not a symbol of the Holy Spirit; it is the life of God in a bottle. As a result of the heresy that the book contains, Bakare tore his own copy of the book. Wale Odunsi quotes Bakare as saying, "I saw errors in that book because he said the anointing oil is not a symbol of the Holy Spirit, that it is the life of God in a bottle. How can you write that and I would let it pass. No! If the anointing oil is the Holy Spirit, then Jesus is a lamb walking on four legs." Wale Odunsi, "I Tore Oyedepo's Book Because He Said Anointing Oil is God's Life in a Bottle – Tunde Bakare," *DailyPost Nigeria*, September 7, 2014, <http://dailypost.ng/2014/09/07/tore-oyedepos-book-said-anointing-oil-gods-life-bottle-tunde-bakare>.

Also, the destructive effect of wrong interpretation of Scripture on the preacher and church was highlighted. In the words of C. K. Okeke, "Nigerian Christians can't think any more on how to create and build wealth but how to manipulate God to rain dollars on them. Today, the teaching in the church that wealth and material blessings are based on one's faith is a travesty. It is the kind of teaching and preaching that keeps people in bondage and spiritual blindness. Today's church is spiritually blind." C. K. Ekeke and Debra J. Mumford, "Prosperity Gospel and 419 in the Church – Part 2," Sahara Reporters, November 14, 2012, [saharareporters.com/2012/11/14/prosperity-gospel-and-419-church---part-2-rev-c-k-ekeke-and-prof-debra-j-mumford](http://saharareporters.com/2012/11/14/prosperity-gospel-and-419-church---part-2-rev-c-k-ekeke-and-prof-debra-j-mumford).

Another example of the destructive effect of an inaccurate interpretation of Scripture on the preacher and the church is written by Micheal Mukwuzi and Blessing Ogunsu. The report is about Chris Oyakhilome's teachings and how they ruined many of his followers' lives and careers and tainted his reputation, too. Two of his followers, Lawrence Agada and Gbenga Kehinde, are in a police net because they stole companies' money to sow seed in the church. Sahara Reporters, "A Pulpit Tycoon-Chris Oyakhilome's Business Empire," February 13, 2008, <http://saharareporters.com/2008/02/13/pulpit-tycoon-chris-oyakhilomes-business-empire>.

must teach the biblical understanding of the Scriptures even though it is difficult. The difficulty in understanding Scripture is acknowledged based on the time devoted to preparation, the preaching and teaching of God’s Word, and the training of theological students in Bible colleges, seminaries, and universities on the art of biblical interpretation. Most importantly, God gave the Holy Spirit and his Word—the revelation of his will—to have it understood by people. Understanding God’s Word begins with believing that God’s Word is true; consistently reading, studying, and researching challenging passages; and obeying all the commands given therein.<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Spirit effectively empowers people to interpret Scripture accurately using their abilities (Acts 8:26-35). However, Christians have the responsibility to invest their time and energy in studying Scripture and learning the principles and methods of accurate interpretation (2 Tim 2:15). Importantly, every minister of the gospel has the duty of being steadfast in interpreting Scripture accurately because of the overwhelming activities of heretics and their followers in this society (2 Tim 2:2, 14). In addition to interpreting the Scriptures accurately, ministers must live lives that correspond with their teachings, and they must avoid engaging in arguments that bring no good to the church in order to win heretics and their followers back to Christ in gentleness, humility, and loving-kindness (2 Tim 2:23-25). Above all, ministers must teach the church the foundational principles and methods of interpreting Scriptures accurately.

### **The Holy Spirit and Bible Interpretation (Acts 8:26-35)**

Luke presents the role of the Holy Spirit in people’s using their ability to interpret Scripture accurately to spread the gospel and edify the church. Luke highlights the activities of the apostles in interpreting Scripture correctly while teaching and

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15. <sup>2</sup>Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992),

preaching the gospel of Christ in a persecuted society, even after the death of Stephen (Acts 8:28). Christ instructed his disciples to flee from places of persecution (Matt 10:23). Therefore, following the persecution in Jerusalem, the apostles scattered and continued to interpret the Scriptures while teaching and preaching the gospel accurately.

Luke documents one such occasion as he writes of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:25-35). The documented evangelistic events throughout Acts reveal the presence of the Holy Spirit and his impartation in the life of Christ's disciples in fulfillment of Jesus's promise prior to his ascension into heaven. In parting, Jesus told his disciples, "And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).<sup>3</sup> He also said to them, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit empowers Christians to be Christ's witnesses in every part of the earth. Luke, a Greek physician, witnessed this enabling power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the apostles during evangelistic outreaches. Luke wrote the book of Acts to his dear friend Theophilus, to assure him of the veracity of all he had been taught in order to ground his faith in the truth of the gospel (Acts 1:1; see also Luke 1:1-4).<sup>4</sup>

Acts 8:26-35 reads,

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb

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<sup>3</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

<sup>4</sup>Johannes Munck and William Albright, *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), xvi.

before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

The account of Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian began with the ministration of an angel. An angel instructed Philip to go to the desert south of Gaza from Jerusalem. Luke does not mention Philip’s original location prior to going to the desert road south of Gaza from Jerusalem. However, Luke points out that Philip’s actions in this mission were supernaturally guided.<sup>5</sup>

Philip obeyed the instruction from the angel and moved to the road, where an Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot was headed back home after worshipping at Jerusalem. Luke describes the Eunuch as a significant man in the life of Queen Candace and the country. The eunuch held the position of a treasurer (finance minister) of the Ethiopian queen.

The Holy Spirit told Philip to go close to the eunuch’s chariot. Philip ran close to the chariot and heard the eunuch reading aloud—but not understanding—the book of Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The eunuch responded, “How will I understand if there is no one to guide me.” According to William Larkin, “Luke consistently tells us that reading and understanding scripture is not the same thing, especially for those who do not have the hermeneutical key (Luke 13:27; compare Luke 6:3; 10: 26). Correct spiritual understanding is a gift (8:10; 10:22). The Eunuch admits his need.”<sup>6</sup>

Participating in church services and other Christian meetings and reading the

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<sup>5</sup>Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 310.

<sup>6</sup>William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 133.

Bible regularly are great disciplines. Still, they will not guide one to interpret Scripture accurately unless the person enjoys the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit as guardian and teacher played out clearly in the life of the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch could not understand the passage—even though he participated in temple worship in Jerusalem—until he was guided because he had no relationship with Jesus Christ. John asserts, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). The absence of the Holy Spirit in someone’s life makes it impossible for one to understand the things of God and its application to one’s life. According to Timothy Paul Jones, “Unless the Spirit is at work within us, we may hear the words of the Scripture, we will never understand Scripture rightly or apply the message in our lives (James 1:22-2:26).”<sup>7</sup>

The apostle Paul adds, “Now the natural man doesn’t receive the things of God’s Spirit for they are foolishness to him, and he can’t know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). Further, he says, “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a believer after conversion comes first, followed by one’s having the ability to interpret Scripture accurately.

In the following statement, Paul teaches the church that the Holy Spirit reveals God’s mind to Christians and enables them to teach others:

These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Cor 2:10-13)

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<sup>7</sup>Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Rose, 2015), 19.

Also, God gives spiritual gifts to the church, which the Holy Spirit uses through believers for the edification of the church. The spiritual gifts include teaching, prophecy, leadership, evangelists, and the like (Rom 12:9; Eph 4:11). The Holy Spirit uses an individual's ability to teach others (a spiritual gift) to interpret the Scriptures accurately to everyone.

Then, learning the principles of biblical interpretation either under an instructor in the church or at a theological institution ensues. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in one's life should not be an excuse to avoid learning how to handle God's Word accurately.<sup>8</sup>

The eunuch invited Philip to come into the chariot to explain to him the prophet's meaning of Isaiah's statement: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he, not his mouth: In his humiliation, his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth" (Acts 8:32-33; see also Isa 53:7-8). God used Philip as a guide to explain the passage to the eunuch. Darrell Bock explains the meaning of the Greek word ὀδηγέω (*hodēgeō*; "to guide") thus:

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<sup>8</sup>According to Femi Adeleye, many pastors who are in the ministry to enrich themselves materially are always quick to project the philosophy of having the Holy Spirit's presence as the greatest teacher in terms of gospel presentation. As such, they have no need of rigorous theological education on handling God's Word. Evidently, it plays out on the nature of print and electronic media ministrations they present as God's messages to people. Sadly, there are several "pastors," "evangelists," and "missionaries" who handle God's Word wrongly.

Femi mentions John Praise of Dominion Chapel and David Oyedepo of Winners Chapel (in Nigeria) as examples of pastors who handled God's Word wrongly. Femi writes that John Praise, who refers to his headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria, as God's headquarters, once preached on "Developing a Posture of Wealth Mentality." Referring to Lazarus and the rich man, Praise asked, "Why was Lazarus at Abraham's bosom?" His answer was "Lazarus had such a poor mentality of himself, a poverty mentality, such that when he got to heaven the gold streets made him afraid. He could not live alone in his own mansion so Abraham had to bring him on his lap to give him orientation about wealth." To avoid that, Christians have to learn to rebuke the spirit of poverty and confess positively. Femi Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel* (Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive, 2011), 53.

Also, David Oyedepo also uses Scripture to back his emphasis on material prosperity. In the introduction in his book *Covenant Wealth*, he writes, "It is important to know that God is interested in the comfort of people. He is excited when they prosper. He is happy when they are comfortable. . . . Wealth speaks of comfort. It speaks of fulfillment, and God desires your comfort above everything else." He then quotes the verse commonly used to back prosperity: "I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as they soul prospereth (3 John 2)." Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, 54.

“Hodēgeō”—guide—refers in everyday usage to someone guiding someone to another person such as guiding a blind person, the guidance Moses or God gave the Jews, or being led into wisdom. Philip serves as an interpretive guide to God’s wisdom both to scripture and to God’s plan in Jesus. He fulfills the mission to which God has called this member of the church.<sup>9</sup>

The Holy Spirit uses preachers, teachers, evangelists, and missionaries—including laypeople—to interpret Scripture rightly in order to educate people and win souls for Christ. Philip, a deacon-turned-evangelist, served as the interpreter and spirit-filled teacher whom God provided for the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch’s understanding of Isaiah 53:7-8—about the Messiah’s humiliation, torture, death, and resurrection for the salvation of humanity—led him to believe in Jesus Christ and be baptized. As a result, the Ethiopian went home rejoicing as a child of God, no longer an outsider before God Almighty. In the words of Gary Nebeker, “Thus the roles of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics are: 1) aiding our understanding of who Christ is and 2) affecting our transformation into Christ’s image. The work of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics involves both the former and the latter-not one to the exclusion of the other.”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, biblical interpretation through the power of the Holy Spirit points to Christ, the incarnate Son of God, who paid the penalty of humans’ sins on the cross to reconcile mankind with God. Also, accurate Spirit-led biblical interpretation brings positive changes in one’s life. The conversion of the eunuch and his request to be baptized are evidence that he was pointed to Christ, to whom the Isaiah passage refers. Nebeker affirms this point:

Biblical interpretation is Christ-Centric—that’s Christ-centered. It points to Christ who is the truth personified. In line with John’s account, he is the way, the truth and life. Truth is personal and relational, not only cognitive conviction or belief about God. Since belief in Christ is personal decision to have relationship with God as a child of God which ultimately brings transformation in the life of a person. Therefore to understand the gospel rightly means understanding Christ rightly and

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<sup>9</sup>Darrell Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 342-43.

<sup>10</sup>Gary Nebeker, “The Holy Spirit, Hermeneutics, and Transformation: From Present to Future Glory,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27, no. 1 (January 2003): 50.

understanding Christ rightly means understanding the truth.<sup>11</sup>

According to Luke’s account, accurate interpretation of the scriptural passage led to the eunuch’s conversion and baptism. Accurate interpretation of the gospel should be actualized to win souls for Christ and for the edification of the church, not for personal or corporate gain, which is the order of the day in modern society. According to Femi Adeleye,

The shift from a Christocentric gospel to one that appeals more to the satisfaction of our immediate appetites has produced what has been described as “adulterated” or “fraudulent” Christianity. One pastor bluntly calls it the Gospel of greed. It is a gospel that tends to make life as here on earth as convenient as possible without preparing people for eternity.<sup>12</sup>

Incorrect biblical interpretations possibly present Christianity and faithful believers in a bad light before the world. Hence, believers, including pastors, teachers, evangelists, and missionaries, should interpret the Scriptures like Philip—in obedience to the Holy Spirit, which may result in the salvation of souls.

### **The Preacher and Biblical Interpretation (2 Tim 2:14-15)**

In addition to the role of the Holy Spirit in using one’s ability to interpret Scripture accurately, pastors must teach congregants the principles of biblical interpretation as well as teach the Scriptures correctly. Paul charged Timothy to prove himself to be a worthy servant of God by interpreting the Scriptures accurately: “Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:14-15). Second Timothy consists of warnings against false teachers.<sup>13</sup> While in

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<sup>11</sup>Nebeker, “The Holy Spirit, Hermeneutics, and Transformation,” 50.

<sup>12</sup>Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, 3.

<sup>13</sup>Luke Johnson, *The Writing of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 439.

prison, Paul wrote his second epistle to Timothy, his spiritual son. Many theologians view the letter as Paul's "farewell discourse" to Timothy.<sup>14</sup> In the correspondence, Paul reminds Timothy of what he taught him and exhorts him to hold fast to it in the face of opposition. Paul's relationship with Timothy was intimate in terms of their father-son relationship. The words of Paul in his letters to various churches portray such relationality (see, e.g., 1 Cor 4:16-17; 16:10-11; Phil 2:19-23; 1 Thess 3:2). In addition to their relationship, Timothy played essential roles in the life and ministry of Paul. Luke Johnson describes it in this manner:

We have repeatedly seen Timothy's prominence within the Pauline mission: co-sponsor of five letters (see 2 Cor 1:1; Phl 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:1), he was Paul's go-between with the Macedonian churches (see Act 18:5; 19:22) of Thessalonica (1 Th 3:2) and Philippi (Phl 2:19), as well as with the Corinthians (Rom 16:21). According to 1 Timothy 1:3, he played the same role for the Ephesian church. In Acts 16:1, he is said to have a Greek father, which would make it likely that he had some Greek education as well. He is the beloved (2 Tim 1:2) or genuine child (1 Tim 1:2). He is a "servant of God" (doulos; 2 Tim 2:24; cf same in Phl 1:1 and diakonos in 1 Th 3:2). He is to "extend" others (1 Tim 6:2; 2 Tim 4:2), and to "remind" churches of Paul's teaching (2 Tim 2:14), providing them an example of it (1 Tim 4:12) even as he himself has an example to follow in Paul (2 Tim 1:13).<sup>15</sup>

Timothy, a pastor in Ephesus, received a letter (i.e., 2 Tim) concerning the activities of false teachers that were parading falsehoods in the name of the Lord and how to relate with them. In 2:14, Paul instructs Timothy to remind the Ephesian church of what he taught them—that is, the same message he handed to him (2:2). The apostle Paul admonishes Timothy to emulate him as his mentor and model. He should imitate Paul's lifestyle and ministry pattern by living out a life that is contrary to that of the false teachers of his time. The lifestyle and activities of the heretics should not be associated with him; instead, Timothy should stand firm in the faith, his doctrine, and his teaching and should endure opposition and persecution like Paul. Besides, the success of the false

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<sup>14</sup>Johnson, *The Writing of the New Testament*, 452.

<sup>15</sup>Johnson, *The Writing of the New Testament*, 431-32.

teachers in attracting many followers should not push him to tell lies at any time. Timothy should be the ideal teacher who preaches the truth in season and out of season, convinces, rebukes, exhorts, and is unfailing in patience and teaching (4:2).

The passage in consideration enumerates the false teachers' methods, goal, and doctrine. The false teachers' presentation methods are harsh arguments, quarrels, their godless character, and the deception of women burdened with sin. Their goal is to destroy people's lives, split the church apart, and gain the approval of people. Their doctrine is that the resurrection of the saints has already taken place. According to Eric Titus, "The specific teaching of the heretical teachers was that resurrection had taken place. The resurrection of the saints was key to Christian faith to the early church, so it attracted great attention to both the false teachers and orthodox."<sup>16</sup> In certainty, no value is derived from false teachers' activities since they ruin people's lives, like those of Hymenaeus and Philetus, and contradict the truth of the gospel (2 Tim 2:17-18). In the words of Philip Towner, their false teaching is "utterly unhealthy, unsound, destroying wholeness, [and] in contrast to the health-producing gospel (see 1 Tim 1:10)."<sup>17</sup> Painfully, believers not well-grounded in the faith were influenced by the "cleverness of word"<sup>18</sup> of the false teachers to accept the doctrine that ruins their faith. Despite the devastating nature of false teaching spreading like an infection ("gangrene"; see 2 Tim 2:17), which is hard to stop and deadly, the foundation of the Lord stands firm and cannot be defeated.

Paul presents several approaches to Timothy in handling the situation: First, Timothy should not get involved in an argument of words. Second, he should not be part

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<sup>16</sup>Eric Titus, *The Second Letter of Paul to Timothy*, in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible: Introduction and Commentary for Each Book of the Bible Including Apocrypha with General Articles*, ed. Charles Laymon (Marshall, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 890.

<sup>17</sup>Philip Towner, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 183.

<sup>18</sup>Towner, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 181.

of those who participate in godless chatter. Third, he should not get busy in explaining the intricacies of the content of the doctrinal differences.

Fourth, Timothy should be diligent, hasty, and urgent to handle doctrinal controversy rightly because accurate interpretation of the Scriptures is vital in forming the beliefs and practices of a church and its spiritual growth. The belief and practices are rooted in the scriptural interpretations accepted by the congregation. A wrong interpretation of Scripture will automatically lead to erroneous doctrinal beliefs, practices, and lifestyles. False doctrinal beliefs and practices cannot be associated with the Scriptures. As Adeleye affirms,

Therefore, when the word of God is twisted or manipulated to accommodate various forms of subjective interests, it ceases to be “the power of God that brings salvation” (Rom 1:16). It is only the truth of God as God intends it to be interpreted that remains the power of God that brings salvation. Jesus did not stop at asking the expert in the law what is written in the law. He also asked “How do you read it? (Lk 10:26)<sup>19</sup>

Paul consistently emphasizes the importance of teaching and preaching the gospel truth in the pastorate; hence, he warns his spiritual sons, Timothy and Titus, regarding it:

1. “This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth” (Titus 1:14).
2. “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Titus 2:15).
3. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13).
4. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:1-2).

Timothy and Titus must remain faithful to the teachings of the gospel, both in speech and

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<sup>19</sup> Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, 9.

deeds. Thus, God's approval is earned.

Fifth, Timothy should not be ashamed of rightly dividing the word of truth.

Towner examines three possible meanings of the term "rightly divide" while quoting Barret, Calvin, and Barclay:

1) Cutting a stone to fit into a building (Barret 1963); 2) a father distributing food at meal (Calvin); and 3) cutting a road through the countryside (Barclay 1975; Scott 1973). Also Paul uses the metaphor in this context in a broad idea of accurate interpretation and appropriate use of the scripture is at least clear. For Timothy this meant to provide responsible interpretation of the word of truth in the midst of controversy and quarrels about "new-fangled" teaching (see 1 Tim 1:4).<sup>20</sup>

Towner goes on to suggest that the responsible interpretation of Scripture consists of the following:

The instruction applies to interpretation of the Bible today too, but in consideration of the tremendous historical, cultural and social distance that separate us from the Christians of the first Century and the Israelites of the Old Testament, our task is more complicated. Our "correct handling" of the biblical text includes first understanding of the original message in the original context which requires knowledge of the biblical languages and the historical-cultural – social setting that the author addressed (or depending on those who have such knowledge). But the task is not finished until the original message has been brought across the Centuries and applied freshly in our own situations. This is not the task of a single person but to be carried out in the church in dependence on the Holy Spirit and with a view to the understanding of the church down through the ages and in our present time.<sup>21</sup>

In the same vein, Jude relayed the same message to the Christians of his day: "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, encourages believers to stand against heresy and apostasy and contend for the faith by interpreting the Scripture accurately, not adding on or subtracting from the complete Scripture given to the saints. The right approach in handling false teaching is to teach the truth and live a life that goes with it because together they save God's servant and his listeners as well as glorify God

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<sup>20</sup>Towner, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 182.

<sup>21</sup>Towner, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 182.

(1 Tim 4:16). In the words of Walter Liefeld, “This concern over how to handle damaging controversies fits in with Paul’s insistence on the Lord’s servants maintaining purity of life consistent with their purity of doctrine. In turn, all this combines to praise God’s name and uphold his reputation.”<sup>22</sup> The accurate interpretation of the Scripture without the purity of life that supports it brings shame to the workman (i.e., pastor) who is supposed to stand approved before God, his people, and society. The best manner to counter wrong doctrine is by teaching, preaching, and living out the true faith daily.

Sixth, Timothy should not insult heretics, engage them in an argument, or disassociate himself from them; instead, he should be patient, kind, gentle, and loving to them—in addition to living out what he teaches. Possibly, God can save them from the devil’s trap as they come to their senses and repent (2 Tim 2:25-26). Paul’s exhortations to Timothy are relevant and needful for present-day ministry given the prominence of false teachers, their activities, and the havoc they cause in modern Christendom. False teachers today draw many followers because they present their followers and others with what they want to hear (2 Tim 4:15). Sadly, many churches that tend to preach and teach the truth of the gospel are not growing numerically. Paul’s message to pastors is to hold firm to the truth and to not emulate false teachers. The Holy Spirit uses one’s ability to interpret Scripture; the pastor needs to be steadfast in preaching and teaching the Scriptures accurately, including teaching the principles of biblical interpretation to Christians in the local church.

### **Christians and Biblical Interpretation (Heb 5:11-14)**

Every Christian has the responsibility to learn the art of biblical interpretation. The writer of Hebrews supports the need for believers to be skillful in the accurate

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<sup>22</sup>Walter Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 263.

interpretation of the Scriptures:

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Heb 5:11-14)

This passage emphasizes the need to grow into maturity spiritually concerning the Word of God and to become skillful in its use—because lack of spiritual growth in the life of a Christian is a caricature of Christianity. According to James Drapers, “One of the greatest tragedies in human history in general, and in Christendom in particular, is the lack of spiritual growth and development among Christians. Those who received the Word of God but have not understood its depths, it demands, or its demonstration in their lives are a tragic caricature of Christians.”<sup>23</sup>

The book of Hebrews points out the sufficiency and superiority of the new covenant in Christ over the old covenant in Judaism. Glaringly, throughout the book, there are comparisons of the superiority of the new faith in Christ over Judaism, of the superiority of the new priesthood (Melchizedek) over the old one (Aaron), of the new sacrifice (Christ’s death) over the old ones (animal sacrifices), and more. The book was written to believers who were contemplating going back to Judaism as a result of their spiritual immaturity due to their lack of understanding of biblical truth, criticism, and even persecution. The author is unknown, though several people have been suggested, including Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Philip, and Priscilla. Apparently, the author knows Timothy (Heb 13:23).<sup>24</sup>

In Hebrews 5:11-14, the author presents one of the tragedies in the Christian

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<sup>23</sup>James Draper, *Hebrews: The Life That Pleases God* (Wheaton, IL: Coverdale House, 1976), 137.

<sup>24</sup>John MacArthur, *Hebrews, MacArthur New Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), xi.

faith, which is the absence of spiritual growth in the lives of Christians toward maturity. This reality is also known as spiritual lukewarmness, which is the coolness of one's spirituality and one's lack of hunger for God's Word. In churches, people "have a form of godliness but [deny] its power" (2 Tim 3:5). Many people have accepted Christ into their life but experience no spiritual growth month- after- month or year- after- year. Believers are actively involved in church activities and programs, yet they are not experiencing growth in their walk with God. They remain babies in Christ despite their years spiritually because they are busy chasing mundane things instead of what enhances their spiritual growth.

Obviously, when growth in the life of a child ceases, such stagnation makes room for worry and eventually sadness, particularly in those who experience it. A lack of growth and development means that something is wrong with the child's system, and he or she needs urgent medical attention. Similarly, if people give their life to Christ, then spiritual growth is expected in their life. When that is not happening, it gives great concern to the church. Donald Guthrie adds, "The propagating of an understanding of the Christian message in fully-developed form depends on those who are mature instructing those who are immature. It is a dangerous position, therefore in any community, if its potential teachers are themselves at the immature stage."<sup>25</sup> Guthrie's words capture the concern that the writer of Hebrews expresses in 5:11-14.

The writer interrupts his discussion on the priesthood of Christ—which he later continues in chapter 7—to express disappointment over his difficulty in explaining the priesthood of Christ because of his recipients' inability to understand it due to their sluggishness. They ought to have been in a position of teaching people, but they need to be taught the ABCs of Christianity despite their having many years in the faith. The

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<sup>25</sup>Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press UK, 2009), 134.

writer declares them infants in the Lord because they drank milk instead of solid food since anyone not skilled in the message of righteousness is still a spiritual infant. Indisputably, solid food is for those skillful in differentiating wrong from right.

The writer of Hebrews longs for Christians to become mature in their understanding and their use of the entire message of God's healing, restoration, and saving justice in the expression of their faith. The writer wants them to understand the whole message of the Scripture; to be able to handle the Word with respect to their own lives, communities, and the broader world; and to see how different parts of God's revelation fit together, apply to different situations, and have the power to transform lives and circumstances.<sup>26</sup> A good understanding of the exceptional nature of the Scriptures is important in the spiritual life of every Christian. The Word of God is in-depth in nature. Therefore, it should not be read casually. The reason many Christians cannot read the Scriptures with excitement and understanding is that they read it carelessly. The excitement that goes with reading and understanding profound biblical truths is not revealed to lazy Christians. Scripture demands continuous attention in studying it to grasp the message therein.

Similarly, God emphasized the importance of the diligent study of the Scriptures in his charges to Joshua: "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" (Josh 1:8). The ability to do biblical interpretation is not achieved only by learning the principles of biblical interpretation; it also involves consistency in spending quality time to study and meditate on God's Word and to practice the principles of biblical interpretation in the course of one's study and meditation. Also,

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<sup>26</sup>N. T Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone*, New Testament for Everyone Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 54.

having a proper understanding of the nature of God's Word aids Christians in appreciating the Scriptures. In the words of Draper,

The word of God is alive, it is growing, it constantly enlarging and expanding. We can never exhaust it. We can never study it too much. We can never plunge to its depths. We can always say there are many more things to learn and understand the Word of God. God's Word is so profound that we cannot plunge to its depth, due to its enlarging and expanding nature. The enlarging and expanding nature of God's word is understood by enlarging revelation that comes to the heart of the readers. That is always full of new meaning, new direction and new discoveries to the hearts.<sup>27</sup>

No matter how many times Christians study God's Word, its outstanding nature causes it to speak to every Christian who opens it for encouragement, knowledge, rebuke, guidance, training in godliness, and the like—at any moment. The excitement in the living Word of God is that it reveals biblical truth about an individual's life and that of a community.

Furthermore, the Hebrew Christians failed in the responsibility that the Scriptures demand of them. The Scriptures demand that Christians should listen and pay attention to God's Word, share what they received, and grow to maturity. God expects his children to listen to his Word as well as pay attention to its instructions. Unfortunately, the Hebrew church had an inoperative ear to God's Word. They were dull in their understanding of God's Word due to their deaf ears. God's Word demands attention when people hear it and read it. Christians must study God's Word, take it to heart, and apply it in their lives. Second, the Word of God demands that Christians share their teaching with others. Every believer ought to be a teacher at one level or the other (Deut 6:7; Col 3:16; 2 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 3:15), but the Hebrew Christians were not teaching others, unlike the Jewish community, who were tutored in the law and took pride in it even before the Gentiles. Third, the Word of God demands that every Christian grow in faith to maturity, unlike the Hebrew Christians, who decided not to grow in faith to maturity. They

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<sup>27</sup>Draper, *Hebrews*, 131.

preferred to be baby believers, demanding to be taught the ABCs of Christian faith when they ought to be teaching others.

God's Word should be both believed and demonstrated in the lives of Christians daily. Every Christian is to live out God's Word, which one believes, unlike the Hebrew Christians, who received the Word but did not live it out for others to see in their daily endeavors, which contributed to their spiritually immature stature. If a person is not growing maturely, he or she becomes a baby all the time. C. S. Lovett buttresses this sentiment with these words: "What happened to Hebrew Christians is the law of life. If a Christian does not study, understand, and apply the truth receives and continue to study it consistently. The person digresses backward."<sup>28</sup>

Hebrews 5:11-14 points out clearly that spiritual maturity may have no relation with one's age in the faith. A Christian may be a baby in Christ despite his or her biological age, like Hebrew Christians. Lovett paints a picture of a spiritual baby this way:

They like the "honey-moon" stage of Christianity and never get down to the business of growing up in Christ. They are touchy, lose their temper just easily, spend little time in the Word, they don't witness Christ and they are critical of others. You can't give them any responsibility. And if you happen to say the wrong thing to them, they'll quit and go home. Even salvation becomes shaky to the Christian who doesn't get off the bottle. He needs reassurance that he is saved. He hasn't learned by experience to rest in what Christ has done for him and get on with the business of shaping up in the Lord. The infant cannot recognize a life-changing truth when it hits him in the face. Neither can he recognize one inspired by Satan. Baby Christians are spectators while adults are participators. The infants watch the battle of the Christians life, the adult gets into it. The infant/baby Christians don't want to get involved.<sup>29</sup>

Sadly, many Christians are spiritually dwarfed in stature because they have refused to pay attention to God's Word in studying it, appropriating it in their lives, living it, teaching others, and growing in faith to maturity. According to Guthrie, "Maturity is

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<sup>28</sup>C. S. Lovett, *Lovett's Lights on Hebrews* (La Verne, CA: El Camino Press, 1976), 120.

<sup>29</sup>Lovett, *Lovett's Lights on Hebrews*, 120-23.

the desirable development from spiritual childhood. It comes neither from isolated events nor from a great spiritual burst but from a steady application of spiritual discipline.”<sup>30</sup>

Frances Gench adds,

Growth in faith is a continual process throughout our lives- with no graduation day in sight! Continued growth occurs throughout our lives in a variety of ways: 1) As we carefully study the scriptures, the primary tradition by which we know who we are, whom we worship, and how we are to exist in the world as the body of believers. 2) As we listen to the “great cloud of witnesses” who speak to us through the confessions, hymns, and traditions of the church. 3) As we join together with other Christians in worship, service, study, and fellowship. 4) As we reflect together on issues that face us in this world in seeking to embody God’s purposes for human life.<sup>31</sup>

The Hebrew believers were not progressing spiritually because they were tied to the old dispensation of ritualism and to blending in with their Jewish culture.

Therefore, according to the author of Hebrews, they should do away with their ritualism and holding onto their culture because they have a better position before God by the provision of Calvary and Christ as the High Priest (Heb 6:12). As John Phillips asserts,

The Hebrew Christians must abandon the Temple sacrifices, together with its attending rituals and its accompanying priesthood. They have far better provision for their need in Calvary and a far better priest in Christ. Some of the Hebrews were looking back speculatively to the Temple as though there could be coexistence between Judaism and Christianity. Not so! The Old Testament contained only “beginning the word of the Christ.” The substance found in Christ must not be forsaken for the mere shadows found in the Levitical ritual.<sup>32</sup>

The Hebrew believers needed to grow from babies to grown-up Christians, and for that to happen, they needed to learn discernment. They needed to train their senses and consciences to discern the correct use of Scripture through regular practices in order to avoid simply being nominal Christians who filled up church auditoriums on Sundays.

Vis-à-vis the state of the church in Africa, Adeleye states,

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<sup>30</sup>Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 136.

<sup>31</sup>Frances Gench, *Hebrews and James* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 36.

<sup>32</sup>John Phillips, *Exploring Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 89.

The truth is, within Africa, as in many lands, the church still has a long way to go before it can be a true witness to Christ in society. We still have a long way to go in being light and salt to the continent. Look at Nigeria. New churches and ministries are constantly springing up. I can't think of any other city in the world with as many churches as Lagos. Some streets in Lagos have as many as five church buildings. No week goes by without some significant evangelistic event in Lagos. Yet according to statistical reports, Nigeria has long held the record of being the most corrupt nation in the world. It was only recently that another African country with equally significant church growth records took over the leadership in corruption. For many years now, Nairobi has been the "Jerusalem" of mission agencies, yet for all its Christian flavor, Nairobi is fast becoming one of the most unsafe cities in Africa. I have witnessed a woman being lifted off her feet while in less than fifteen seconds her shoes and jewelry were stolen. It happened too fast for anyone to cry out. Johannesburg is not different. What is needed now is not celebration but heart searching. It is helpful once in a while to withdraw into a closet for individual soul searching. We need to ask, "Am I really in the faith?" "Am I really salt and light in society?"<sup>33</sup>

Adeleye's view further buttresses the notion that the dilemma of Christians in the book of Hebrews was a foreshadowing of the twenty-first-century church. Therefore, the points of this project must be taken to heart by every Christian, including church leaders, in order for the church of Christ to continue to advance the kingdom of God in a world that celebrates sins and falsehood.

### **Conclusion**

The Holy Spirit is the one behind sound scriptural interpretation and the conviction of persons unto salvation. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person, he or she cannot understand the Scripture because one of the Spirit's works is to reveal to humanity God's will written in the Scripture. In addition, one of the aims of biblical interpretation is to ensure that people understand the Scriptures to the point of their being reconciling with their Creator.

The Holy Spirit, the most excellent teacher, empowers people to interpret Scripture accurately using their abilities; hence, Christians have the responsibility of learning the principles of biblical interpretation. Also, pastors are to preach and teach

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<sup>33</sup>Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, 121-22.

God's Word accurately to Christians in every local church and to disciple them on the principles of biblical interpretation because there are lots of false teachers peddling falsehoods using the Scriptures. At the same time, seasoned guest preachers and church workers who preach and teach the truth may be allowed to bring God's message to the church. Besides, pastors must live lives that corresponds with what they teach and preach to the church and others in the society in order to win souls for Christ; they should not engage in petty arguments with heretics (2 Tim 2:14-15). Lastly, pastors are not the only people who need to preach and teach the Scriptures accurately and live out what they profess; such is the responsibility of every Christian in a local church (Heb 5:11-15).

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES OF  
INTERPRETING OLD TESTAMENT AND  
NEW TESTAMENT LITERATURES

The Bible is a collection of writings Christians value as inspired, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative. It is a compilation of sixty-six small books—written by different individuals from different historical periods, backgrounds, personalities, and cultures—into a unified book. The highlighted nature of the Bible attests to the Holy Spirit as the authority behind the writings (2 Tim 3:16).<sup>1</sup> The books of the Bible at first circulated independently, then they were gradually gathered together into a small collection and over time into a greater collection until a collection of collections was formed.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible is divided into two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> The first division of the Old Testament contains thirty-nine books of various genres, such as historical narratives, poetry, psalms, proverbs, and prophesy. Jason DeRouchie explains why the Old Testament is important:

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), pt. 1, q. 1, para. 2, Kindle.

<sup>2</sup>The Bible” means literally “the books.” The term rests ultimately on the Greek word *biblios* (papyrus) and comes to us by way of the Greek *biblion* (book) and the Old French *bible*. Jews of the time of Jesus used such terms as “the books,” “the holy books,” and “the book of the law” in referring to their sacred texts (Dan 9:2; 1 Macc 3:48; 12:9). New Testament writers referred to those texts as “the Scriptures” (Matt 21:42), “the holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:2), the law (John 12:34), “the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). “Scripture” is simply the Latin rendering of the Greek word for “writing.” From about AD 400, “the books”—without qualifying adjectives and meaning “the Books”—became the standard term of reference for the whole body of sacred writings. Edward Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 17.

<sup>3</sup>The word “Testament” is the Latin word *testamentum*, meaning covenant or agreement. The Bible with its divisions contains a record of God’s covenantal relationship with humanity. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, pt. 1, q. 1, para. 3.

The Old Testament was Jesus' only Scripture and makes up three-fourths (75.55 percent) of our Bible. If space says anything, the Old Testament matters to God, who gave us his Word in a Book. In fact, it was his first special revelation, which set a foundation for the fulfillment that we find in Jesus in the New Testament. The Old Testament was the only Bible of Jesus and the earliest church (e.g., Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:44; Acts 24:14; 2 Tim. 3:15), and it is a major part of our Scriptures. . . . Finally, the New Testament worldview and teachings are built on the framework supplied in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we find literally hundreds of Old Testament quotations, allusions, and echoes, none of which we will fully grasp apart from saturating ourselves in Jesus' Bible.<sup>4</sup>

The New Testament contains several genres, like historical narratives, letters, parables, and prophesy.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of the Bible is to reveal God's desires and ways to wayward mankind, "to bring them to Christ, to maturity in him, and to send them out into the world to witness by their lifestyle and verbally."<sup>6</sup> Second, the Bible exists to make people wise for salvation through trust in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:16) so that they may enjoy God's forgiveness and gain possession of eternal life. To that end, this chapter presents the history of the canonization of Scripture, the basic principles of hermeneutics, the principles of interpreting Old Testament and New Testament narratives, and how biblical interpretation is done.

### **The History of Canonization**

The concept of canonization cannot be ignored while discussing biblical interpretation because it is all about interpretation and setting the boundaries for biblical interpretation. Edward Blair defines "canon" as an ancient Semitic word that means "reed," which is an authoritative standard by which other things are measured. Therefore, a sacred canon represents a list of holy writings drawn up as a closed collection, not to be added to, subtracted from, or altered in any way.<sup>7</sup> The biblical canon is a list of books that

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<sup>4</sup>Jason DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), introduction, para, 17 and 19.

<sup>5</sup>Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, pt. 1, q. 1, para. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, 28.

<sup>7</sup>Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, 29.

Christians accept to be unique, authoritative, and inspired. Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria (ca. AD 352), first used the word “canon” to refer to Christians’ restricted inspired list of books. The Synod of Laodicea (AD 363) was the first church council to use the word “canon” in this manner. Consequently, the term was widely used and quickly accepted.<sup>8</sup> Canonization is “the process of recognizing that inherent authority, not bestowing it from an outside source.”<sup>9</sup> The early church did not create the canon but a process of its recognition, a matter of interpreting the text, and how texts are to be read by churches.<sup>10</sup>

The Bible’s precise content and book arrangement varied in different places and periods of Jewish and Christian history. Such variations are reflected in the differences between the various Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and contemporary English Bibles.<sup>11</sup> Besides, within Christianity, there are differences concerning what is considered Scripture.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, pt. 1, q. 6, para. 1.

<sup>9</sup>Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, pt. 1, q. 6, para. 2.

<sup>10</sup>Brian Vickers, “Biblical Hermeneutics” (unpublished course notes for 22100: Biblical Hermeneutics, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall semester, 2017), 10.

<sup>11</sup>The Hebrew Bible is composed of thirty-nine books but grouped into twenty-four books. The books grouped together include 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, and 1-2 Chronicles. The Hebrew Bible is arranged in this order: the Law, or Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), the Prophets (the former prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings; the latter prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; the Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Mal), and the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song, Ruth, Lamentation, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1-2 Chronicles). Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, 17-18.

<sup>12</sup>The Greek Bible is the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek during third to first centuries BC. The Bible was used in Greco-Roman times by Greek-speaking Jews and early Gentile Christians. The Greek Bible has an addition of seventeen books to the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible. According to Blair, fourteen of the seventeen books, including 2 Esd, now comprise the Apocrypha of the Protestant Bible. The Roman Catholic Church accepted twelve of these books as inspirational and authoritative with the Hebrew Bible. Also he listed the Roman Catholic Greek Old Testament arrangement, with minor changes as follows: the Book of Law and History (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-4 Kgdms (1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings), 1-2 Paralipomena (1-2 Chronicles), 1-2 Esd (an Apocrypha book of Ezra and Ezra-Nehemiah), Esther (with additions now in the modern-day Apocrypha), Jdt, Tob, 1-4 Macc), the Poetic and Prophetic Books (Pss; Odes Sol. [including the Pr Man], Prov, Eccl, Song, Job, Wis, Sir, Pss. Sol., Hos, Amos, Mic, Joel, Obad, Jonah, Nah, Hab, Zeph, Hag, Zech, Mal, Isa, Jer, Bar, Lam, Ep Jer, Ezek, Dan [with additions, including Pr Azar, Sg Three, Sus, and Bel]). Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, 18-19.

The Latin Bible was translated through the Lord's work of many Christian translators, including Jerome. Jerome was accorded the honor of translating the Old Testament from the Hebrew Bible, while his predecessors did their translations from the Greek Bible. The Latin Bible emerged between the second to fifth centuries (AD). The Latin Bible's content and arrangement were the same as that of the Greek Bible. After the Council of Trent in AD 1546, the Latin Bible had few changes.<sup>13</sup>

The early church widely used the Greek Bible and later translated it to the Latin Bible as accepted books. However, some portions of the Bible were later designated as Apocrypha by Protestants. Though many individuals at that time questioned the Apocrypha and forbade its inclusion, the Council of Hippo (393) and, later, the Council of Trent (1546) decided that it was canon. However, Martin Luther rejected the authority of the Apocrypha, which he described as "books which are not held equal to the sacred Scriptures, and yet are useful and good for reading."<sup>14</sup>

The Jewish Scriptures were canonized because of the following reasons: (1) the popularity of the Greek Bible (Septuagint) in Christian churches, (2) the spread of written Christian literature tagged heretical by the Jews that gave rise to Christianity, (3) the fall of the Jewish revolutionary movement against Roman authority in AD 66-73 and 132-135, and (4) the banning of literature that supported the movement by Jewish leaders. In addition, the following criteria were used to canonize the Jewish Scriptures: (1) Was the book written by an inspired prophet or someone connected with him? (2)

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<sup>13</sup>The changes excluded the Prayer of Manasseh and I Esdras from the list and placed them in an appendix. Also, III-IV Maccabees were not included in the Latin Bible. The Contemporary English Bible contains the Old Testament books in accord with the Hebrew Bible. The additional books of the Greek and Latin Bibles are omitted completely or placed in a section tagged "Apocrypha." The Roman Catholic and Protestant Bible agree on the same content and arrangement of the New Testament. However, the Roman Catholic Bible contains the same Old Testament as the Latin Bible, with the exception that the former introduces 1-2 Maccabees between Esther and Job and uses the customary names for 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, and 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah rather than the old terminology. Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, 19-20.

<sup>14</sup>Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, 30.

Does the teaching conform to what is traditionally understood as the law of God? (3) Is the book suitable for reading and instruction in public worship in the temple and synagogue? (4) Does the book celebrate the mighty work of God on behalf of Israel? (5) Does the book remind Israel of her God-appointed responsibilities within the covenant relationship?<sup>15</sup>

Christianity was on the rise before the canonization of the third section of the Old Testament (i.e., the Writings) in the first and third centuries (AD). At that time, Christian literature was in circulation and gained acceptance by Gentile and Jewish Christians. The New Testament writings claimed authority directly or indirectly. The influence of the heretics through their writings led to the canonization of the New Testament writings. Eusebius of Caesarea began the move to canonize the New Testament in his attempt to distinguish between disputed, rejected, and acknowledged books around 325 AD. Then, Athanasius of Alexandria listed the canonical books of the New Testament in his Easter letter in 367, followed by the church's conciliar decisions at Rome (382), Hippo (393), and Carthage (397), which put together the list of books presented in the New Testament.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the Bible does not derive its authority and infallibility from the church by its canonization. The books of the Bible were infallible and authoritative before they were canonized by the church councils. Prior to the canonization of the Bible, the vast majority of the books functioned authoritatively as material for preaching and teaching in the church as the apostles' writings; though, concerns were raised regarding a few books: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. These books were not given universal endorsement until the fourth century, when the formal sanction

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<sup>15</sup>Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, 31.

<sup>16</sup>Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, 35.

of the New Testament was completed during the third council of Carthage in 397.<sup>17</sup>

Walter Kaiser adds,

There was a progressive recognition of certain books as being canonical right from their inception by readers and listeners who were contemporaneous with the writers and who were thereby in the best position to determine the claim of the writers. It seems clear that by the time of Jesus, most Jews were in agreement as to their own canon—a list that matches our current Old Testament in content.<sup>18</sup>

The Protestants did not recognize the Apocrypha as Scripture for several reasons: (1) the Jews who wrote the books never accepted them into the canon; (2) it contains factual and theological errors, such as praying for the dead (2 Macc 12:43-45); (3) prior to the Council in Trent in 1546, the Roman Catholic Church did not recognize the books as Scripture; and (4) the books were never cited in the New Testament either by Jesus or the apostles.<sup>19</sup> The history of canonization depicts that the authority of the Scriptures is inherent prior to its canonization. Therefore, canonization is the process of recognizing the inherent authority of sixty-six books of the Bible by the church.

### **The Basic Principles of Interpreting Scripture**

Scriptural interpretation means to properly and faithfully explain a text in speech or writing for the purpose of conveying the inspired author's meaning of the text, without neglecting divine intent.<sup>20</sup> DeRouchie adds that Scriptural interpretation shares the same meaning with exegesis:

Narrowly defined, exegesis of Scripture is the personal discovery of what the biblical authors intended their texts to mean. Texts convey meaning; they do not produce it. Rather, following God's leading, the biblical authors purposely wrote the words they did with specific sense and purpose. "Men spoke from God as they were

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<sup>17</sup>R. C. Sproul, "The Establishment of Scripture," in *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 74-75.

<sup>18</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 31.

<sup>19</sup>Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, pt. 1, q. 6, para. 17.

<sup>20</sup>Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, sect. A, q. 8, para. 2.

carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). We have to carefully read what the Lord through his human servants gives us in Scripture. Exegesis is about discovering what is there, which includes both the specific meaning that the authors convey and its implications—those inferences in a text of which the authors may or may not have been unaware but that legitimately fall within the principle or pattern of meaning that they willed.<sup>21</sup>

David Naselli disagrees with Robert Plummer and DeRouchie; he states that the meaning of hermeneutics is different from exegesis:

Hermeneutics concerns principles of interpretation (i.e., it’s about how the interpretive process works), and exegesis applies those principles. Hermeneutics supplies the tools to discover a text’s meaning, and exegesis uses those tools. And hermeneutics studies how to interpret the Bible, which is different from applying those principles while you interpret or exegete the Bible (i.e., carefully read it by drawing meaning out of it, analyzing what the author intended to communicate).<sup>22</sup>

DeRouchie, however, alludes to the notion that hermeneutics and exegesis are inseparable as far as Bible study is concerned since “biblical interpretation is not complete until it gives rise to an application through a life of worship.”<sup>23</sup> The basic principles of interpreting Scripture explains the author’s meaning of the text without neglecting the divine intent.

Most importantly, the interpretation of the Bible is a task that needs the right tools for the job. William Klein, Craig Blomberg, Robert Hubbard put it this way:

It is a simple fact of life; the right tools are necessary to do the right job. A hammer is fine for attaching something with nails but nearly useless for loosening a screw. A pipe wrench works great for removing a sink drain but not so well for removing a window panel! The same is true of tools of measurement. If recipe calls for a certain amount of flour and oil, the right tool is a measuring cup—not a voltmeter! In short, the nature of task determines what tools are appropriate. The same principle applies to the interpretation of the Bible. The nature of this task necessitates certain tools.<sup>24</sup>

The Bible is literature written by human authors with human language and composed of

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<sup>21</sup>DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, introduction, para. 2.

<sup>22</sup>David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017 ), 2.

<sup>23</sup>DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, introduction, para. 4.

<sup>24</sup>William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 259.

prose and poetry in various sizes and shapes. To interpret it accurately, literary tools must be used because they empower readers to understand the Scriptures with their minds, to sharpen their reasoning to uncover the Bible's ideas and truths, and to develop literary competence. Literary competence is the ability of readers to discern each literature with its reference frame, ground, rules, strategy, and purpose through the text and interpret it correctly. Every reader who knows the formulation and function of each literary type can boldly interpret the Scriptures correctly.<sup>25</sup> To understand the biblical meaning of the text begins with distinguishing the principles necessary to achieve the purpose.

The Bible writers communicated to their initial audience in a manner they understood using language and standards without any secret code, except on a few occasions, when they used parables, riddles, and symbols to communicate. In fact, in ideal conversation, one understands the discourse without any conscious effort because of the wealth of knowledge and words acquired. However, when it comes to the Bible, it is difficult to understand it without conscious effort because it is written in a foreign language to people who lived thousands of years ago at different places in the world with different ways of life. Therefore, what is automatically clear to the initial audience will not always be immediately clear to modern readers, and what is easy for them to understand will require serious effort from Christians today to understand it.<sup>26</sup> An interpreter must be conversant with the following four principles to interpret a text accurately because an acceptable meaning of a text reflects these principles: literary context, historical-cultural background, word meanings, and grammatical relationships.

### **Literary Context**

The basis of biblical interpretation is that the intended meaning of any passage

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<sup>25</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 260.

<sup>26</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 155-56.

is consistent with the sense of the literary context in which it occurs.<sup>27</sup> In literature, the context of a passage is the material immediately before and after it. The context of a sentence is its paragraph. The context of a paragraph consists of the paragraph before and after it. The context of a chapter consists of the surrounding chapters. The controlling context of a passage is the whole book in which the passage belongs. Likewise, the canon of sixty-six books provides the largest context through which every passage is understood.<sup>28</sup> According to Grant Osborne,

Unless we can grasp the whole before attempting to dissect the parts, interpretation is doomed from the start. Statements simply have no meaning apart from their context. Without a situation to give the command content, it becomes meaningless. In Scripture, the context provides the situation behind the text. In fact, there is no meaning apart from context, only several possible meanings.<sup>29</sup>

To avoid misconstruing the context of biblical passages, every passage needs to be interpreted within its context because the context provides a flow of thought and an accurate meaning of words and delineates the correct relationship among units. There are levels of context in interpreting a passage accurately: immediate, the book, and all of the books of the Bible.

**Immediate context.** The immediate context exercises important control in the passage under study. The immediate context applies to materials immediately before and after the passage under discussion. It will also apply in some cases to preceding and succeeding paragraphs. In another example, it refers to a subsection in the author's presentation or a major book division. Determining the immediate context in which a passage occurs requires tactical outlining, which help interpreters to discern the natural divisions in the book. The linking of one idea to another in a sequential manner and the

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<sup>27</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 156.

<sup>28</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 156-57.

<sup>29</sup>Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. and exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 37, Kindle.

closeness and correlation of the materials to each other present immediate context as a more important indicator to the meaning of the passage than the whole book.<sup>30</sup>

**Literary context of the book.** The literary context of the book is the second important aspect in understanding the meaning of a passage according to the author's intent. It refers to the context of the book in which the passage occurs. To understand the author's meaning of a specific passage, the interpreter has to understand the context of the book. To achieve that, the interpreter needs to read the book, if possible twice, to discover the purpose(s) or theme(s) of the book, the book's outline, and parallel passages in the book that deal with the same subject.<sup>31</sup>

**Context of the entire book.** The next element in understanding a specific passage is the literary context of the entire book. Although the Bible is written by human authors who lived at different times with different backgrounds and with different people, it maintains its unity because of its divinely inspired nature. Notably, the human authors participated and lived in Judeo-Christian religious traditions. Consequently, they drew from each other's writing in expressing their thoughts clearly to their recipients. For example, the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles draw from each other's writings. The same can be said of the Synoptic Gospels in line with popular themes on Gospel composition. The unity of the Scriptures due to its divinely inspired nature showcases the consistent thought in a passage on a subject with the rest of other books in the Bible that handle the same subject. Good interpretation of a biblical passage on a subject does not contradict parallel passages in the Bible that treat the same subject.<sup>32</sup> As Osborne says,

Literary critics have pointed out, however, that the parts have no meaning apart

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<sup>30</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 162-63.

<sup>31</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 167.

<sup>32</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 168-69.

from the whole. Only when the message of the whole passage is considered can the parts be studied for details of this central message. In reality, the hermeneutical process can be summarized in this way: first, we chart the whole of a book to analyze its flow of thought in preliminary fashion; next, we study each part intensively in order to detect the detailed argumentation; finally, we rework the thought development of the whole in relation to the parts. We move from the whole book to its major sections and then to its paragraphs and finally to its individual sentences.<sup>33</sup>

## **Historical-Cultural Background**

Having considered the literary context, which includes the immediate context, the whole-book context, and the whole-Bible context, the next basic principle of interpreting Scripture is the historical-cultural background. The historical-cultural background is fundamental in interpreting the Scriptures correctly because they were written to people with different ways of life from thousands of years ago. Ancient people's way of life differs from modern lifestyles vis-à-vis language, culture, dress, society, and more. In reality, the ancients were the first recipients of the message before it got to present-day readers. Wayne Grudem attests that historical background information can certainly enrich one's understanding of individual passages of Scripture today, making them more precise and vivid.<sup>34</sup> Also, according to Naselli, the historical-cultural background presents the genre (the style of the literature), the author (the writer of the book), the date (when the book was written), the place (where the writer was when he wrote the book), the audience (to whom the author wrote the book), and the purpose (the reason why the author wrote the book).<sup>35</sup> Therefore, a good understanding of the historical-cultural background of every passage is one of the key principles in interpreting the Bible accurately in view of the author's and recipients' perspectives and mindsets as well as the contextualization of the passage. Understanding the historical-cultural

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<sup>33</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 40.

<sup>34</sup>Wayne Grudem, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *Themelios* 34, no. 3 (November 2009): 297.

<sup>35</sup>Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 169.

background of a particular passage allow modern readers to experience the originally intended meaning.

**Perspective.**<sup>36</sup> The historical-cultural background is important in understanding and interpreting a passage because it presents the perspectives of the writer and recipients of a given book. The writer's and the recipients' perspectives are based on the circumstances they found themselves sharing regarding culture, language, and society. Modern interpreters need to put themselves in the world of original writer and recipients in order to understand and interpret a given passage accurately. Understanding the perspective of the original communicators—writer and recipients—is very important in the interpreting Scripture.<sup>37</sup>

**Mindset.**<sup>38</sup> The historical-cultural aspect of society gives meaning to the mindset factor in a given passage. Ideas are not the only thing that a statement communicates. A statement causes an emotional effect on readers or recipients. The affective (i.e., feeling) dimension of discourse is regulated by the value system of each culture. Hence, the effect of a statement in a discourse depends on the standards of right and wrong values set by the culture. For example, Jesus calling Herod a fox in Luke 13:32 does not have the same value in the present society. Modern interpreters must be aware of the mindset of the biblical terms to interpret a given passage accurately, avoid shaping the Scriptures to conform to contemporary values, and avoid obscuring the original passage's intent. The biblical revelation was communicated within cultures. It could not be otherwise, for all human language is culturally conditioned.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 172.

<sup>37</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 172.

<sup>38</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 173.

<sup>39</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 173.

**Contextualization.**<sup>40</sup> Perspective and mindset point out the importance of the historical-cultural background in interpreting the Scriptures in line with the original recipients. Contextualization deals with conveying the passage to present-day society so that modern readers can experience the originally intended meaning. Good interpreters have two lenses in their quest to interpret the Scripture accurately. They put on the lens of the biblical times to obtain the narrator's intended meaning of the text and another lens to bring the relevancy of the text's meaning to today's world.<sup>41</sup> The principle of the historical-cultural background takes interpreters into the history and culture of the writer and recipients, allowing them to consider the author's and recipients' perspectives and mindsets and to accurately contextualize the passage to contemporary society.

### **Word Meaning**

Accurate interpretation of Scripture involves understanding the meaning of the words in the context they occur. The absence of words leaves society with a means of communication characterized by non-verbal sounds, symbols, and pictures.<sup>42</sup> Also, Roy Zuck says,

Thoughts are expressed through words, and words are building blocks of sentences. Therefore, to determine God's thoughts we need to study His words and how they are associated in sentences. If we neglect the meanings of the words and how they are used, we have no way of knowing whose interpretations are correct. The assertion, "You can make the Bible mean anything you want it to mean," is true only if grammatical interpretation is ignored.<sup>43</sup>

The importance of words in communication is appreciated when people know their nature, range of meaning, semantic fields, changes in meaning, and nuances of

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<sup>40</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 173.

<sup>41</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 173-74.

<sup>42</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 183.

<sup>43</sup>Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991), 99.

meaning. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard put in this manner:

A word is a semantic sign—a combination of symbols or sounds that represents an idea. Spoken words are a combination of sounds that stand for a specific idea; written words combine letters representing these sounds to symbolize a concept. The idea designated by any given word can be communicated either orally or visually. But why a word means what it does is mostly a matter of convention. That's just the way it is!<sup>44</sup>

From a hermeneutical standpoint, the meaning of a word is interpreted accurately from the original use of the word at the time it was written and in the context that it occurred. The original writer selects the word to express a specific idea. The responsibility of the interpreter is to discover the thought the author expresses because the meaning of the original word is the idea that occurs in the passage; it is the purpose for the word studies.<sup>45</sup>

### **Grammatical-Structural Relationships**

Word meaning is a basic principle that points out the need for an interpreter to know the meaning of a word in the context it occurs in order to interpret Scripture accurately. Key to the accurate interpretation of Scripture are a good understanding of the nature of words, that words have a range of meanings, word meanings overlap, words meaning changes over time, and words have connotative and denotative meanings. An accurate understanding and interpretation of Scripture requires analyzing the grammar and structure of a passage. According to Zuck, “By grammatical they meant determining the meaning of the Bible by studying the words and sentences of scripture in their normal, plain sense.”<sup>46</sup> Further, Osborne explains that “grammar is the architectural blueprint of communication, telling how the various parts of an utterance relate to each

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<sup>44</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 183-84.

<sup>45</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 185.

<sup>46</sup>Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 77.

other. In fact, grammar is the key to word meaning, and semantic analysis (word study) is dependent on it, since words have meaning only as they relate to the other words in a sentence.”<sup>47</sup>

Grammar technically consists of two elements: morphology and syntax. Morphology is about the forms of individual words and how words are manipulated to indicate their function in a language. Syntax is about the system each language has in combining various constituents for the purpose of communication. It expresses the way a language arranges words to form a meaningful phrase, sentence, or larger unit. In English syntax, word order is an essential element. However, in Hebrew and Greek, the word order is less fixed in nature.<sup>48</sup> The interpreter’s knowledge of the biblical language is important in analyzing the grammar and structure of a passage; however, the absence of biblical language knowledge can be compensated by having a good grasp of English grammar, using the best English version of the Bible with reliable commentaries, and employing other resources written by scholars that can explain the original grammar of a Bible passage. In addition, comparing different sources on a particular passage will definitely aid a person in discovering whether there is a scholarly consensus concerning the grammatical position of a particular passage.<sup>49</sup>

In sum, interpreters need to have knowledge of the biblical languages because they convey nuances that are hard to capture in English translations, making grammatical studies strategic in accurate biblical interpretation. However, the grammatical construction can be analyzed through the structure of the sentence. Understanding the structure of the sentence helps the interpreter to uncover the grammatical construction.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 63.

<sup>48</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 200.

<sup>49</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 204.

<sup>50</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 203.

## The Principles of Interpreting Biblical Narrative

Having discussed the basic principles in interpreting Scripture (i.e., literary context, the historical-cultural background, word meaning, and grammatical-structural relationships), the discussion now focuses on the principles of interpreting biblical narratives. The manner in which people read a magazine or newspaper is not the same as the manner in which they read a computer manual because the texts represent different genres. Literary genre means different kinds of literature or reading material. People already know genre intuitively because they would read a computer manual differently than they would read Shakespeare, for example. The same principles apply to reading and interpreting the Bible. Oftentimes, people read the book of Kings the same way they read Psalms 23—as if they are the same genre. In doing so, however, they violate the principle of interpreting Scripture accurately. The fundamental way to interpret the Scriptures is to read different parts of the Scriptures on the basis of their genre. Hence, different genres require different principles for interpreting them. When the principles of interpreting a text that belongs to a particular genre are not applied, the text will lose its meaning.

Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard add,

We must understand how the Biblical languages function if we are to understand what the writer meant to say. A larger dimension involved understanding an utterance in the specific literary genre or writing style the author employed to convey his/her message. We interpret the words in a poem differently from those in a letter when we know we are looking at a poem rather than a letter, or vice versa. We expect ambiguity or figures of speech to convey a meaning in poetry that is different from the more concrete sense of words in a historical narrative.<sup>51</sup>

The biblical narratives are the first and most frequent books people encountered in reading the Bible. Narrative is an important genre of literature within the Judeo-Christian tradition. It occupies a huge amount of space in both the Old Testament and New Testament. In fact, over 40 percent of the New Testament and nearly 60 percent

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<sup>51</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 9.

of the Old Testament consist of narrative.<sup>52</sup> The purpose of biblical narrative is not to relay what happened in the past but to relate past events to biblical faith. As a result, the meaning of the text is not only what happened but also an interpretation of what happened. The meaning of narrative is implicit and elusive to readers.<sup>53</sup>

Biblical narratives report events in the Bible, more like storytellers than historians, more to instruct than to inform, more to teach later generations about God-loving conduct than to make sure they merely have the facts straight. Biblical narratives present a comprehensive picture of what happened and communicate a particular theme. The storyteller's craft is evident in most of the biblical narratives, such as plot, narrative pacing, description, characterization, and word-play. Importantly, to interpret narratives competently, readers must track the storyteller's argument to discover the theme he intends to express.<sup>54</sup>

### **Introductions and Conclusions**<sup>55</sup>

Another principle of interpreting biblical narratives is the use of introductions and conclusions. The narrative writers used the introduction and conclusion of their books to give clues to readers concerning the book's theme and focus. For instance, Exodus 34:9-12, points to Moses walk's with God as a faithful servant whom God used in the life of Israel to showcase his power and personality to the world. The passage summarizes Exodus through Deuteronomy. Other examples are John 20:30-31 and Joshua 1:2. In addition, Stein asserts that the historical writers of 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings,

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<sup>52</sup>Robert Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 79.

<sup>53</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 8.

<sup>54</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 261.

<sup>55</sup>The following paragraphs, headings, and outlines are taken from Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 89-98.

1-2 Chronicles built their narratives on the contents of the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges. Similarly, the writers of New Testament (e.g., Matt 1:1; Mark 1:2-3; Rom 1:2; 4:1-3; 9:1-5; Heb 1:1-2; Jas 1:1) built their narratives on the teachings of the Old Testament.

### **Authorial Comments**

The author's comments is another principle in interpreting biblical narrative. Narrative authors use comments to give clues about interpreting narratives, such as 1 Kings 14:8; 15:5, 11; 22:43; 2 Kings 10:30: "he did what was right in the eye of God." The author wants interpreters to know the right things that the king did, which are in line with God's precepts. Also in the New Testament, the writers insert comments to help interpreters understand the incident they are reporting, such as Mark 12:12: "And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away." At times, the author inserts theological comments to help interpreters see the theological importance of an incident, such as Mark 17:19 ("Thus he declared all food clean"), which stresses the fact that Jesus has put to an end to Jewish regulations of foods being classified as either clean or unclean.

### **Authorial Summaries**

Biblical narrative writers use summaries to help interpreters understand the meaning of the narrative. For instance, reading Genesis 1:31 ("God saw everything he created was very good") and Mark 8:31 ("And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again"), interpreters understand the divine plan and the necessity of Christ's death. The author of Act's summaries in 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:31 help interpreters to understand the emphasis on the numerical growth of the early church through prayer, apostolic teaching, favorable reputation, and taking care

of others' needs.

### **Repetition**

Repetition is another principle that helps interpreters to understand the meaning of biblical narrative. Repetition is used in the book of Judges, for example, to teach the cyclical nature of rebellion, repentance, and restoration in the life of the Jews and to teach—most importantly—that disobedience leads to judgment and repentance to salvation (Judg 2:11, 14; 3:7, 8, 12; 4:1, 2; 6:1b, 19; 10:6; 13:19). When Israel does evil in the sight of the Lord, God hands them over to their enemies. When they cry out to him in repentance, he delivers them (3:5b, 9a, 9b, 15a; 4:3, 4-24; 6:6-7, 11-25; 10:10-16; 11:1-33). Similarly, the Gospel of Luke emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus through the author's constant repetition of the Holy Spirit. The involvement of the Holy Spirit is mentioned, for example, at the birth of John the Baptist and at the baptism of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:15, 35, 41-45; 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18).

### **Proportion**

Proportion is another principle that helps interpreters to understand the meaning of biblical narrative. It stresses the amount of space taken by a writer in the presentation of an account compared to other writers, especially in the Gospels. Examples include the healing of the demon-possessed man and the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5. There, the author showcases Jesus's power to handle tragic and hopeless situations in the lives of various people.

### **Authoritative speaker**

The authoritative speaker is a yet another principle in interpreting biblical narrative. This principle helps interpreters to understand the meaning of narrative by placing key dialogue in the mouth of various speakers. In other words, the writer uses the characters to project what should be received as truth and acceptable lifestyle or

condemned as inappropriate behavior before God. For example, every statement from God or Jesus is accepted as the truth to hold onto in pursuit of godliness. Also, every instruction from the prophets, disciples, or patriarchs is accepted to be the truth unless the narrator says otherwise. On the other hand, the writer's comment dissuades readers from emulating a character whose lifestyle is not pleasing to God. Interpreters understand a lifestyle that is not to be emulated and one that needs to be emulated (1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 14:17, 20). In addition, the writer helps interpreters understand the meaning of his narrative by presenting a character who demonstrates a godly lifestyle in accordance with God's will as what should be emulated and lived out by readers (see, e.g., Gen 13:13; 1 Sam 2:12; 25:3; 2 Sam 19:27; 20:1; 1 Kgs 12:8; 18:13; Job 1:1).

### **Dialogue or Direct Discourse**

Direct discourse or dialogue within a narrative account is used to focus readers' attention on the message in the passage. When an indirect conversation turns to direct conversation as noted with quotation marks, the attention of the reader is required. For example, after Jesus speaks to the wild wind, which results in the calming of the storm while he and his disciples are in the boat, the disciples say, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Luke 8:22-25). Also, a dialogue between two people is used by the narrator to point out the theme of the narrative. One example is the dialogue between Moses and God in Exodus 3:6-8. In this passage, the narrator points out the theme of the narrative and gives an understanding of the whole book. The direct conversation depicts Moses as the person whom God will use to save his people from slavery in Egypt.

### **Reading and Thinking Horizontally and Vertically**

Reading and thinking horizontally entail making a comparison of the Synoptic Gospels to recognize the unique theological perspective of each narrator (e.g., comparing

Luke with Matthew and Mark and John on their accounts and emphases of Jesus’s prayer life; his attitude to the less privileged in society, women, sinners; and the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’s ministry). In other words, readers should respect the integrity and emphasis of each story since the Holy Spirit inspired four Gospels instead of one; hence, each author has a unique story to tell.<sup>56</sup> Table 1 depicts an example:

Table 1. The seven sayings of Jesus from the cross<sup>57</sup>

Luke 23	John 19	Matthew 27 // Mark 15
1. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (v. 34).	2. To Mary: “Dear woman, here is your son” (v. 26). To John: “Here is your mother” (v. 27).	
3. “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (v. 43).	4. “I am thirsty” (v. 28).	5. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (v. 46 // v. 34)
6. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (v. 46).	7. “It is finished” (v. 30).	

Reading and thinking vertically entail reading the Gospels according to their terms by going through the progression (step by step) of each narrative—from the introduction to the conflict to the climax to the resolution. In other words, it means following the narrative from the top to the bottom.<sup>58</sup>

Also, interpreters need to identify each scene of the story, because the focus is on the main character(s), and summarize the words and actions contained therein to

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<sup>56</sup>Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), chap. 1, “What are the Gospels?,” para. 46. Kindle.

<sup>57</sup>Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus*, chap. 1, “What are the Gospels?,” para. 41.

<sup>58</sup>Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus*, chap. 1, “What are the Gospels?,” para. 22.

reflect the narrator's point of view and purpose for recording these details.<sup>59</sup> Second, interpreters have to analyze the plot of the narrative by observing how the author paces the plot and highlights the highpoint of the narrative in noting the action rising from conflict to resolution to climax.<sup>60</sup> Third, interpreters must determine the point of view from which the narrative is recorded by observing how the writer tells the story, what character is the focus of the story, and whether the narrator expresses the thoughts and emotions of the character or criticize his or her actions.<sup>61</sup> Fourth, interpreters must pay close attention to the details of the scenes by discovering how the writer describes the characters and where the actions take place.<sup>62</sup> Fifth, interpreters must examine the dialogue that the author uses to narrate the story to discover what the writer introduces into the story and how he moves back and forth between dialogue and narrative.<sup>63</sup> Sixth, interpreters must look at the units within the scene and their relationship with one another because the meaning of the scene is understood by discovering how the units are structured.<sup>64</sup> Lastly, interpreters needs to study the stylistic devices used by the writer, such as repetition, omission, inclusion, chiasm, and irony.<sup>65</sup>

### **How to Interpret the Scriptures Accurately**

Having discussed the history of Bible canonization, basic hermeneutical principles, and specific principles of interpreting Old Testament and New Testament

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<sup>59</sup>Brent Sandy and Ronald Giese Jr., *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 80.

<sup>60</sup>Sandy and Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 80.

<sup>61</sup>Sandy and Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 80.

<sup>62</sup>Sandy and Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 80.

<sup>63</sup>Sandy and Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 80.

<sup>64</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 81.

<sup>65</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 81.

narratives, this section closes the chapter with a few suggestions on how to do the biblical interpretation.

### **Prayer of Dependence on the Holy Spirit**

The interpretation of Scripture begins with a prayer for guidance and understanding of the text by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives information and insights from the text, enables the mind to comprehend the text in line with the author's intent, and brings transformation through the Word. The explanatory impact of Scripture begins with interpreters, who take time to study the Scriptures and then teach or preach to God's people. Certainly, God speaks to interpreters first as they showcase dependence on God through prayer for an understanding of the text and generate transformative results in their lives and that of the church. If the author's intent is not understood, whatever people teach or preach becomes lies before God and his people. Absolutely, lies destroy individuals and Christ's church. Using the principles of interpreting Scriptures are important in exegeting a given passage of Scripture. However, the starting point must be with prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit because interpreters are just the messengers of God, not the sender. Therefore, prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit and the use of the interpretation principles must be utilized to interpret Scripture accurately.

### **Allow the Text to Speak for Itself**

At times, when it comes to biblical interpretation, readers have preconceived ideas while reading the text, which causes them not to be objective. Readers need to be aware of any baggage they may bring to the table with regard to their family, culture, training, or work backgrounds in order to avoid imposing their personal meanings on the Scriptures, which is called "eisegesis," or reading into a text what one wants it to mean"<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 57.

rather than allowing Scripture to speak for itself.<sup>67</sup> Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart add,

The first reason one needs to learn how to interpret is that, whether one likes it or not, every reader is at the same time an interpreter. That is, most of us assume as we read that we also understand what we read. We also tend to think that our understanding is the same as the Holy Spirit's or human author's intent. However, we invariably bring to the text all that we are, with all our experiences, culture, and prior understandings of words and ideas. Sometimes what we bring to the text, unintentionally to be sure, leads us astray, or else causes us to read all kinds of foreign ideas into the text.<sup>68</sup>

If people manipulate the text to fit their preconceived messages, it will no longer be the Word of God proclaimed but rather one's own ideas shared.<sup>69</sup> The imposition of one's presuppositions on the Scriptures leads to teaching and preaching fallacy to God's people. Lies stick easily in people's minds, but they are very hard to debunk. It can take a pastor five years to build the church spiritually, whereas it only takes thirty minutes of teaching or preaching to destroy the work of five years. Therefore, interpreters must allow the text to speak to them in order to avoid spreading falsehoods that will ruin the church.

### **A Good Grasp of the Passage**

Good preachers and interpreters of the Word ensure that they understand the passage very well according to the author's intent before applying it. Interpreters first observe the text (What does it say?), then interpret it (What does it mean?), and finally apply it (How does it apply to me, the church, and society?). Observation begins with reading the passage and identifying words, prepositions, verbs, adverbs, figures of speech, and the like that draw one's attention. Observation (What does it say?) leads to interpretation (What does it mean?). The interpretation explains what the author is

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<sup>67</sup>D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 126, Kindle.

<sup>68</sup>Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 22.

<sup>69</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 50.

saying. If the message of the author is not understood, then the interpretation of the text and application will be wrong. After the interpretation is achieved, the application ensues. The application asks how does it apply to me, the church, and society? According to Zuck, the goal of studying the Bible is not to determine what it says and what it means but to apply it to one's life. If interpreters fail to apply the Scriptures, then they will cut short the entire process and will not have finished what God has asked them to do.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Application of the Principles**

In addition to prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit, allowing the text to speak for itself, and having a good understanding of the passage, interpreters must apply the basic principles of interpreting the Scriptures and the specific principles of interpreting the Old Testament and New Testament narratives discussed above.

### **Conclusion**

The ability to interpret the Scriptures accurately needs to be the priority of every Christian, particularly with the increase of false teachers and false teachings. In fact, that cannot be achieved if every believer is not conversant with the principles discussed in this chapter. This chapter has highlighted that the Bible is an inspired, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative book prior to its canonization by the church. However, canonization recognizes the inherent authority of the sixty-six books of the Bible; consequently, it sets the boundary for the books to be interpreted. In addition, this chapter has discussed the general principles of interpreting Scripture and the specific principles of interpreting Old Testament and New Testament narratives.

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<sup>70</sup>Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 13.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

This chapter describes the project preparation actions, then discusses the completion of the three project goals, and finally analyzes the results. The purpose of this project was to improve accurate biblical interpretation at Cornerstone Church of Waterloo, Wisconsin. The three key goals of this project included assessing the current biblical interpretation ability of select adult members of CCWW, developing a six-week curriculum to train them in accurate biblical interpretation, and improving their ability to interpret the Bible accurately. The training program used the developed six-week curriculum to improve members' ability to interpret Scripture while administering pre- and post-course surveys. The training series was chosen because it fit into the teaching structure at CCWW, which enhanced the accomplishment of the goals of this project. The training was originally intended to last eight weeks, but after discussion with CCWW leadership and with the approval of my supervisor, the training was shortened to a six-week period. The implementation of the project began on December 8, 2019, and ran through January 26, 2020.

#### **The Target Group**

Prior to obtaining approval of the proposed research instrument by the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the target group was planned to be for ten to fifteen select adult members of CCWW. However, after a heart-to-heart discussion with Pastor Aaron Sturgill, the pastor of CCWW and with the approval of the rest of the CCWW leadership team, the training was not limited to ten to fifteen select adult members of the church. The training was made open to all adult men and women who attend morning Sunday school class due to the importance attached to biblical

interpretation by the church. Consequently, the class had a composition of adult men and women who participated in the training over a period of six weeks.

Also, I shared with the members of Shalom Christian Assembly Madison—the church I am planting in the city of Madison—that I would be doing a training on biblical interpretation at CCWW beginning on December 8, 2019, and I encouraged them to participate. Interestingly, the members of Shalom Christian Assembly Madison joined the class. The target group was adults whose age range from 20 to 85 years, and twenty-seven people from CCWW participated in the training. The target group was comprised of accountants, nurses, a veterinary doctor, a computer analyst, retirees, marketers, business people, post-graduate students, academicians, and others.

### **Preparing the Training Series**

The preparation for the training series began with the development of the curriculum during my Master of Divinity (MDiv) class on Hermeneutics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It later developed to completion during a doctoral class on Foundations of Teaching at the same school in July 2019. The curriculum was initially very vast, covering all the biblical genres: narrative, law, prophecy, poetry, parables, letters, and apocalyptic literature. But, it was modified to include the specific focus of the present project. A pre-course survey consisting of ten questions was developed for the purpose of achieving the first goal of the project: assessing the current ability of adult members of CCWW on biblical interpretation. I set up the expert panel who assessed the pre-course survey. The expert panel was composed of pastors, post-graduate students in theological institutions, missionaries, navigators, and public servants. Most of the expert-panel members had theological training.

The expert panel used the six-week curriculum developed for the training to assess the pre-course survey. The expert panel did not approve of the first submission of the pre-course survey for the following reasons: (1) the choice of words used was not

appropriate in a church context; (2) a few of the questions were very easy for participants to pick out the right answer; (3) grammatical and typographical corrections needed to be made; and (4) the participants needed to be informed that they were not to use Bible commentaries while taking the survey. All the corrections were noted, addressed accordingly, and sent back to the expert panel along with an explanation that the questions were intentionally structured to include both easy and difficult ones to answer. Hence, many of the questions were designed to be challenging, while a few were to be easily answered. The expert panel approved of the pre-course survey's second submission.

### **Pre-course Survey**

The pre-course survey consisted of ten multiple-choice questions. The ten questions were taken from the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), Joshua, 2 Samuel, the Synoptic Gospels, and the book of Acts. The pre-course survey (see appendix 1) was distributed online to the adult Sunday school class members a week before the commencement of the training along with a request to take the survey and send it back to me. Unfortunately, none of them took the survey before the beginning of the training. As a result, the pre-course survey instrument was administered to thirty people (27 from Cornerstone Church and 3 from Shalom Christian Assembly Madison) on the day the training began, December 8, 2019. At the beginning of the training, members were given twenty minutes to take the survey and then to hand it back to me. The pre-course survey of three Shalom Christian Assembly members and five of Cornerstone Church members (elders) and its data were excluded in the analysis of the results since those members were not part of the target group (i.e., Cornerstone Church).

The pre-course survey instrument consisted of ten questions that cover only narrative as a genre both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The questions centered on narrative because that genre is the focus of the project. The questions were in

a multiple-choice format, where each question has five optional answers, and participants could choose one of the five as the correct answer to the question. The pre-course survey instrument consists of both easy and challenging ten multiple-choice questions to be answered by the participants. The pre-course survey instrument was administered, and twenty-two copies were collected later that same day.

The first goal of this project was to assess the current ability of select adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. This goal was accomplished by administering a pre-course survey, which was used to measure ten-to-fifteen selected adult members' current ability to interpret Scripture accurately. The goal would be considered successful when the selected adult members took the pre-course survey and the surveys were graded for accuracy of interpretive ability.

The first goal of the project was achieved by developing a pre-course survey, running it through an expert panel, obtaining approval by the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and administering the survey to twenty-two adult members of CCWW in order to assess their current ability on biblical interpretation and scored them.

### **Development of the Training Content**

The content of the training was based on the focus of the project, which was to teach the basic principles of interpreting Scripture and to narrow it to the principle of interpreting biblical narrative. The project did not cover the principles of interpreting poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic literature, and letters—only narratives. The curriculum content consisted of the principles of interpreting Scripture accurately.

### **Participation**

The participation of the members was good from the first day the pre-course survey was administered. I planned to have between ten to fifteen adults in the class, but I had thirty adult participants (Cornerstone Church members) each Sunday, though all

those who were present on the first day were not consistent throughout the six-week training. On a general note, the participation was commendable since 60 percent of the participants attended three weeks of the training out of the six weeks. The training began on December 8 and was held again on December 15, 2019. Then, it went on a break because Christmas and the New Year needed to be celebrated. After the Christmas and New Year celebrations, the class resumed on January 5 until it ended on January 26, 2020.

### **Curriculum and Training Series Evaluators**

The CCWW leadership team were the evaluators of the curriculum and training series; they gave helpful feedback after assessing the impact and success of the training. The leadership team was composed of the church pastor and four church elders. Remarkably, the leadership team had the opportunity to read the project and the curriculum as well as participate in the training; but, they did not take the pre- and post-course survey instruments. The team was asked to listen to the teachings during training series, fill out the curriculum and training evaluation form using the developed rubric (see appendix 4), and then return the completed rubrics a week later. The evaluation rubric focused on eight issues:

1. The material is clearly relevant on accurate interpretation of Scripture.
2. The material is biblical and theologically consistent.
3. The material includes vital information on how to interpret Scripture accurately.
4. The material clearly lays out principles to be used to train others on accurate interpretation of Scripture.
5. The points of the material vividly support the purpose outlined in the thesis, which are easy to comprehend.
6. The lesson contains points of practical application.
7. The lesson is detailed in its coverage of the material.
8. Generally, the lesson is sharp, clear and could be communicated by another person.

## **Delivering the Training Series**

“Biblical Interpretation” was the title of the training series because I wanted participants to be preoccupied with it as what should guide them when reading the Scriptures, preparing a sermon, or teaching a class in the church—since Christians have the responsibility to prove themselves as capable workers who are not ashamed but rightly divide the Word of God (2 Tim 2:15). The following is a summary of each session of the six-week training (see also appendix 3).

Week 1, the first training, focused on the following:

1. What is the meaning of hermeneutics? Several definitions of hermeneutics were discussed.
2. Why are we having the training on biblical interpretation? The reasons why the training is on biblical interpretation including the following: Christian ministry, a good grasp of the Scriptures, the importance of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation, allowing the text to speak for itself, exposure to the principles of interpreting Scripture and its application, and having a great biblical and interpretational framework. The first training on December 8, 2019 was an introduction to subsequent training.

Week 2, the second training, was on “Basic Principles of Interpreting Scripture” and focused on the following:

1. The manner in which Bible writers convey their message to the initial recipients. The Bible writers communicated to their initial audience in a way they understood using communicative language and standards without any secret code, except on a few occasions, when they used parables, riddles, and symbols to communicate to their audience.
2. The Bible is difficult to understand without conscious effort because it is written in a foreign language to people with different backgrounds, cultures, and lifestyles.
3. There are certain tools or principles to use and observe in order to understand and interpret the Bible accurately.
4. The principles are literary context, historical-cultural background, word meaning, and grammatical relationships because an acceptable meaning of a text reflects those four principles.
5. The literary context, the king in the interpretation of a text, was the first principle discussed, including the importance of literary context. What is immediate context?

Week 3, the third training, continued on the basic principles of interpreting Scripture, focusing on the literary context (whole-book context and whole-Bible context)

and the historical-cultural background:

1. The purpose(s) of the book, its outline, the structure, and parallel passages that treat the same subject.
2. The parallel passages in the book written by the same author that treat the same subject.
3. Parallel passages written by different authors in the same Testament that address the same subject.
4. Parallel passages written by different authors in a different Testament that treat the same subject.
5. Under historical-cultural background/context: perspective, mindset, contextualization, and resourceful materials to use to discover the historical and cultural background in the passage.

Week 4, the fourth training, treated the principles of wording meaning and grammatical relationships, focusing on the following:

1. What is the word meaning/study and grammatical connection in a sentence?
2. The importance of word study.
3. The importance of words in communication involves knowing their nature, range of meanings, the overlapping nature of words, and the connotative and denotative nature of words.
4. How to do a word study.
5. Resources that will help a person to do an effective word study and discover the grammatical relationships of a sentence.

Week 5, the fifth training, was on the principles of interpreting biblical narrative, beginning with an introduction that highlighted how narratives are interpreted differently than poetry, letters, prophecy, and other genres. For biblical interpretation to be achieved, the principles for interpreting each genre must be applied. Thus, the following was discussed:

1. The different types of biblical narrative.
2. The principles of interpreting different types of biblical narrative.
3. Key terms in understanding biblical narratives.

Week 6, the sixth training, was the continuation of the principles of

interpreting biblical narrative. The discussion focused on the following:

1. The different types of biblical narrative.
2. The principles of interpreting different types of biblical narrative.
3. The other principles of interpreting biblical narrative.
4. The conclusion of the training series.

From the beginning of week 2, the training began with an exercise on a question picked from the pre-course survey already taken by the participants on week 1 of the training. The question was looked at by everyone to figure out the right answer. The right answer was not given by the facilitator because he planned that the class would revisit the question at the end of the training that week to ascertain whether they comprehended the lesson taught. In weeks 4 and 5, the exercise was done, but it did not kick off the class because some clarifications needed to be made. The trainings were structured to begin and end with an exercise from the pre-course survey. Discussion time was structured into the training, which took place in the second half of each training during a ten-minute period. Thus, ten minutes were allotted for participant questions toward the end of the training. An interjection was allowed if it was for clarification on the comment the facilitator made a few minutes prior during the training. The six-week training ended on an appreciative note to the participants, accompanied by a reminder that interpreting Scripture accurately is rewarding and thrilling, though it requires discipline, commitment, and time. The post-survey instrument was administered on the final day of the training (week 6).

### **The Post-Course Survey Instrument**

The post-course survey (see appendix 2) differs from the pre-course survey in terms of the number of questions on the instrument and its structure. However, they share certain similarities; for example, the first ten questions on both surveys center only on the narrative genre of the Bible. Having the post-course survey different from the pre-course

survey was born out of a discussion I had with my supervisor in January over the issue of using the *t*-test or other measurements to score my instruments and adding a few hybrid questions. He approved of my adding a new set of ten questions to the post-course survey since they would prove whether participants improved in their ability to interpret Scripture accurately, and he approved of my using a *t*-test to score my surveys. I developed the post-course survey and sent it to the expert panel for assessment. The first submission was not approved, and the expert panel gave the following critiques: the ten new questions seemed to be easily answerable compared to the pre-course survey, and five questions needed to be added that covered some of the concepts discussed during the training. I made the recommended corrections to the post-course survey instrument and then sent it back to the expert panel. The second submission of the post-course survey was approved.

In line with my supervisor's counsel, the post-course survey instrument had ten new multiple-choice questions that were entirely different from the pre-course survey. Also, the post-course survey consisted of two levels: ten multiple-choice questions and nine hybrid questions. The expert panel suggested the inclusion of five hybrid questions in the survey after its assessment in order to test the participants on the concepts discussed during the training. The different nature of the post-course survey instrument, including the inclusion of the five hybrid questions, was approved by the supervisor. However, the results of the hybrid questions were not added to the data collected and analyzed; only the results of the ten multiple-choice questions were used. The hybrid questions were added to evaluate the impact and success of the curriculum and the training series. The post-survey instrument was sent to the participants online to complete; participants were then to return it to me online or bring it on the last day of the training. Unfortunately, no one completed the post-course survey online, so I administered the survey instrument to participants on the final day of training. They were given until the end of the morning church service to return it to me. It was emphasized

that only those who participated in the pre-course survey would be allowed to take the post-course survey. Since we have a number tag, it was easy to figure out those who did and did not attend the training the first week. When the post-course survey instrument was collected at the end of the training, there were only fifteen people who took the pre-course survey instrument, while seven were absent for one reason or the other.

### **Curriculum and Training Series Evaluation**

First, the curriculum and training evaluation form was developed and sent to the evaluators, the CCWW leadership team. The evaluators assessed the evaluation form and it approved in the first submission. After the six weeks of training, the evaluation form was sent to each of the leadership team members who served as evaluators for them to turn it one week later. The aim was to assess whether the curriculum and the training were successful in meeting the goals of the project. The evaluation forms were sent in by each of the evaluators, and then they were thoroughly reviewed. The rubric had four criteria for evaluation, ranging from 1 to 4 (1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary).

Four of the evaluators gave positive feedback, with every evaluation item being marked as either “sufficient” or “exemplary,” except one (“The lesson contains points of practical application”), which was marked “require attentions” by one evaluator. The evaluator gave the following suggestion toward improving the training series: “There would be benefit in including a primary purpose for each specific lesson, an introductory illustration of some kind, and case studies that would allow for discussion and implementation.” Meanwhile, another evaluator marked “sufficient” on item 5 (“The points of the material vividly support the purpose outlined in the thesis which are easy to comprehend”) yet commented, “If time permitted, more focus on personal application, and how it relates to specific situations, popular misinterpretation, etc., would have been helpful.” Another evaluator marked “sufficient” on item 5 yet commented, “Yes—

however, his before/after questionnaire could be improved upon by having more concise answers to choose from. In some cases, answers sounded similar.” The same evaluator gave the following comment on item 8 (“Generally, the lesson is sharp, clear and could be communicated by another person”): “The only comment is I think your PowerPoint needs to be a bit shorter and leave more opportunities for Q&A and discussion.” I do realize that time constraints probably played a factor on this item.

Table 2. Completed curriculum and training evaluation

Criteria	1	2	3	4
The material is clearly relevant on accurate interpretation of Scripture.	0	0	0	5
The material is biblical and theologically consistent.	0	0	1	4
The material includes vital information on how to interpret Scripture accurately.	0	0	0	5
The material clearly lays out principles to be used to train others on accurate interpretation of Scripture.	0	0	1	4
The points of the material vividly support the purpose outlined in the thesis which are easy to comprehend.	0	0	2	3
The lesson contains points of practical application.	0	1	2	2
The lesson is detailed in its coverage of the material	0	0	4	1
Generally, the lesson is sharp, clear and could be communicated by another person.	0	1	3	1

Generally, the evaluators were appreciative of the efforts, hard work, and smooth presentation of the training materials for them to learn the principles of interpreting Scripture accurately. I appreciated the evaluators for their honesty in expressing their thoughts on the training, which showed that I needed to do a more practical application, case studies, question-and-answer sections, and discussion as well as to work on the PowerPoint slides despite the limited time available for the training.

The second goal of the project was to develop a curriculum to train selected adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. Also, the curriculum was developed using several hermeneutics books and other relevant books, and the goal was measured by the teaching pastor and the leadership team of CCWW's using the rubric to evaluate the teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. The goal was considered successfully met when an 85 percent minimum evaluation criterion was met or exceeded. If the minimum requirement was not achieved, there would be a review of the curriculum to address the weaknesses identified by the evaluation.

The second goal of this project was achieved in view of the fact that a curriculum was developed to train adult members of CCWW over a period of six weeks on biblical interpretation. Hermeneutical books and other relevant resources were used in the development of the curriculum, and the curriculum and training rubric was used in evaluating the teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum by the teaching pastor and the leadership team of CCWW. The evaluation report recorded a successful achievement of more than eighty-five percent.

### ***T-Test***

A five-point scale was used to determine numeric values for each question of the survey, with each question having the desired highest possible score of five points. Each person's scores were totaled, and those who completed both a pre- and post-course survey instrument were compared using a one-tail paired *t*-test, which showed no statistically significant improvement ( $t_{(14)} = 1.26, p = .2280$ ) in participants' ability to interpret Scripture accurately (see appendix 5). The two surveys were administered to twenty-two participants, but only data from fifteen participants were collected and analyzed because seven people did not complete the post-course survey. After the data was gathered and computed in a spreadsheet, the results showed an average decrease of 0.65 points for those who filled out both surveys.

The third goal of this project was to improve the ability of selected adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. The goal was measured by administering the post-course survey to the same members who completed the pre-course survey and comparing the results using a *t*-test. The goal would be considered successfully met when the *t*-test demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course surveys. Sadly, the third goal of this project was not achieved by developing a new set of questions for the post-course survey, running it through an expert panel, and administering it to the same members who completed the pre-course survey. After comparing the results using the *t*-test, there was no positive, statistically significant difference in the ability of the adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the project preparation actions, discussed the three goals of the project, and analyzed the results. The assessment is that the goals of this project were not met, and the *t*-test results concerning the pre- and post-course surveys showed that there was no positive, statistically significant difference in the ability of the adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. However, I am thankful to God for the knowledge acquired and the exposure to many insights in the course of this research. Moreover, I am grateful to God for the privilege of having been used to train his children on the principles of biblical interpretation. The time spent in the course of this project—in reading, writing, preparing, training, and learning—have been worthwhile to the glory of God. I would gladly do it again and again to equip God’s people to present the scriptural messages biblically. The evaluation of the project is discussed in chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The desire to see Scripture interpreted correctly inside and outside of the church has been my burden since the day I knew how to interpret Scripture accurately. My prayer has been that every member of Cornerstone Church Waterloo, Wisconsin, would improve in the skill of interpreting the Scriptures correctly. The CCWW leadership team has been doing great work in teaching the truth to the members, and the members love the Lord and desire to grow in their faith and relationship with Christ. This chapter presents the evaluation of the project's purpose and goals, the positive accomplishments of the project, its pitfalls, and what would have been done differently to improve the effectiveness of the project.

#### **Evaluation of Project Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to improve the ability of adult members of CCWW in biblical interpretation through training. My burden to train Christians in biblical interpretation started many years ago because of the presence of unbiblical teachings peddled in the media and churches, particularly in Nigeria, where I lived. The humiliation, disrespect, abuse, and death that people are exposed to due to a lack of understanding God's Word is pathetic. Hosea says, "My people perish because of lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6). The ability to interpret the Scriptures accurately will not happen automatically if Christians are not willing to be disciplined on the principles of biblical interpretation. After being taught, Christians need to spend quality time reading the Bible on their own and to do an in-depth study of the Word using the principles taught to them on a daily basis through the power of the Holy Spirit. Then, they will grow in their ability

to interpret Scripture accurately. Learning the principles is excellent, but without using the principles in daily to study the Word, no growth will be actualized. Every Christian has the responsibility of studying the Scripture to grow spiritually as well as to disciple others (Heb 5:11-15).

### **Evaluation of the Project Goals**

In line with the purpose of this project, the project goals were suitable for improving adult members' ability on biblical interpretation at CCWW. The project had three goals: (1) assess the current ability of selected adult members of CCWW on biblical interpretation; (2) develop a curriculum to train selected adult members of CCWW to interpret the Bible accurately; and (3) improve the ability of selected adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately.

#### **Goal 1: Assessment of Current Ability in Biblical Interpretation**

The first goal was to assess the current ability of selected adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. The assessment provided in clear terms the current ability of adult members in biblical interpretation. The goal was achieved when the pre-course survey was administered to twenty-two adult members of CCWW and the results were scored. The results of the pre-course survey indicated that the members had some knowledge of biblical interpretation, but there was a need for improvement. By God's grace, I have enjoyed ten years of partnership with CCWW as their missionary in Nigeria, and I have been privileged to visit the church twice within those ten years. Presently, I have been serving as one of the church's deacons for almost two years, and I have seen the hard work and diligence put in by the pastor and the elders in presenting biblically sound teachings on the pulpit, during Sunday school, and during Bible study times. I can boldly attest that the performance of the members in the pre-course survey was the fruit of the pastor and elders' labor.

I think the discussion in chapter 2 of this project—which emphasizes that pastors must teach and preach the Word accurately as well as give room for members to learn the principles of biblical interpretation—align with the above comment. The exciting part of the pre-course survey is that it exposed the current ability of the adult members on biblical interpretation. After the pre-course survey, a few of the members confessed that they thought they knew how to explain scriptural passages, but they realized that they know nothing. So they were willing to learn biblical interpretation.

Also, the members' willingness to learn biblical interpretation connects with the rationale of this project, which was to improve their ability to interpret Scripture accurately as they engage in church ministry. Christian ministry involves the teaching, learning, and application of the Bible either in youth ministry, children ministry, missions, discipleship, pastoral ministry, Christian education, and the like.

## **Goal 2: Curriculum Development for Training**

The second goal of this project was to develop a curriculum to train adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. The curriculum was designed for training adult members for six weeks. The accomplishments of this goal were fantastic given its impartation in the lives of the participants. First, the curriculum provided an easy-to-read manual and principles of biblical interpretation that spared laypeople from spending so much time in reading many theological books full of jargon that they cannot comprehend for the sole purpose of learning biblical interpretation.

Second, the curriculum opened the participants' eyes to see that the ability to interpret Scripture is thrilling and time-consuming but can be learned without people's having to enroll in the theological institutions. Also, to a certain extent, they can now preach and teach biblically, like pastors, missionaries, and evangelists who have had theological training.

Third, the curriculum—through the basic principles of biblical interpretation

that were taught and the several exercises that went along with them—provided a handy tool to the participants in having a good grasp of the passages in the Bible. Further, the curriculum had a particular emphasis that good preachers and teachers of the Word ensure that they understand the passage well in accordance with the author’s intent before they apply it to their lives. In addition, the curriculum emphasized that it is the responsibility of readers first to observe the text, then to interpret it, and finally to apply it. The principles of biblical interpretation discussed in chapter 3 were taught to the participants. Indeed, they have become well-equipped to interpret Scripture accurately, and they stand a chance of being used by God to teach and disciple others in the matter of Christian faith. Also, they will be able to discern the truth from the falsehoods peddled in society.

Fourth, I witnessed participants’ spark and deep hunger and desire for God’s Word during the six-week training period during which the curriculum was put in use. The curriculum—through the training—helped them to understand the biblical-interpretative framework of the Bible. They understood that the Bible is about the history of redemption, beginning from Genesis and culminating in Revelation. The sixty-six books of the Bible intertwine to tell a glorious story of God’s creation, the fall and sinful nature of man, and the provision of God for the redemption of his people through Jesus Christ. God’s covenant with humanity is the spine that ties the storyline together.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, the members’ participation was encouraging in that training attendance was still high even on the day (Sunday) when there was a snowstorm the night before (Saturday). During the six weeks of training, there was never less than thirty participants in every training. The only thing that can account for the deep hunger and desire for Scripture is the relevance of the curriculum to biblical interpretation.

The deep hunger and desire toward learning biblical interpretation were

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Rose, 2015), 20.

propelled by the desire to serve effectively in church ministry, which involves the accurate teaching and application of Scripture. That reality connects with the core teaching of chapter 2 regarding the Hebrew Christians in Hebrew 5:11-14. The Hebrew Christians preferred to be fed milk like babies instead of solid food despite their years in the faith. They did not want to grow, so they were always being taught the simple issues of Christian faith when they should have been teaching others. Conversely, the training participants desired to learn to teach and disciple others on biblical interpretation.

### **Goal 3: Improvement of Ability to Interpret Scripture Accurately**

The third goal was to improve the ability of selected adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. The goal was not considered successfully met because the *t*-test demonstrated no positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-project surveys. The following may account for why this goal was not: First, the Sunday school time of one hour allocated for the training was not enough for the curriculum to be taught in detail, with practical applications, case studies, question-and-answer sections, and discussions. Second, the training should have been done in thirteen weeks instead of the six weeks in which it was done. Third, as a result of a short period of six weeks allocated to the training, lots of information was given out in one-hour periods, which was too much information for average attendees. Fourth, most of the participants in the training did not have a book in which to take notes of what was taught in order to remember them despite the two weeks break due to the Christmas and New Year celebrations; they just listened to the facilitator for six weeks without writing down anything. Fifth, the accent of the facilitator contributed to the issue since he is not an American but a Nigerian. Some of the participants struggled to understand some of the things he said due to his accent.

Sixth, the participants' failure to take both the pre- and post-project surveys online before the commencement of the training contributed to the issue. Since the

surveys were not taken online and sent back to me *before* the training, I had to administer the surveys *during* the training, giving participants some time to fill them out and then hand them back to me. Such an atmosphere tends to pressure participants to not think through the questions deeply before filling in the answers, especially when most of the answers cannot be selected easily at face value. Seventh, the answers to the questions in the surveys were not easy to pick out on face value; they required reading in between the lines and in-depth thinking for participants to be able to select the right answers. Eighth, each of the PowerPoint slides had lots of information to comprehend within a short time, and at times the font size of the slides was so small that elderly participants could not read them. Ninth and lastly, the sample size was small, which was worsened by the absence of seven participants who missed the post-project survey, which led to having only fifteen participants as the sample population.

Meanwhile, the third goal was not met because of *t*-test results did not show a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course surveys concerning the ability of adult members of CCWW to interpret Scripture accurately. However, the goal may have been met in the long run because of the verbal testimonies and responses of those who participated in the post-course survey. In addition, the participation of the CCWW leadership team in the training and their vision to begin the training of future leaders of the church—teenagers—on the principles of biblical interpretation will cause them to fall in love with Scripture at their young age, enhance their reading and comprehension of Scripture, help them stand firm in the faith, and cultivate and prepare them to teach others.

In the same vein, the training should be used by church leaders to train others—not only teenagers—on biblical interpretation, thereby enhancing discipleship within and without the church, making pastoral work easy for the leadership team, and reducing the influence of false teachers who spread heresies in society (Matt 28:19-20). Ultimately, the impartation of this goal should promote the place of the Holy Spirit and

his role in using the abilities of individuals to interpret Scripture accurately (Acts 8:26-35) since the presence of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives does not negate people's need to learn the principles of biblical interpretation.

### **Strengths of the Project**

The project demonstrated some strengths even though there was no positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course surveys with regard to improving the ability of adult members of CCWW in biblical interpretation. First, there was enthusiasm in the participants to know the principles of biblical interpretation. The Sunday school attendance during the training was commendable even on the day (Sunday) when there was a snowstorm the night before (Saturday). Second, the responses to the hybrid questions in the post-project survey instrument indicated that all the participants thought that the training was helpful and impactful to them and that they would recommend the training to others if it were to be held again. Third, one of the curriculum evaluators, responding to item 4 of the evaluation rubric ("The material clearly lays out principles to be used to train others on accurate interpretation of Scripture"), said, "The material is excellent for training those who train others." Fourth, the participants acknowledged that training on biblical interpretation is critical due to the widespread misuse of the Scriptures and false doctrine, which is more and more prevalent and accessible due to social media and the internet.

Fifth, one participant responded to one of the hybrid questions in the post-project survey ("Have you found this class helpful? Please explain below"), saying, "Thank you so much for presenting this material—you gave so much information and it would take a lot of studies to retain it all. It has been very helpful and will help to review." That response was a demonstration of this project's strength. Sixth, the participants are now better equipped to study the Scriptures, based on a comment from a participant on the post-course survey instrument: "I have a better study methods; I am

better equipped to study a passage.” Seventh, an curriculum evaluator, responding to item 3 of the evaluation rubric (“The material includes vital information on how to interpret Scripture accurately”), said, “Very thorough and comprehensive. I love how it brings all these principles together in one place.” Eighth and lastly, I was given the following counsel by an elderly participant who attended all of the trainings:

Do not leave the teaching of the Word to do administrative work and other things in the ministry. Because church planters fall into that trap of doing all the work (everything) in the church since they are grooming leaders that will faithfully lead other aspects of the church ministry in the future. As a result, they spend less time in studying to teach God’s Word to God’s people. If you spend less time studying the Word, the members will definitely know.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

Every project does have its weaknesses. The weaknesses of this project are as following: First, the Sunday school period chosen for the training was not the best because of the duration factor. As a result, there was not time enough for the curriculum to be taught in detail, with practical applications, case studies, question-and-answer sections, and discussions. Second, the decision to do the training in six weeks was wrong because of the vast nature of the curriculum. Third, a lot of information was given out due to the six-week structure of the curriculum, which ought to have been broken into thirteen weeks to avoid the average attendees been overwhelmed. Fourth, most of the participants did not take notes in a book of what was taught so that they could review the material when they get home and not forget it. Fifth, the accent of the facilitator was a weakness since he could not communicate like Americans. Consequently, some of the participants struggled to understand him.

Sixth, the participants’ failure to take the pre- and post-project surveys online before the training began led to the administration of the surveys during the training days, which exposed participants to unwarranted pressure while completing the survey instruments. Seventh, the PowerPoint slides had a lot of information to comprehend within a short time, and at times the font size of the slides was so small that elderly

participants could not read them. Eight, the sample size was small, aggravated by the absence of seven participants who missed the post-project survey, which led to only having fifteen participants as the sample population. Ninth and lastly, the training caused one participant to be hesitant to interpret the Scriptures (s)he had been exposed to adverse implications of unbiblical interpretation as well as several rules to observe in biblical interpretation. In the post-project survey, the participant noted, “I enjoyed learning about context. However, now I am a little hesitant to interpret Scripture because I do not want to do it incorrectly.”

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

If I were to do the project again, I would do a few things differently: First, I would choose another period for the meeting; I may do it at men’s breakfast meeting that lasts for two hours, or I may set up another meeting for the training that does not meet during the Sunday school period. Consequently, I would have enough time for the curriculum to be taught in detail, with practical applications, case studies, question-and-answer sections, and discussions. Second, the training would be done in thirteen weeks rather than in six weeks due to the vast nature of the curriculum. Third, the information would be broken down into weeks that CCWW members are used to so as to avoid burdening them with too much information to grasp within a short amount of time. Fourth, I would encourage each participant to have a notebook in which to write down things to review when they go home so that they do not forget what is taught in the training.

Fifth, I would work on my accent so that I can communicate well to American participants. Sixth, I would give the participants two weeks to take the surveys and include constant reminders, as opposed to a week, and I would avoid administering the surveys during training days, which exposes participants to unwarranted pressure. Seventh, I would make the PowerPoint slides shorter, reduce the amount of information

that participants are required to comprehend within a short amount of time, and increase the font size on the slides so that elderly participants can read them. Eighth and lastly, I would use a larger sample size, even it meant moving from a training series to a sermon series.

### **Theological Reflections**

Through this project, God has done great things in the lives of participants, beginning with me. I am very grateful to God for teaching his Word every day and using me to train others on biblical interpretation at CCWW. This project has allowed me to make amazing theological reflections regarding biblical interpretation. First, biblical interpretation cannot take place without the work of the Holy Spirit because he is responsible for illuminating the minds of believers to understand God when he speaks through his Word. The Holy Spirit speaks to believers through God's Word because he resides in them, unlike nonbelievers because they have no relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Hence, they do not have fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, nonbelievers cannot understand Scripture, interpret it, or apply it even if they attend church services every Sunday because the Holy Spirit does not reside in them. According to Timothy Paul Jones, "Unless the Spirit is at work within us, we may hear the words of the Scripture, we will never understand Scripture rightly or apply the message in our lives (James 1:22-2:26)."<sup>2</sup> The apostle Paul adds, "Now the natural man doesn't receive the things of God's Spirit for they are foolishness to him, and he can't know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). He also says, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18). Biblical interpretation convicts nonbelievers of their sins and draws them into the saving knowledge of Christ so that they believe in

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<sup>2</sup>Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 19.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross for their sins. Also, biblical interpretation enhances the spread of the undiluted Word of God and causes spiritual growth in people's lives and that of the church.

Second, the pastors and the church leadership have the responsibility of teaching and preaching the Scripture accurately, training others to learn the principles of biblical interpretation, and supporting those who desire to go for theological training so that they can be effective in the presentation of God's Word accurately and advance the kingdom of God (2 Tim 2:2; 4:2). Third, Christians have the responsibility to study God's Word, understand it, interpret it, and apply it in their lives in order to teach others both within and without the church (Heb 5:11-14).

### **Personal Reflections**

I give God the glory for the wonderful journey of writing this project and for the immense support of CCWW, both spiritually and materially, in ensuring that the project was a success. The presence of the Holy Spirit and his illumination work in the lives of Christians does not negate the importance of sitting down under a pastor or leader or going for theological training to learn how to do biblical interpretation. The Bible is a very rich book, and it demands believers' diligence, discipline, and commitment to studying it, with the intention that they grow in the knowledge of God's Word, enhance their relationship with God, contend for the faith entrusted to Christians, and disciple others to join the workforce of God's servants. In the quest to interpret Scripture accurately, Christians will be exposed to other resources that open doors to understanding the history, culture, and languages that are part of the Bible we read today. Consultation with these resources does not in any way diminish the sufficiency of the Scripture; rather, it enhances our understanding and application of it.

### **Conclusion**

The chapter has discussed the evaluation of the project's purpose and goals, the

positive accomplishments of the project, its pitfalls, and what would be done differently to improve the effectiveness of the project. This project is a work of joy to me because it has been a privilege to write on an issue for which I have a burden—to educate Christians on biblical interpretation and its importance in their relationship with God and advancement of the gospel of Christ. I thank God and the leadership of CCWW for giving me the opportunity to train the members on the principles of biblical interpretation. Truly, God spoke to me through the rigorous work of the project, and I learned a lot while writing each chapter and through my interactions with the participants during the training. By God’s grace, as a church planter, I will train the members of Shalom Christian Assembly Madison and others on biblical interpretation using this project.

## APPENDIX 1

### PRE-PROJECT SURVEY INSTRUMENT ON ACCURATE BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research you are about to partake in is designed to identify the current ability of select adult members of CCWW in accurately interpreting the Bible. Onwuka J. Ugorji conducts this research for the purpose of collecting data for his ministry project. You will perform this survey twice, once at the beginning and again at the end of the project. Please check one right answer out of the multiple answers under each question below. Any information you provide will be sternly held in confidence, and your name will never be reported or identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The act of completing the survey and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent to use your responses in this project.

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

Questions:

1. What is the most biblical interpretation of this verse, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)?
  - a). The serpent, his seed, and the woman’s seed will not see eye to eye.
  - b). There will always be warfare between Satan, his seeds, and the woman, her seed. Eventually, the woman’s seed will kill the serpent and his seeds.
  - c). The woman’s seeds will defeat Satan referring to Cain, Abel, and Seth.
  - d). The serpent and his seeds refer to Satan and demons while the woman’s seed refers to Christ and his followers. It points to Christ’s victory over Satan on the cross but he will suffer in the hands of men.
  - e). The serpent and his children will always be killed by humans wherever they are seen.
  
2. What is the most biblical interpretation of this passage, “But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” (Mark 10:14-15)?
  - a). A person needs to be a little child to have eternal life.

- b). All little children will inherit heaven.
  - c). Jesus loves children so much that he prefers having them in heaven than adults.
  - d). Jesus wants all his followers to behave childishly.
  - e). Jesus demands his followers to trust him with that kind of childlike faith characterized by simplicity, humility, and purity in order to have eternal life.
3. What is the most biblical interpretation of the passage, Deuteronomy 23: 24-25 “When you come into the vineyard of your neighbor, then you may eat grapes as you please and until you are full, but you shall not put any into your container. When you come into the standing grain of your neighbor, then you may pluck ears with your hand, but you may not swing a sickle among the standing grain of your neighbor.”?
- a). Farmers should be gracious to love their neighbors as they love themselves.
  - b). It is permission to go into somebody’s farm to harvest farm produce if you have none at home.
  - c). Every farm belongs to everyone in the community including travelers.
  - d). The existence of this law is an indication of God’s accommodation of lazy people in society.
  - e). Travelers now have the right to go into any farm while hungry to eat grapes and harvest more that will sustain them throughout the journey.
4. What is the most biblical interpretation of the passage, 2 Samuel 6:6-8, “Now David and all the house of Israel were dancing before Yahweh, with all kinds of musical instruments made from ash trees, and with zithers, harps, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals. When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzza reached out to the ark of God and took hold of it, because the oxen had stumbled. Then the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Uzza, and God struck him down there because of the indiscretion, and he died there beside the ark of God. David was angry because Yahweh had burst out against Uzza, and he called that place Perez-Uzza until this day.”?
- a). Uzza died because of his foolishness by trying to prevent the ark from falling.
  - b). The excitement of David as a result of the return of the ark cost Uzza his life.
  - c). Uzza’s carelessness and an act of irreverence were reasons for his death.
  - d). God’s harsh discipline meted on Uzza is an indication that sacred tasks must be done in sacred manner.
  - e). The roughness and bad nature of the way caused the stumbling of the oxen that threatened to throw the ark from the cart. The nature of the road cost Uzza’s death.
5. What is the most biblical interpretation of this text, Act 2: 17-21 “And it will be in the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old

men will dream dreams. And even on my male slaves and on my female slaves I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. And I will cause wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun will be changed to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes. And it will be that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”?

- a). The text has come to fulfillment completely.
  - b). The text is yet to be fulfilled on earth.
  - c). The text is fulfilled partially now though Christians wait for the complete fulfillment in the future.
  - d). The text is not expected to come to fulfillment.
  - e). The text will be fulfilled in Christ’s second coming.
6. What is the most biblical interpretation of John 6:53-55, “Then Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves! The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”?”
- a). Jesus demands that one must drink his blood and eat flesh literally in order to have eternal life and experience resurrection when he comes.
  - b). Jesus says that without consistent participation in the Lord’s supper no eternal life and resurrection to the fellow.
  - c). Jesus promises eternal life and resurrection to many that witnessed his suffering and death on the cross.
  - d). Jesus speaks about the atonement for man’s sins on the cross which gives eternal life and resurrection to those who have a personal faith in him.
  - e). Jesus does not know what he was talking about because it is against the law to eat or drink blood.
7. What is the most biblical interpretation of Luke 8:19-21, “Now his mother and brothers came to him, and they were not able to meet with him because of the crowd. And it was reported to him, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside wanting to see you.” But he answered and said to them, “These are my mother and my brothers—the ones who hear the word of God and do it.”?”
- a). Jesus negates the family relationship with his siblings since they don’t believe in him nor care about his ministry.
  - b). Everyone is part of Jesus’ family, no matter their color or lifestyle. If you are human, automatically you are part of Jesus’ family.
  - c). Jesus says that blood relations are not important than one’s family of faith.
  - d). Indirectly, Jesus says I do not like the family I belong to.
  - e). Jesus says my family members are those that hear God’s words and put it in practice, which cut cross every tribe, ethnicity, race, nationality.

8. What is the most biblical interpretation of Mark 2:18-19, “And John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and they came and said to him, “Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “The bridegroom’s attendants are not able to fast while the bridegroom is with them, are they? As long a time *as* they have the bridegroom with them, they are not able to fast.”?”
- Jesus does not support the voluntary fasting on Monday and Thursday every week imposed by the Pharisees in addition to annual fasting on Atonement Day as an act of repentance.
  - Jesus condemns fasting in a person’s life since he/she has a personal relationship with him, the bridegroom.
  - Jesus’ disciples love food so much that is why they do not fast like others.
  - Jesus does not disagree with the act of fasting so far it is done properly; besides, his presence with them will not allow that since fasting signifies sorrow in the presence of the bridegroom.
  - It is inappropriate for Jesus’ disciples to fast since they have all they need.
9. What is the most biblical interpretation of Exodus 14:13, “And Moses said to the people, “You must not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of Yahweh, which he will accomplish for you today, because the Egyptians whom you see today you will see never again.”?”
- The Egyptian soldiers are about to run back to Egypt.
  - Egyptians are about to be eliminated from the face of the earth.
  - The Lord will give them deliverance by fighting for them.
  - Moses says that to calm them down and take that pressure off his shoulders.
  - None of the above.
10. What is the most biblical interpretation of Joshua 1:7-8, “Only be strong and very courageous to observe diligently the whole law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn aside from it, to the right or left, so that you may succeed wherever you go. The scroll of this law will not depart from your mouth; you will meditate on it day and night so that you may observe diligently all that is written in it. For then you will succeed in your ways and prosper.”?”
- Joshua have no choice but to be strong and courageous as well as to carefully obey all the laws of Moses.
  - The condition for Joshua to be strong and courageous depend on his obedience in keeping the laws.
  - Joshua’s prosperity and success in battles rest on his courage to talk and think about the law and to obey it fully by living it out.
  - God’s command to Joshua is to let him know that the task will be very tough.
  - If Joshua does not want to be a great leader like Moses; he should do what he likes.

## APPENDIX 2

### POST-PROJECT SURVEY INSTRUMENT ON ACCURATE BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research you are about to partake in is designed to identify the current ability of select adult members of CCWW in accurately interpreting the Bible. Onwuka J. Ugorji conducts this research for the purpose of collecting data for his ministry project. You will perform this survey twice, once at the beginning and again at the end of the project. Please check one right answer out of the multiple answers under each question below. Any information you provide will be sternly held in confidence, and your name will never be reported or identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The act of completing the survey and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent to use your responses in this project.

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

Questions:

1. What is the most biblical interpretation of this verse, “Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:50-52)?
  - a). Jesus is against one owning a sword for protection and self-defense.
  - b). Jesus lives to accomplish his father’s will and his kingdom will be advanced not by sword but by faith and obedience to God.
  - c). Jesus was happy that his disciple could fought for him against those that wanted to get hold of him.
  - d). Jesus says that those that are fond of sword will die by sword.
  - e). Jesus says it is better one is killed than he/she takes someone life in a fight.
  
2. What is the most biblical interpretation of this passage, “Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

(Numbers 11:4-7)?

- a). Israelites missed the food they ate in Egypt while in slavery.
  - b). The Egyptian food was more sumptuous than the manna God provided.
  - c). The non-Israelites who left Egypt with Israelites were the ones that complained of the manna.
  - d). Israelites and other rebelled against Moses and God over what they did not have (Egyptian food) rather than being grateful for deliverance from slavery in Egypt and other mighty deeds during the journey.
  - e). God couldn't afford to provide fish, cucumbers, onions, melons, leeks, and garlics to them; so he gave them manna from heaven.
3. What is the most biblical interpretation of the passage, Luke 7: 27-28 "This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."?
- a). Jesus contrasts life before Christ with life in its fullness in his kingdom.
  - b). Jesus contrasts the personality of the John the Baptist with individual Christians.
  - c). John the Baptist is the greatest man ever lived on planet earth.
  - d). John the Baptist was the last of the OT prophets as well as the last to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah.
  - e). Nobody accomplishes God-given purposes better than John the Baptist; however, those who come after him have greater spiritual heritage because they have vivid knowledge of Christ's death and resurrection.
4. What is the most biblical interpretation of the passage, 1 Samuel 17:36-38, "Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God. And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"?
- a). David brags about his expertise as a good shepherd that protects his flock of sheep from wild animals.
  - b). He will defeat the uncircumcised Philistine the same way he struck down the lions and bears that came after his sheep in the bush.
  - c). The Lord who gives him deliverance and victory over the wild animals will do the same over Goliath.
  - d). Saul's good wishes were what he needs to defeat the uncircumcised Philistine, Goliath.
  - e). A great moment for David to demonstrate to the public the skills he deploys in protecting his flock of sheep.
5. What is the most biblical interpretation of this text, Act 3: 4-9 "And Peter directed

his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God,"?

- a). Peter heals the crippled man with what he had, the ability to command one's attention.
  - b). The crippled man expects healing from Peter and John, not gifts.
  - c). The crippled man expects gifts from Peter and John, not healing particularly when Peter said "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you."
  - d). The crippled man was healed by the authority in the name of Jesus.
  - e). Christians have all they need to do exploit for the kingdom.
6. What is the most biblical interpretation of Genesis 18:19, "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."?
- a). Abraham has the responsibility of grooming his children and household after him in keeping the way of the Lord.
  - b). The fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham depends on his children and household walking in the way of the Lord.
  - c). God informed Abraham of his judgment over Sodom and Gomorrah because of his covenant with him and his special role in the plan of God.
  - d). Abraham is a chosen man of God whose children and household after him will point other nations to Yahweh as the only true God through their acts of righteousness and justice; then the promise will be fulfilled.
  - e). Abraham needs to communicate his faith to his children and household after him.
7. What is the most biblical interpretation of Deuteronomy 8:1-6, "The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him."?

- a). God’s commandment to Israelites and the treatment in the wilderness were not for their betterment.
  - b). God intends to remove everything about Egypt in the life of Israelites that is the reason behind the commandment and the treatment in the wilderness.
  - c). God punishes the Israelites in the wilderness because of their sin by feeding them manna and disciplines them harshly.
  - d). God reminds Israelites that the gift of life and fertility of land are byproduct of obedience to his commands and the wilderness experiences are geared to produce obedience and faith in them.
  - e). All of the above.
8. What is the most biblical interpretation of Exodus 12:24-28, “You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.”?
- a). God commands Israelites to dedicate a day to observe his presence in their midst in Egypt.
  - b). God disgraces Egypt a world power before community of nations in the manner in which he grants deliverance to Israelites.
  - c). God commands Israelites through Moses to observe the Passover in the Promised land, to teach their children its meaning; then, the people did so in worship and gratitude to God who grants them deliverance from centuries of slavery.
  - d). Israelites observes the Passover but did not care to teach their children its meaning so as to continue the religious tradition.
  - e). The Passover celebration reminds Israelites of God’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt.
9. What is the most biblical interpretation of Judges 17:6, “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”?
- a). It means everyone was a king to himself and his household since there is no King figure in existence.
  - b). Evil was prominent in the society since every individual determines what is good or bad in his/her life.
  - c). God gives them reprobate minds that they could not view evil lifestyle as evil before God and mankind.

- d). People reject God’s right way of living; consequently, they ended up doing what seems right at that time.
- e). None of the above.
10. What is the most biblical interpretation of John 12:39-43, “Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”?”
- a). People in Jesus’s day did not believe in him as the Messiah because they simply chose a lifestyle of resisting God and had become stiff-necked in their evil ways that they could not understand Jesus’ message.
- b). People chose not to believe in Jesus because he is not what they are in need of at that time.
- c). The people witnessed several unimaginable miracles Jesus wrought before their eyes but they chose not to relate those with what the Holy Book says about the Messiah.
- d).The people believed whatever they wanted to which were different from Jesus’ message.
- e). Many people did not believe in Jesus and his message because of fear of been persecuted.
11. What is a context of a sentence?
- a). The paragraph.
- b) The chapter before and after it.
- c) The preceding verses and after it
- d) The passages surrounding the sentence.
- e) The entire Bible.
12. What are the three context of a passage?
- a) Immediate, the parallel, and book context.
- b) Whole Bible, Book, and immediate context.
- c) Word studies, grammatical relationship, and book context.
- d) Grammatical relationship, immediate, and book context.
- e) Whole Bible, word studies, and narratives context.
13. What is immediate context of a passage?
- a) A material immediately before and after the passage; proceeding and succeeding paragraphs; subsection or a major book division in some cases.
- b) The paragraphs before and after the passage and immediate material before and after it.
- c) The subsection and the major division of the book.
- d) The parallel passages in the book and other books in the same Testament.

- e) It is the passage surround the passage.
14. What are the basic principles of interpreting Scripture?
- a) Narratives, poetry, letters, and apocalyptic literature.
  - b) Literary context, grammatical relationship, and narratives.
  - c) Literary context, historical-cultural context, and word studies.
  - d) Historical-cultural background, word meaning, literary context, and grammatical relationship.
  - e) Word meaning, narratives, literary context, grammatical relationship.
15. How to find the literary context of a book in which the passage occurs?
- a) Discover the purpose(s) of the book, the book outline, and parallel passages that treat the same subject.
  - b) The book outline, its purpose(s), and the parallel passages that treat the same subject.
  - c) Read the book twice; discover the purpose(s) of the book; and parallel passages that treat the same subject.
  - d) Find the immediate and the whole Bible context.
  - e) Reading the book repeatedly, discover the purpose(s) of the book, the book outline, and parallel passages that treat the same subject.

How many times were you able to attend the Bible interpretation class?

- a) 0 b) 1 c) 2 d) 3 e) 4 f) 5 g) 6

Have you found this class helpful?

- a) Yes b) No

Please explain below

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Having taken the class, I am better equipped to read and interpret the Bible accurately.

- a) Agree b) Disagree

Please explain below

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If this class were to be held again, would you recommend it to someone who has not taken it?

- a) Yes b) No

## APPENDIX 3

### PROJECT TRAINING SERIES

#### **Week 1 - Introduction to Biblical Interpretation**

##### **I. Introduction**

I am thankful to God Almighty for everything including leading me to this point in my education. Also, thankful to Pastor Aaron and the leadership of this local assembly, for their immense support and opportunity to teach principles of biblical interpretation for six weeks as part of my project and requirements to graduate from Southern. In addition, I want to thank you for been here this morning to be part of the Sunday school class as well as your participation in taking my survey instrument. Please I will like to have them at the end of this Sunday school class.

##### **The Syllabus & Course**

By God's grace, during these six weeks, we will mainly discuss the general/basic principles of interpreting Scripture and narrowing it to the principle of interpreting OT and NT narrative. This morning we are going to discuss the meaning of hermeneutics and what we stand to gain from it.

##### **II. Definition of Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is simply the practice and interpretation of biblical theories. In this class, we are going to lean on the practical, not philosophical hermeneutics. Scriptural interpretation is to properly and faithfully explain a text in speech or writing for the purpose of conveying the inspired author's meaning of the text, without neglecting divine

intent.<sup>1</sup> Jason DeRouchie added,

Narrowly defined, exegesis of Scripture is the personal discovery of what the biblical authors intended their texts to mean. Texts convey meaning; they do not produce it. Rather, following God’s leading, the biblical authors purposely wrote the words they did with specific sense and purpose. “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). We have to carefully read what the Lord through his human servants gives us in Scripture. Exegesis is about discovering what is there, which includes both the specific meaning that the authors convey and its implications—those inferences in a text of which the authors may or may not have been unaware but that legitimately fall within the principle or pattern of meaning that they willed.<sup>2</sup>

### III. Why Hermeneutics

#### ➤ *Christian Ministry*

Hermeneutics is important because Christian ministry is about learning and application of the Bible. Whatever one does, hermeneutics is involved, whether it is youth ministry or missions, discipleship, pastoral, education/theological training. As people go with great expectations when they get to see their doctors, mechanics so it applies to preachers and teachers of the Word; hence it takes great work and studying hermeneutics to meet those expectations.

#### ➤ *Prayer of Dependence on the Holy Spirit*

The interpretation of scripture begins with a prayer for guidance and understanding of the text by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives information and insights from the text as well as enables the mind to comprehend the text in line with the author’s intent and brings transformation through the word. Remember, John 5:39 the Jewish theologians, the world-class experts in interpreting the Bible missed the point of the Scripture because the Holy Spirit did not show them how to respond to God’s word. “Unless the Spirit is at work within

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), sect. A, q. 8, para. 2, Kindle.

<sup>2</sup>Jason DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), introduction, para. 2, Kindle.

us, we may hear the words of the Scripture, we will never understand Scripture rightly or apply the message in our lives (James 1:22-2:26).”<sup>3</sup>

Also, the fresh pastor, John Calvin once said, “Without the illumination of the Spirit, the Word will have no effect.” “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). The absence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person makes it difficult for him/her to understand the things of God including having the ability to interpret the Scripture accurately.

The Apostle Paul adds, “Now the natural man doesn’t receive the things of God’s Spirit for they are foolishness to him, and he can’t know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14) and “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18).

Besides, Jesus promised this to his disciples, “When the comforter will come, he will teach you all truth” (John 14:26b).

Someone said that reading the Bible without the Holy Spirit is like reading the Bible in a cave without a source of light, the map may be right in front of you but one will not figure out which way to go. As we read and interpret the Scripture, the Spirit shows us how the Word should reshape our lives. Certainly, God speaks to the reader/interpreter first as he showcases dependence on God through prayer for an understanding of the text and generates transformative results in his life and that of the church. If the author’s intent is not understood whatever one teaches/preaches becomes lies before God and his people. Absolutely, lies destroy

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<sup>3</sup>Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Rose, 2015), 19.

an individual and Christ's church. Having said that, using the principles of interpreting Scriptures are important in exegeting a passage. However, the starting point must be with prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit because the teacher/preacher is just a messenger of God, not the sender. Therefore, prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit and the use of the interpretation principles must be engaged in order to interpret Scripture accurately.

➤ *Allow the Text to Speak for Itself*

At times when it comes to biblical interpretation, readers bring something on the table while reading the text which causes them not to be objective. The reader needs to be aware of any baggage he brings to the table in view of his family, culture, training, or work backgrounds to avoid imposing personal meanings on the Scripture (“eisegesis, to “read into” a text what one wants it to mean”<sup>4</sup>) rather than allowing Scripture to speak for itself.<sup>5</sup> If we manipulate the text to fit our preconceived message, it will no longer be the Word of God proclaimed but rather our ideas shared.<sup>6</sup> The imposition of one's presupposition on the Scripture leads to teaching/preaching fallacy to God's people. Lies stick easily in people's minds but are very hard to debunk. It can take a pastor five years to build the church spiritually whereas it takes a teaching/message of thirty minutes to destroy the work of five years. We remember Paul's admonition in 1 Tim 4:16 regarding the negative effects of inaccurate interpretation of the Scripture on the preacher/teacher and the church, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers – 1 Timothy 4:16.

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<sup>4</sup>Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. and exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 57, Kindle.

<sup>5</sup>D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 126, Kindle.

<sup>6</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 50.

Therefore, the reader/interpreter must allow the text to speak to him/her to avoid the spread of falsehood that will ruin the church.

➤ *A Good Grasp of the Passage*

A good preacher/interpreter of the word ensures that he understands the passage very well according to the author's intent before applying it. The interpreter first observes the text (what does it say); secondly, interprets it (what does it mean); and then applies it (how does it apply to me). Observation beginning with reading the passage, identifying words, phrases/clauses, prepositions, verbs, adverbs, the figure of speech, etc, that draw one's attention. The observation (what does it say) leads to interpretation, (what does it mean). The interpretation, explains what the author is saying. If the message of the author is not understood; the interpretation of the text and application will be wrong. After the interpretation is achieved, the application ensues. The application says, how does it apply to me? According to Zuck, the goal of the Bible is not only to determine what it says and what it means but to apply it to one's life, if we fail to apply the Scripture, we will cut short the entire process and have not finished what God has asked us to do.<sup>7</sup> DeRouchie also says, "Biblical interpretation is not complete until it gives rise to an application through a life of worship."<sup>8</sup>

➤ *Exposure to Principles of Interpreting Scriptures and Its Application*

In addition to prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit, allowing the text to speak for itself, and having a good understanding of the passage. It exposes a person to principles of interpreting Scripture and its application. Consequently, it sparks and deepens peoples' love and desire for the Scriptures and its teachings as well as enhance their relationship with God toward maturity in the faith. The joy

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<sup>7</sup>Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991), 13.

<sup>8</sup>DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, introduction, para. 4.

that goes with understanding and application of the Scripture draws a person closer to God and propels the person to teach others what he/she learned from God's Word. Therefore it enhances discipleship making within and outside the church, makes pastoral work easy for the leadership team; as well as, reduces the influence of false teachers in spreading heresies in the society (Matt 28:19-20).

➤ *Great Biblical and Interpretation Framework*

Biblical interpretation is a broad framework (big picture). The framework is the biblical history of redemption. The Bible is one big story (true) of events, not individual book standing on its own. The particulars fill in the whole and whole helps to understand the particulars (individual books). The books are connected to explain the whole Scripture. Though the Bible was written by at least forty authors over the span of more than 1500 years does not mean it is fragmented or haphazard. The sixty-six books of the Bible intertwine to tell a glorious story of God's creation, the fall and sinful nature of man, the provision of God for the redemption of his people through Jesus Christ. God's covenant with humanity is the spine that ties the storyline together.

After the disobedience of Adam and Eve, God set in motion plans to restore what the fall destroy according to Genesis 3:15. The Bible tells one story of the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 pointing to Christ incarnation in human form to pay the penalty of our sins through death on the cross in order to reconcile people to God. The reconciliation happens in the lives of those who have a relationship with Christ as the Lord and Savior. The biblical storyline ends with Christ's victory over evil on earth and restoration of the Eden destroyed by sin with the New Heaven and New Earth. God points to the redemption of mankind through Jesus from Genesis to Revelation.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Having discussed today the meaning of Biblical interpretation and why doing biblical

interpretation class, we shall by God's grace next week, discuss the general principles of interpreting scriptures: literary context, historical-cultural background, word meanings, and grammatical relationship and principles of interpreting OT and NT narrative: Genesis, Exodus, large portions of Deuteronomy, Numbers and the Prophets; Joshua to Esther, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.

## Week 2 - The General Principles of Interpreting Scripture

### Introduction

The Bible writers communicated to their initial audience in a manner they understood using communication language and standard without any secret code except on a few occasions they deployed the use of parables, riddles, and symbols, to communicate to their audience. Truly, in ideal conversation, one understands the discourse without conscious efforts because of the wealth of experience in knowledge and words acquired. However, when it comes to the Bible, it is difficult to understand it without conscious effort because it is written in a foreign language, to people who lived long ago at different places in the world with different ways of life. Therefore, what is automatically clear to the initial audience, will not be clear to us and what is easy for them to understand will require serious effort from us in order to understand it.<sup>9</sup>

Most importantly, the interpretation of the Bible is a task that needs the right tool for the job.

William Klein, Craig Blomberg, Robert Hubbard put it thus,

It is a simple fact of life; the right tools are necessary to do the right job. A hammer is fine for attaching something with nails but nearly useless for loosening a screw. A pipe wrench works great for removing a sink drain but not so well for removing a window panel! The same is true of tools of measurement. If recipe calls for a certain amount of flour and oil, the right tool is a measuring cup-not a voltmeter! In short, the nature of task determines what tools are appropriate. The same principle applies to the interpretation of the Bible. The nature of this task necessitates certain tools.<sup>10</sup>

Bible is literature written by human authors with human language, composed of prose and poetry in various sizes and shapes. To interpret it accurately, literary tools must be used because they empower the reader to understand the Scripture, sharpen its reasoning to uncover ideas and truth and to become literary competent. Literary competence is the

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<sup>9</sup>William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 155-56.

<sup>10</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 259.

ability of the reader to discern each kind of literature with its reference frame, ground, rules, strategy, and purpose through the text and interpret it correctly. Every reader that knows the formulation and function of each literary type can boldly interpret the Scripture correctly.<sup>11</sup> The main goal of biblical interpretation is to discover the meaning of the biblical text. To understand the biblical meaning of the text begins with distinguishing the principles necessary to achieve the purpose.

An interpreter/reader must be conversant with the following in order to interpret a text accurately: literary context, historical-cultural background, word meanings, and grammatical relationship because an acceptable meaning of a text reflects these four principles.

### **Literary Context**

According to William, Craig, and Robert, the basic of hermeneutics is that the intended meaning of any passage is consistent with the literary context in which it occurs.<sup>12</sup> In literature, the context of a passage is the material immediately before and after it. The context of a sentence is its paragraph. The context of a paragraph is the lines of preceding paragraphs that follow and after it. The context of a chapter is the surrounding chapters. The controlling context of a passage is the whole book in which the passage belongs; likewise, the canon of sixty-six books provides the largest context through which every passage is understood. To avoid misconstruing the context of biblical passages, every passage needs to be interpreted consistently within its context because it provides a flow of thought, accurate meaning of words, and delineates the correct relationship among units.

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<sup>11</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 260.

<sup>12</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 156.

### ***The Importance of Context***

*Literary Context provides Flow of Thought*-The context provides a flow a thought that grants an easy understanding of the passage. In the political arena, politicians have complained of been taken out of context by media, particularly; when a reporter expresses an emphasis on a certain part of the politician's speech that is not intended. Similarly, many people quote Bible passages and do the application wrongly because they interpreted the passage out of context. Undoubtedly, if the Biblical writers were alive, they would have complained of been quoted out of context. Misunderstanding of a text occurs when people only hear part of what was said and based their understanding on it. The context provides a flow of thought that grants an easy understanding of the passage. A flow of thought is a series of ideas that are related and tie together to communicate a specific concept. Every meaningful communication must have a flow of logical thoughts consists of one thought leading to another in the quest to communicate the intended concept. Intentionally, the preceding statement prepares for the one that comes after it and the words that follow grow out of what precedes. People communicate, not with a series of randomly selected ideas linked together in a logical pattern.<sup>13</sup> Ordinarily, all sentences in a paragraph express a common theme. Each sentence tends to build on the previous one, consequently provide a continuity of subject matter that unifies the whole. Any interpretation that contradicts the points of its overall context is not the right one.

*Context Provides Accurate Meaning of Words*-The literary context of a text is an avenue to derive the accurate meaning of words. We know from our English dictionaries that words have range of meanings. When a word is used in a text which may have different meanings the reader/interpreter is expected to stop to think of which meaning captures

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<sup>13</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 137.

the overall meaning of the passage. To figure out the exact meaning of the word, the literary context provides the clue to determine the accurate word that is used in the text. In a text with multiple-meaning, the interpreter picks the meaning of a word that is consistently expressed from the context.

*Context Delineates Correct Relationships among Units*-The correct interpretation must be consistent with the context because most books were written and preserved to be read as a unit. The writer composed and edited individual sentences and paragraphs as part of a larger document. They comprise individual units of larger literary works, and interpreters must understand them according to their relationship to the whole argument of the book.<sup>14</sup>

There are levels of context in interpreting a passage accurately: immediate context; the book context; and the Whole Bible.

### ***Immediate Context***

The immediate context exercises important control in the passage under study. The immediate context applies to a material immediately before and after the passage under discussion. It will also apply in some cases, to preceding and succeeding paragraphs. In another case, it applies to a subsection in the author's presentation or a major book division. In determining the immediate context in which a passage occurs requires tactical outlining which aids interpreters to discern the natural divisions in the book. The linking of one idea to another in a sequential manner, the closeness, and correlation of the materials to each other present immediate context as an important indicator to the meaning of the passage than the whole book or whole Bible.

In addition, to inquire of the immediate context, two things attract the interpreter's attention: Theme and Structure. To discover the theme/central idea where the passage

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<sup>14</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 158.

occurs, the interpreter needs to determine the theme of the preceding and following passages. Presumably, the passage in consideration is not at the beginning or the last thought of the unit. If that is the case, the interpreter must evaluate the preceding and the following passages and analyze the subjects in order to find the common theme that holds them together. Definitely, the immediate context's theme controls the meaning of the words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in the passage under study. Learning how to discover the theme of the immediate context takes lots of practice. The first step is to examine the preceding passage. Find the subject that runs through the passage. Then come up with a theme that is brief and concise; specifically, in a topic sentence format. For example, to assert that the theme of the passage is 'Love' will be wrong because a passage cannot treat all issues about 'Love'. Rather, in a topic sentence format, themes could read, 'love is more than a feeling; it must be demonstrated with action'.

The immediate context is the structure (organization of the text). Passages are not only linked together by theme but structurally. A good reader/interpreter discusses how the author structured the material. He/she discovers how the passage grows out of the preceding section and stretched into the next, how each paragraph contributed to the development of the thought in the immediate context. This observation enables the interpreter to explain the relationship between the passage under study with other paragraphs surrounding it. The arrangement of passages in sequential order involves the deployment of several structural relationships. In the historical narrative, paragraphs are arranged in a chronological pattern. It reports events in the order in which they took place. The succession of events is indicated by writers in using adverbs and conjunctions: now, then, later, and afterward, that points to continuity.<sup>15</sup> Besides, other texts are arranged together in a context based on thematic continuity. For instance, the Gospel writers, they clustered events together not on a chronological basis but thematically.

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<sup>15</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 164.

### ***The Literary Context of the Book***

The literary context of the book is a second important aspect in understanding the meaning of a passage according to the author's intent. It refers to the context of the book in which the passage occurs. To understand the author's meaning of the specific passage, the interpreter has to understand the context of the book. To achieve that, the interpreter needs to read the book, if possible repeatedly and discover the purpose(s) of the book or theme(s), the book outline, and parallel passages in the book that deal on the same subject.

*The Purpose of the Book*-To understand the reason why the author composed the book leads to understanding its individual parts. Observably, the purpose of the book is clearly stated in some books either at the beginning or at the end like the case in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:1-4) and Gospel of John (Jn 20:30-31). In some cases, it is difficult to discover the purpose of the book like in the OT books. In such cases, the interpreter can examine what the author does and deduce the purpose from the content or examine the subject treated in each chapter and discover the dominant subject in the book. Through that means, the purpose of the book is discovered.

*The Basic Outline (plan)*-The basic outline of the book is the contribution of individual chapters toward the goal of the entire book. In a longer book, two elements are involved: the general train of thought in the entire book and the specific train of thought of the section of the book the passage is found. The literary context of the book is understood when the interpreter can explain vividly the contributions of each section/chapter toward the overall goal of the book.

*The Parallel Passages that Deal on the Same Subject*-The literary context of the book is understood by discovering the parallel passages that deal on the same subject. When an author used one subject once or more in a book, it is important to check it for the purpose of using the parallel passage to gain clarity on the subject. However, the interpreter checks if they are really parallel in the true sense of it in terms of having the same

meaning or different meaning. In fact, William, Craig, and Robert sound this warning,

We must always make sure that the passages are truly parallel. Sometimes passages use identical words but with different meaning of words. This would be only an apparent parallel. Such passages should not be used to interpret each other directly. Even when both passages are true parallels, one cannot simply read the ideas of one passage into the other without proper justification. We must keep ever before us the goal of interpretation: the intention of the text. We became liable to serious errors when we interpret a passage in light of another while ignoring the immediate context of each passage. As a precaution, always interpret each parallel passage according to its own immediate context and the entire book context before comparing the passages. Once we know the contextually valid meaning for each parallel passage, we can compare the passages to see if any of them sheds light on specific details in the passage under study.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 168.

## **Week 3 - The General Principles of Biblical Interpretation (2)**

### **Context of the Entire Bible**

The first element in understanding a specific passage is the literary context of the entire book. Though the Bible is written by a human author that lived at different times with different backgrounds for different people yet it maintains its unity because of the divine inspirational nature. Notably, the human authors participated and lived in Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Consequently, they draw from each other's writing in expressing their thought clearly to their recipients such as the book of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, draw from each other including the Synoptic Gospels according to popular themes on Gospel composition. The unity of the Scripture due to its divine inspirational nature showcases the consistent thought in a passage on a subject with the rest of other books in the Bible that handle the same subject. Good interpretation of the biblical passage on a subject does not contradict with parallel passages in the Bible that treat the same subject. In interpreting a passage according to the literary context of the whole Bible, three groups of a parallel need to be observed:

1. Parallel passages in the books written by the same author on the subject (in case of Paul that wrote several books). The writing of the same author on the subject brings clarity on the issue under consideration since the person says and means the same idea represented, promising high-level of linguistic and conceptual continuity, for example, 1 Timothy 1; 4; 6.
2. Parallel passages in the books written by different authors on the subject in the same testament (NT or OT). The writers in the same Testament have some things in common with other writers in sharing the same phrase in God's redemptive agenda. The OT writers focused on Israel as a nation chosen by God, complete loyalty to Yahweh as an expression of their relationship and future blessings of prophetic promises. The books are written in Hebrew or Aramaic language and the primary setting reflects the Semitic

culture of Israelites while their writings cover at least a thousand years. Thus, the interpersonal relationship among the authors/writers was rare unlike the NT writers. NT writings cover a period of fifth years with a membership of different nationalities that made up of the church through whom they were composed. The authors, apostles, and their associates had close contact with each other and expressed a high degree of continuity in the manner in which they communicate their faith. The NT writer used the Greek language in their writing and their setting reflects predominantly the Hellenistic culture of the Roman Empire. They focused on the proclamation of the good news of Christ's death and resurrection as God's grace available to mankind.

3. Parallel passages in books written by different human authors on the subject in another Testament (Perhaps OT if the book passage in consideration is in NT).

The parallel of books from another testament adds a great value to the interpretation of a passage, particularly the OT parallels of the NT. The early church Bible is the OT written in Greek translation-Septuagint. Therefore, the NT writers knew the OT as well as borrow their theological language and categories from it. In fact, the Gospel of Matthew draws lots of insights from OT in proving Jesus' deity as the Savior predicted in the OT by the prophets (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; Hosea 11:1; Jeremiah 31). Also, the writer of Hebrews based his argument from the OT writings (Deut 32:43; 10:5-7).

William, Craig, and Robert warn thus:

The NT did not influence the writing of OT, but NT parallels to OT texts help readers find the total teaching of the Bible on a subject and may draw out further implications. . . . At the same time, interpreters must exercise extreme caution to avoid an undue Christianizing of the OT. Parallel NT passages should not be used to make OT passages teaches NT truth. The early church had the tendency—one continued by Protestants after the Reformation—to read NT theological concepts into OT passages. We must avoid this error; our first task is always to understand each text on its own terms—as its writer and readers would have understood it.<sup>17</sup>

Discussion Question –Matthew 28: 20b, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end

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<sup>17</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 171.

of the age.” Context wise, is it right to reference this line of Scripture to someone that feels lonely or scared as a word of comfort?

### **Historical-Cultural Background/Context**

The next basic principle of interpreting Scripture is to discuss the historical-cultural background, having discussed the literary context that covers the immediate, the book and the whole book contexts. The historical-cultural background is very important in interpreting the Scripture correctly because it refers to information from outside the text that helps us better understand the text. And that includes languages.),<sup>18</sup> it does not eliminate the text; it illuminates it<sup>19</sup> to us since the Scripture is written to people with different ways of life from thousands of years ago. The people’s way of life differs from our present lifestyle: language, culture, dressing, food, society, etc. In reality, they were the first recipients of the message before it gets to us. To have a good grasp on the historical-cultural background of the passages in the Bible, we need to know the history and cultural contexts of the ancient Near East, Second Temple Judaism, and the Greco-Roman world.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, a good understanding of the historical-cultural background of every passage is a key principle in interpreting the Bible accurately in view of the author and recipients’ perspective and mindset, and contextualization of the passage in order to share the same impartation with the present society.

#### ***Perspective***

The historical-cultural background is important in understanding and interpreting a passage because it presents the perspective of the writer and recipients of the book. The writer and the recipients’ perspectives are based on the circumstance they found

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<sup>18</sup>David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 164-65.

<sup>19</sup>Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 163.

<sup>20</sup>Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 162.

themselves having shared the same culture, language, and society. The reader needs to put himself/herself in the shoes and world of the writer and the recipients at that time to understand and interpret the passage accurately. Understanding the perspective of the original communicators – writer and recipients- is very important in the interpretation of the book/letter. An example is the Canaanites woman that pleaded with Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus said to her it is not right to take the food that belongs to children and throw it to the dogs, Matthew 15:26.

### ***Mindset***

The historical-cultural aspect of society gives meaning to the mindset factor in the passage. Ideas are not the only thing that statements communicate; they cause emotional impact. A statement causes an emotional effect on the reader/recipients. Every culture manifests a system of values that regulated the affective or feeling dimension of the discourse. Hence, the effect of a statement in a discourse depends on the standards of what is right and wrong or the scale of values set by the culture. For example, when Jesus called Herod Antipas a fox in Luke 13:32, his hearers understood fox to represent a certain value. It is not the same value in the present society. An interpreter must be aware of the mindset of the biblical times to interpret the passage accurately and avoid shaping the Scripture to conform to our values; in order to avoid the original intent been obscured. The biblical revelation was communicated within cultures. It could not be otherwise, for all human language is culturally conditioned.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Contextualization***

Perspective and mindset point out the importance of historical-cultural background in interpreting the Scripture in line with the original recipients. Contextualization deals with conveying the passage to the present society to experience the same impartation. A good

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<sup>21</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 173.

interpreter has two lenses in the quest to interpret the Scripture accurately. The interpreter puts on the lens of the biblical times to have the narrator's intended meaning of the text and another lens that brings the meaning of the text to be relevant to today's world.

***Historical-Cultural Background Bible Examples:***

Biblical examples that portray the significance of historical-cultural background/context:

1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Here's basically what Winter argues:

1. During religious ceremonies, pagan Roman men with a high social status pulled their togas over their heads when they led by praying or offering sacrifices. So Paul commanded Christian men not to cover their heads during their times of corporate worship like the socially elite pagans did. 2. A woman's covering her head socially indicated that she was married. The thin headscarf or head covering symbolized a married woman's modesty and chastity and submission to her husband. It was one way in which a wife honored her husband. The Greek word *gunē* can mean "woman" or "wife," depending on the context, and in this passage, it refers specifically to the wife in verses 3, 5, 6, 10, and 13. (The ESV translates it as "wife" in those verses, unlike the NIV, which translates it "woman.>"). 3. A new kind of wife was emerging at this time in the Roman world—one who rebelled against the cultural milieu that allowed husbands but not wives to be sexually promiscuous. One way in which such wives would flaunt that freedom was by removing their veils. So a Christian wife should not deliberately remove her veil while praying or prophesying during a time of corporate worship because that would contentiously identify her with these other promiscuous women. Not everyone agrees with Winter on this, but I think that he has made the most persuasive case based on the historical-cultural context. Regardless of whether you agree with Winter, my point is that you must engage the historical-cultural context of this passage in order to accurately interpret and apply it.

Another example Rev. 3:15-16, Laodicea didn't have a natural water supply, unlike three nearby cities: (1) The modern city of Denizli six miles south had hot springs, and that hot

water flowed to Laodicea via an aqueduct. (2) Hierapolis six miles north also had hot springs. (3) And Colossae twelve miles east had fresh cold water. The hot water in Denizli and Hierapolis was useful, especially for healing baths, and the cold water in Colossae was useful, especially for drinking. But the originally hot water that came to Laodicea via an aqueduct was no longer hot; it was lukewarm. Laodicea had a reputation for having nauseating drinking water. It was not hot and useful, nor was it cold and useful. It was lukewarm and useless. Now that you know that historical-cultural context, read Revelation 3:15–16 again: “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.” Jesus is essentially saying to the church at Laodicea, “I know your works: you are neither cold and useful (like the water in Colossae) nor hot and useful (like the water in Denizli and Hierapolis). So because you are lukewarm and thus not useful (like your nauseating water in Laodicea), I will spit you out of my mouth.” Anyone in the area of Laodicea would have understood this, just as people at the time would have understood the Greek language in which John wrote the book of Revelation. But people living in different cultures two thousand years later have to do some extra work to understand this historical-cultural context, just as we have to do some extra work to understand the Greek language in which John wrote.<sup>22</sup>

Jason and David suggest six features worth considering in understanding the historical-cultural context. It’s not always necessary to understand those historical-cultural details in order to accurately understand the Bible, but understanding the historical-cultural context can certainly enhance how you understand a particular passage. Here are six features worth considering:

1. **Worldview.** The values and mindset of (1) the writer, (2) the recipients, (3) other people the text mentions, and/or (4) the larger society.

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<sup>22</sup>Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 167.

2. Societal and economic structures. Marriage and family patterns, gender roles, ethnicity, slavery, social status through patronage, means of earning a living, issues of wealth and poverty.
3. Physical features. Climate, topography, buildings, tools, manner of transportation.
4. Political climate. Its structures, loyalties, and personnel.
5. Behavior patterns. Dress and customs.<sup>23</sup>

**Relevant Resources to Understand Historical-Cultural Context/Background:**

1. The Bible
2. Bible Commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias.
3. Book: Introduction to NT and TO
4. Primary Jewish resources (Extracanonical ):
  1. *The Old Testament Apocrypha* (A collection of about fifteen books dating from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D.): 1–2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, Epistle of Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Children, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, 1–2 Maccabees.
  2. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. A large and diverse collection of ancient Jewish and Hellenistic writings dating mostly to the intertestamental period. Many of the books use pseudonyms, claiming that their author is a well-known biblical figure such as Enoch, Ezra, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob.
  3. *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. A collection of about 850 Jewish manuscripts (mostly fragments) that shepherds discovered in 1947 in caves in the region of Qumran near the Dead Sea. These scrolls include not only texts from every Old Testament book except Esther but other writings such as commentaries on Old Testament books and other works. One group that produced these writings (probably the

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<sup>23</sup>Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 170.

Essenes, a group that Josephus describes as existing in Israel during New Testament times) is especially significant for understanding a strand of Judaism during New Testament times.

4. **Philo.** A Hellenistic Jewish philosopher and Old Testament exegete from Alexandria who lived from about 20 B.C. to A.D. 50. His most significant writings for biblical studies include his commentaries on Genesis and Exodus, which are filled with allegory. His allegorical hermeneutic can be so creative that it's (sadly) entertaining.

5. **Josephus.** A Jewish historian who lived from about A.D. 37 to 110. Other than the Bible, Josephus's four books are the single most important source for understanding the Jewish world of the first century: (1) *Life* is his autobiography; (2) *Against Apion* is an apologetic for Judaism; (3) *Antiquities of the Jews* tells the history of the Jews from the creation of the world until the Jewish war against Rome; and (4) *Jewish War* describes the Jewish war against Rome. He is generally (not always) reliable as a historian.

6. ***The Targums and Rabbinic Literature.*** These are windows into how the early Jewish community interpreted the Old Testament.

(a) *The Targums* translate and interpret the Old Testament in Aramaic, and they were written down starting around the third century A.D.

(b) *The Mishnah, Talmuds, and Midrash* collect the teaching of Jewish rabbis or sages. The Mishnah collects oral law; the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds are commentaries on the Mishnah, and the Midrash often comments on the Old Testament. But these massively voluminous writings are very difficult to date precisely. It's not clear, for example, whether the Jewish beliefs and practices they describe date back to the New Testament.

5. ***Use Primary Greco-Roman Resources:*** The most important authors include Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca the Younger, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger. A

half-dozen authors refer to Jesus and/or early Christianity. The resource I have found most helpful is *The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius, who lived from about A.D. 70 to 130.

### **Conclusion**

The Scripture context and background information are sometimes necessary to understand the Bible. And this should provoke us to study God's Word and his world more diligently.<sup>24</sup>

I will close with the words of Wayne Grudem regarding the Scripture, "Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood."<sup>12</sup> Yes, but . . .

- i. Not all at once
- ii. Not without effort
- iii. Not without ordinary means
- iv. Not without the reader's willingness to obey it
- v. Not without the help of the Holy Spirit
- vi. Not without human misunderstanding
- vii. Never completely

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<sup>24</sup>Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 168.

## Week 4 - The General Principles of Biblical Interpretation (3)

### Word Meaning

#### Introduction

Word meaning/studies is an important aspect of OT and NT, the basic principle of interpretation, and exegesis because it helps to understand the OT and NT better. Word study simply means analyzing the word to discover the accurate meaning in line with the author's intent. It is important to do word studies in Hebrew and Greek since they are not our mother tongue. So one cannot assume he/she understands every nuance of a word in a particular passage. Learning how words function in a language takes time. Language can be crazy but if you are immersed in a language all your life, you may not realize it. We are discussing word meaning/study because the word has a range of meanings according to dictionaries. A good word study illuminates what passage means especially one you could otherwise misinterpret; to appreciate difficult, theologically significant passages; and it's rewarding and thrilling. Accurate interpretation of Scripture involves understanding the meaning of the words in the context it occurs. The absence of words leaves society with a means of communication that is characterized by non-verbal sounds, symbols, and pictures.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Roy Zuck says,

Thoughts are expressed through words, and words are building blocks of sentences. Therefore, to determine God's thoughts we need to study His words and how they are associated in sentences. If we neglect the meanings of the words and how they are used, we have no way of knowing whose interpretations are correct. The assertion, "You can make the Bible mean anything you want it to mean", is true only if grammatical interpretation is ignored.<sup>26</sup>

To appreciate the beauty and importance of words in communication, one needs to know its nature, range of meanings, the overlapping nature of word, and the connotative and

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<sup>25</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 183.

<sup>26</sup>Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 99.

denotative nature of words.

### **The Nature of Words**

Words are arbitrary signs that point the interpreter to the specific ideas the writer expresses in his writing. William, Craig, and Robert put in this manner,

A word is a semantic sign—a combination of symbols or sounds that represents an idea. Spoken words are a combination of sounds that stand for a specific idea; written words combine letter representing these sounds to symbolize a concept. The idea designated by any given word can be communicated either orally or visually. But why a word means what it does mostly a matter of convention. That’s just the way it is!<sup>27</sup>

From a hermeneutical standpoint, the meaning of a word is interpreted accurately from the original use of the word at the time it was written, in the context that it occurs. The original writer selects the word to express specific ideas; the responsibility of the interpreter is to discover the thought the author expresses through the meaning of the original word.<sup>28</sup>

### **Words Have a Range of Meanings**

Words have a wide range of meanings that at times complicate things. But to understand the original meaning of a word, despite it ranges of meaning is to discover the meaning that best fits the context in line with the author’s intent.

### **Word Meanings Overlap**

The meaning of a word overlaps; apparently, a word has different meanings but the same word can have similar meanings with another word in another semantic field which is known as synonyms. “Synonyms are words whom out of their total range of meaning, at least one of their meaning overlap with each other.”<sup>29</sup> Ideally, a specific word is used differently in a passage to express a specific idea from the known meaning in a

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<sup>27</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 183-84.

<sup>28</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 185.

<sup>29</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 186.

circumstance. Understanding this situation helps the interpreter to look out for a clue in the context to decide between the two.

### **Words Meanings Change over Time**

Word meaning changes over time as a result of the development of new meaning through usage and old ones become archaic.<sup>30</sup> The meaning of a word changes with time as the usage of English in existence leads to the emergence of new meaning. The meaning of words used in the first century, today does not have the same meaning in usage today. For example, the use of the word in KJV which expresses the accurate meaning of the original writer, today means a different thing. “Look at KJV use of the word “conversation” (2 Cor 1:12; Gal 1:13; Eph 2:3; 4:22; Phil 1:27). These texts have little to do with what we think of when we use the word “conversation”; so modern version use “conduct or way of life” to convey the texts’ original intent.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, an interpreter must interpret a word based on the original meaning of the word to the writer and recipients, not to read the present century meaning into the earlier use of the word.

### **Words have Connotative and Denotative Meanings**

An interpreter has the responsibility to study and discern the denotation and connotation meanings of the word to the original recipients. The connotative or figurative meaning of a word is different from the denotative meaning. For example, the word dog, denotes, four-legged hairy animal whereas the figurative meaning could have emotive sense and derogatory tone to it. In our context, it could mean an unfaithful person in terms of the marital relationship and in general sense an untrustworthy person. In first-century Jewish society, the use of the dog in reference to a person has a despicable meaning, like Gentiles been addressed or regarded as dogs.

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<sup>30</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 187.

<sup>31</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 187.

## **Steps to do Word Studies:**

### **1. Select Words that Require Detailed Analysis**

In a passage, the interpreter needs to select words that he/she does not understand in English; word that are of theological significance in a passage or upon whom the entire sense of the passage rest on; words that occur only once or rare especially if it has a major impact on the meaning of the passage; words used repeated by the writer; words that are figures of speech; words with apparent synonyms and antonyms such as honor and curse or love and hate (1 Sam 2:30; Matt 6:24; Rom 9:13). Words that fall into any of the categories highlighted in a passage need to be studied to discover the most accurate sense of the word.

### **2. Usage in Context Determines the Meaning.**

The Context is the king. The context guides us to determine the right word fits the author's intent: particularly when the word has a range of meanings. For example, Words often have a range of meanings. If I say "trunk," many different images may come to mind: (1) the main woody stem of a tree, (2) the torso of a person's or animal's body, (3) the extended nose of an elephant, (4) a large box with hinged lid, and (5) the storage compartment located at the rear of a vehicle. Because word meanings can overlap, in any given context an author could choose different words to communicate the same reality. Even when a certain word is not present, the concept may still be. Because the message of every passage of Scripture is dependent on the meaning of words, phrases, and concepts, knowing how to grasp such meaning is important for interpretation. Also, the word minute means part of an hour and a note taken in a meeting. The context tells is the right word that suits the author's intent. Also, context helps us to choose the right meaning of a word both in general and technical sense. The English word reformed could serve as an adjective reformed man and in a technical sense, a system of Christian doctrine (Reformed Theology). The

interpreter must choose the meaning that best fits the specific context considering the literary context and historical-cultural background.

### **3. Look Out for Idioms**

The reader/an interpreter must consider if the combination of a verb plus a preposition takes on a special meaning. In English, “just a minute” as idiomatic expression expresses an undefined period of time. It cannot be applied to a statement that the class will last for fifty minutes.

### **4. Authorial Correspondence**

In doing a word study, discover the parallel passage that uses the word under consideration. First, begin with the author of the passage under consideration, check out in the same book the occurrence of the same word. Then, examine other books used by the author, if the word does occur in them. Next, check the books in the same testament that the word occurs before moving to other books in other Testament. For example, “Righteous” in Gen: 15:6, then 8 other occurrences in the Law of Moses.

### **5. Historical Correspondence**

History shows that language evolves over time; so it is helpful comparing the word usage by another person living at the same time than in different historical eras: For example in Micah 5:2 to understand the meaning of the word “ruler” in ESV, considering the eleven recurrences of the word in contemporary prophet Isaiah will be helpful. However, there is caveat/qualification here, if the author is drawing his language from previous scripture, the earlier Biblical usage often controls the later meaning

### **6. Words with a Range of Meanings**

Words have a range of meanings that require the use of lexicon, Hebrew Concordance, and other theological books to discover the meaning of the word that best fits the context in which it occurs. For example, here is a range of meanings of the word, run:

I run two miles a day.  
She has a run in her nylons.  
That grapevine runs through the fence.  
My nose runs when I have a cold.  
I need to run to the store.  
My new computer runs faster than my previous one.  
I try not to let the water run when I'm not using it because that runs up the water bill.  
I ran out of gas today.  
Someday I'll run for president.

In addition to the lexicon, William, Craig, and Robert suggest these materials,

J.D. Dongles, ed., *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 3 Vol.; M.C. Tenney, ed., *Zondervan pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 vols; P.G. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary*; G.W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 Vols. Revised Edition; D.N. Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols.; T.C. Butler, ed., *Holman Bible Dictionary*; and G.A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols.<sup>32</sup>

## 7. Words Change over Time

To use the past meaning of a word in the current will definitely lead to incorrect meaning because the meaning of a word in the first century may not be the meaning of the word currently. Hence, just because people use a word in the past does not mean it is going to have the same meaning currently. The original meaning of a word (etymology) is an unreliable guide to its contemporary use. For instance, the word "awful" in English is used to express reference (I.e. full of awe), but today it mostly describes something as bad or unpleasant.

### **Discussion:**

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out

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<sup>32</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 191.

man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” – Genesis 6: 1-8

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. – Luke 14:26

“And it will be in the last days,” God says, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. And even on my male slaves and on my female slaves I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. And I will cause wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun will be changed to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes. And it will be that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” – Act 2:17-21

### **Grammatical-Structural Relationship**

Accurate understanding and interpretation of Scripture require analyzing the grammar and structure of a passage. According to Zuck, “by grammatical, they meant determining the meaning of the Bible by studying the words and sentences of scripture in their normal, plain sense.”<sup>33</sup> Grammar is important because it is the whole system and structure that a language uses for communicating effectively and it is the means that God used to give us his Word. The grammatical study has four areas: orthography, phonology, morphology, and syntax. Orthography is the study of an alphabet and of how its letters combine to represent sounds and to form words. Phonology is the study of a language’s system of sounds (phonemes). Morphology is the study of the formation of words. Syntax deals with how words combine to form phrases, clauses, sentences, and even larger discourse structures. Micro-syntax focuses on the shaping of clauses and sentences, whereas macro-syntax addresses the shaping of whole texts.<sup>34</sup>

The interpreter’s knowledge of the biblical language is important in analyzing the grammar and structure of a passage; however, the absence of biblical language

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<sup>33</sup>Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 77.

<sup>34</sup>DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, chap. 5, “Clause and Text Grammar,” para. 15.

knowledge can be compensated by having a good grasp of English grammar, using the best English version of the Bible with reliable commentaries, and other resources written by scholars that can explain the grammar. In addition, comparing different sources on a particular passage will definitely aid a person to discover whether there is a consensus or not on the grammatical position of the passage by scholars.<sup>35</sup>

Hence, the need for an interpreter to have the knowledge of Biblical languages; because they convey nuances that are hard to capture in English translation, making grammatical study strategic in accurate biblical interpretation. However, the grammatical construction can be analyzed through the structure of the sentence. Understanding the structure of the sentence helps the interpreter to uncover the grammatical construction.<sup>36</sup>

## **Conclusion**

I will close with the words of Wayne Grudem regarding the Scripture, “Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood.”<sup>12</sup> Yes, but . . .

- i. Not all at once
- ii. Not without effort
- iii. Not without ordinary means
- iv. Not without the reader’s willingness to obey it
- v. Not without the help of the Holy Spirit
- vi. Not without human misunderstanding
- vii. Never completely

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<sup>35</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 204.

<sup>36</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 203.

## Week 5 - The Principles for Interpreting Biblical Narrative

### Introduction

The manner in which a person reads a magazine/newspaper is not the same while reading a computer manual because they have different genres. Literary Genre means different kinds of literature/reading. A person already knows it intuitively because when he reads a computer manual, he reads it in a different way, he will ordinarily read Shakespeare. The same principles apply in reading and interpreting the Bible. Often times, people read the book of Kings the same way they read Psalms 23 as if it is the same genre. Then, they violate the principle of interpreting Scriptures accurately. The fundamental way to interpret the scripture is to read different parts of the Scriptures on the basis of its genre. Therefore, different genres have different principles of interpreting them. When the principles of interpreting a text that belongs to a particular genre are not applied, the text will lose its meaning. William, Craig, and Robert add,

We must understand how the Biblical languages function if we are to understand what the writer meant to say. A larger dimension involved understanding an utterance in the specific literary genre or writing style the author employed to convey his/her message. We interpret the words in a poem differently from those in a letter when we know we are looking at a poem rather than a letter, or vice versa. We expect ambiguity or figures of speech to convey a meaning in poetry that is different from the more concrete sense of words in a historical narrative.<sup>37</sup>

The biblical narratives are the first and most frequent books people encountered in reading the Bible. The genre of literature is an important narrative within Judeo-Christian tradition. It occupies huge space both in the OT and NT; in fact over 40 percent of NT and nearly 60 percent of OT consist of the narrative. The biblical narratives are Genesis, Exodus, large portions of Deuteronomy, Numbers and the Prophets; Joshua to Esther, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.<sup>38</sup> The purpose of the biblical narrative is not to

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<sup>37</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 9.

<sup>38</sup>Robert Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 79.

relay what happened in the past but to relate past events to biblical faith. As a result, the meaning of the texts is not only on what happened but on an interpretation of what happened. The meaning of narrative is implicit and elusive to the reader.<sup>39</sup>

Biblical narratives report events in the Bible much like the storyteller than historian in order to instruct than to inform; more to teach later generation about God-loving conduct than to make sure they merely have facts straight, and to present a comprehensive picture of what happened and to communicate their theme. The storyteller's craft is evidence in most of the biblical narratives have plot, narrative pacing, description, characterization, and word-play. Importantly, to interpret narratives competently, the reader must track the storyteller's art to discover the theme he intends to express.<sup>40</sup>

There are many narratives; hence, to interpret them accurately, the interpreter needs to examine these narratives: reports, heroic, prophetic story, comedy, and tragedy. **The report** is the simplest OT narrative that is brief, self-contained, and written in a third-person style, in respect to the events that happened in the past. It narrates what happened without literary embellishment such as the setting of each tribe in Canaan (Judg. 1:16-17); the palace construction (1 Kg 7:28; 12:25). Also, the narrative at times explains how a certain place acquires its name that is known as aetiological report (Gen 35:8; Ex 15:23). There are different kinds of OT reports: **Anecdote** gives details about an event/experience in a person's life. It presents personal, not public history; for example, the taking of Elijah by chariots of fire and Elisha taken over the prophetic responsibility (1 Kings 19:19-21). The giving of cities to King Hiram as a gift from Solomon (1 Kings: 9:10-14). **Battle Report** is a narrative about military clash between two or more opposing forces and the results stating who wins or losses (Num 21:21-24; Jg 3:26-30; 2 Sam

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<sup>39</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 8.

<sup>40</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 261.

10:15-19; Jg 8:10-12; Joshua 7:2-5). **Construction Report** gives the details of the important building projects, indicating the signs, materials used and its decorations (Ex 36:8-37:16; I King 6-7; Gen 6:13-22). **Dream Report** narrates the individual dream experience (Gen 37:5-11; 40:9-11, 16-17; 4:1-8; Jg 7:13-14). **Epiphany Report** narrates an experience where an angel or God appears to a person for the purpose of conveying a message. The verb “to appear, become invisible” indicates the beginning of epiphany reports (Gen 12:7; 17:1-21; 18:1-33; 1 Kings 3:4-15; 9:1-9; Gen 28:12-16; 48:3-4). **Historical Stories** elaborate reports written with more literacy style than ordinary reports. They develop rudimentary plot, record dialogues, and speeches by characters, and include dramatic literary touches. The rudimentary plot spans from tension-resolution. Ultimately, it recounts events with outstanding appealing style (1 Sam 11:1-11, 1 King 22:1-37; Jg 9:1-21; 1 King 12:1-20:1-43). **History** is a fall out of the author’s completion of a series of reports, structured to connect between events and certain themes. It is a lengthy document that focuses on a particular subject or historical era with the aim of applying instructions from the past to situations/institutions in the author’s day. The books of Kings and the book of Chronicles reflect such genre.<sup>41</sup> **The memoir** is a subtype of history written in the first-person style to report events in an individual’s life to portray the historical era in which the person lived. The book of Ezra and Nehemiah fall under such category according to some scholars.

### **How to Interpret Reports:**

1. In a simple report, the focus must be on the subject and its contribution to the themes of the larger context.

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<sup>41</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 263.

2. Reports present factual matters (what happened, who did what, etc.). It provides little devotional content/insights except in epiphany report where God's participation in the report is highlighted like in Genesis 28.
3. Reports make their points indirectly which is typical of narratives. The reader must ask, what is the text saying to me? What signal is the author woven into the account to convey its message? It is easy to find interpretative clues in historical stories and histories than in simple reports (1 King 22).
4. Histories are like orchestral; there are a series of voices from different people combined to present common themes. To discover the common themes, the reader must analyze each individual's report to find out what they share in common like the book of Kings and Chronicles. The books focus on Judah, David's affection/patronage to Israel's worship, and the importance of the Temple. The Kings evaluate Israel's kingship lifestyle and point out that it is a spiritual disaster; whereas the Chronicles points to positive spiritual contribution in terms of establishing proper temple worship. The essence of the two written books is to point to the reader the importance of worshipping Yahweh obediently.<sup>42</sup>

**Heroic Narrative** is a common OT narrative. It composes of episodes that center in the life and exploit of a hero/heroine that people tend to remember. The heroic narrative is characterized by accounts on the hero's birth, marriage, life work, and death. It inculcates behavioral norms that are either positive or negative example to the reader. A failed hero offers a great reason to the reader as well as the successful one like the life of Moses in Exodus-Deuteronomy. E.g. Joseph, Ruth, and Naomi (Ruth).

In determining the precise identity of a literary hero is a prime task whenever we read a heroic narrative. The hero's identity is revealed chiefly through six means: the hero's (1)

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<sup>42</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 254.

personal traits and abilities, (2) actions, (3) motivations, (4) responses to events or people, (5) relationships, and (6) roles.

### **Questions to Ask of Hero Stories:**

Since a literary hero incarnates a society's views of reality, morality, and values, the following issues are good ones to explore when reflecting on hero stories.

1. **The View of People.** What kind of beings are people? How can people achieve meaning in life? What is the proper end or goal for a person? What is humanity's origin and what is its destination?
2. **The Religious View.** Does the story postulate a transcendental realm? If so, what is its nature? How is the other world related to this world? How can a person be vitally related to God?
3. **The View of Society.** What is the nature of the human community? What is the individual's role in society? What is the nature of the individual's obligations to his or her fellow humans?
4. **The Question of Values.** What does the story postulate as the highest value in life? Is it a person (God, self, some individual, people in general), an institution (state, church, home), an abstract quality (love, truth, beauty, order), or something physical like nature?

**Epic** is a sub-variety of heroic narrative because it points out the heroic exploit of a virtuous hero. Epic has two unique features: lengthy and highlighting the hero's exploit to high-level importance. Epic presents a nationalistic interest with the hero representing the whole nation, not a family. It involves events, characters, and supernatural settings.

Besides, the events play out with the involvement of supernatural agents in human history on earth, take place in the cosmic arena (heaven and earth), present separate incidents rather than a chain of connected events, and often aim at the cultural feat of the hero, for example, Genesis 1-11; 12-36.

Ancestral Epic themes focus on conquest kingdom, warfare, and dominion.

**Prophetic Story** recounts events in the life of the prophet that demonstrate virtue to emulate, with the purpose of setting an exemplary lifestyle through his conduct or judgment to the “political and religious criticism (1 Kings 17- 11 Kings 9; 4: 8-37; 6:1-7; 13:14-21; Dan 1-6;).”<sup>43</sup>

#### The Principles of Interpreting Heroic Narrative and Prophetic Stories

1. Interpretation should focus on the life of the main character either an individual, or a family, or a nation. The question to ask is: how does the hero’s life model a relationship with God and fellow humans.
2. Hero’s portrays value in the narrative. The interpreter needs to ask: what values are there in the text to evaluate. For instance, Abraham portrays faith as a value that ancient Israel and modern Christians need to exhibit (Gen 15:6; 22:12).
3. In addition to finding the values, the interpreter should make it a priority interpretation wise to discover the large theme involved in the text (election, conquest, religious apostasy, etc.).
4. The application of this narrative must be an analogous situation between Israel and the Church. For example in Gen 21; 29-30, God gave Abraham and Sarah a child at old age in fulfilling the promise of blessing all nations through him. In connecting it to the church, God is faithful and committed to bringing about the salvation of his people today through the birth, death, resurrection, and return of Christ.

**Comedy**- Comedy often brings to mind comic activities/acts in television or theatre.

However, comedy in a literature sense is a narrative whose plot has a happy ending and in some cases through a dramatic reversal. Comedy feature disguises, mistaken identity,

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<sup>43</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 267.

providential coincidence, surprising turns of events, escapes from disaster, and conquest of obstacles. Often it ends with a marriage, a feast, reconciliation with opponents, or victory over enemies. The book of Esther is a comedy including the story of Joseph and his brothers (Gen 37-50; Esther 1-10).

#### Principles of Interpreting Comedy

1. Comedy is plot-driven, therefore, its interpretation should trace the development from the tragedy which later turned to triumph. In tracing the developments the interpreter needs to define the crisis, the turning point, and the climax. In the cases of Joseph and Esther, the interpreter needs to trace how Joseph and Esther saved Israel, respectively.
2. Great attention is given to character development. The interpreter needs to note the character trait of the hero/villain that leads to its success or failure/death or change of attitude from being timid/intermediary like the case of Esther (Esther 4:7) and Harman's degeneration from self-confidence to childish self-pity (Esther 3:6).
3. The interpreter must recognize the role God played in the narrative whether directly or indirectly.
4. State the main theme(s) whether subtle or obvious, for example, in the story of Joseph, the theme is God's preservation of Israel's existence. In that of Esther, the theme is God's preservation of his people before a tyrant.
5. The application goes after the theme(s)

## Week 6 - The Principles of Interpreting Biblical Narratives (2)

**Farewell Speech** -Farewell speech plays an important role in OT literature at different points. It is an address reportedly given by someone before his death or end of the office. Apparently, the speaker/leader exhorts his hearer to live along with a certain lifestyle that pleases God.

How to interpret Farewell Speech

1. The interpreter needs to determine what makes the occasion historical in the life of the people and what pressing issue lies in the background.
2. The reader must summarize the speaker's main points and what the departing leader wants his hearer to do regarding it.
3. The reader must decide the contribution of the speech to the theme of the large context.
4. Make an application from the main points of the speech using the historical setting.

**Tragedy**- Tragedy can be defined as a narrative form in which a protagonist of high degree and greatness of spirit undertakes an action (makes a choice) within a given tragic world and as a result inevitably falls from prosperity to a state of physical and spiritual suffering, sometimes attaining perception.<sup>44</sup> The prototypical biblical tragedy is the story of the Fall in Genesis 3. The great masterpiece of biblical tragedy is the story of Saul in 1 Samuel 9. If we keep in mind that tragedy assigns a specific cause to the hero's downfall and localizes the beginning of woe at a particular point in the hero's life, the story of David as narrated in 1 and 2 Samuel adheres to a tragic pattern, since David's tragic sufferings begin with the Bathsheba/Uriah incident. The story of Samson (Judg. 13–16) is also a tragedy and some of the parables too.

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<sup>44</sup>Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 84, Kindle.

## ***The Principles in Interpreting Biblical Narratives:***

### ***Introductions and Conclusions***

Another principle of interpreting biblical narratives is the use of introductions and conclusions. The narrative writers used the introduction and the conclusion in their books to give a clue to readers on what the book's theme and focus will be. For instance, Ex 34:9-12, points to Moses' walk with God as a faithful servant God used in the life of Israel to showcase his power and personality to the world. The passage summarizes the book of Exodus-Deuteronomy, the Pentateuch. Other examples are John 20:30-31 and Joshua 1:2. In addition, Stein asserts that the historical narrative's writers of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles build their narration on Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges' contents. Similarly, the writers of NT build theirs on the OT teachings (Matt 1:1; Mark 1:2-3; Rom 1:2; 4:1-3; 9:1-5; Heb 1:1-2; Jas 1:1).<sup>45</sup>

### ***Authorial Comment***

The author's comments is another principle in interpreting the biblical narrative. Narrative authors use comments to give a clue in interpreting narratives such as "he did what was right in the eye of God (1 Kgs 14:8; 15:5, 11; 22:43; 2 Kgs 10:30). The author wants the interpreter to know the right things that the king did which are in line with God's precepts. Also in the NT, the writers insert comments to help the interpreter understands the incident he is reporting like in Mark 12:12, "And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away." At times, the author inserts theological comments to help the interpreter see the theological importance of the incident such as Mark 17:19, "Thus he declared all food clean", stressing the fact that Jesus has put to an end to Jewish regulations of foods classified clean and unclean.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 89-91.

<sup>46</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 91.

### ***Authorial Summaries***

Biblical narrative writers use summaries to help interpreters understand the meaning of the narrative. For instance, Genesis 1:31, “God saw everything he created was very good. Mark 8:31, “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again”, interpreters understand the divine plan and necessity of the event in Christ’s death. The author’s summary of Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 9:31, helps the interpreter to understand the emphasis on the numerical growth of the early church through prayer, apostolic teaching, favorable reputation, and taking care of others’ needs.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Repetition***

Repetition is another principle that helps interpreters to understand the meaning of the narrative. Repetition is been used in the book of Judges by the writer to teach the cyclical nature of rebellion, repentance, and restoration in the life of the Jews. Most importantly, that disobedience leads to judgment and repentance to salvation (Judg 2:11; 3:7; 4:1; 6:19; 10:6; 13:19; 2:14; 3:8,12; 4:2; 6:1b). When Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, he handed them over to their enemies. He delivers them when they cried out to him in repentance (3:9a, 15a; 4:3; 6:6-7; 10:10-16; 3:9b, 5b; 4:4-24; 6:11-25; 11:1-33).

Similarly, the gospel of Luke emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus through its constant repetition of the Holy Spirit. The involvement of the Holy Spirit in the birth of John, the Baptist, and the baptism of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:15, 35, 41-45; 3:22; 4:1, 14,18).

### ***Proportion***

Proportion is another principle that stresses the amount of space taken by the writer in the

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<sup>47</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 92.

presentation of an account compared to others. Examples are the healing of demon-possessed man and the women with the issue of blood in Mark 5:2-5, 9, 25-26. Jesus' power to handle tragic and hopeless situations in the life of people is showcased by the author.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Authoritative Speaker***

The authoritative speaker is a principle in interpreting narratives. This principle helps the interpreter to understand the meaning of narrative by placing key dialogue in the mouth of various speakers. In other words, the writer uses the characters to project what should be received as truth and acceptable lifestyle or condemned behavior before God. For example, every statement from God or Jesus is accepted as the truth to hold onto in pursuit of godliness. Also, every instruction from the prophets, disciples or patriarchs is accepted to be the truth except the narrator says otherwise. On the other hand, the writer's comment dissuades one to emulate a character whose lifestyle is not pleasing to God. The interpreter understands that such a lifestyle needs to be emulated (1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 14:17, 20). In addition, the writer helps the interpreter understand the meaning of its narrative by presenting a character that demonstrate the godly lifestyle in accordance with God's will as what should be emulated and lived out by the reader (2 Sam 19:27; 1 Kgs 18:13; Job 1:1; Gen 13:13; 1 Sam 2:12; 25:3; 2 Sam 20:1; 1 Kgs 12:8).<sup>49</sup>

### ***Dialogue or Direct Discourse***

Direct discourse or dialogue within the narrative account is used to focus the attention of the reader to the message in the passage. When the indirect conversation turned to direct conversation noted with a quotation mark, the attention of the reader is needed; for example, Jesus' account of speaking to the wild wind which resulted to the calmness of

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<sup>48</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 94.

<sup>49</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 95-96.

the storm while he and his disciples were in the boat. Thus the disciples said, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Luke 8:22-25). Also, dialogue between two people is used by the narrator to point out the theme of the narrative. An example is a dialogue between Moses and God in Exodus 3:6-8. In this passage, the narrator points out the theme of the narrative and gives an understanding of the whole book. The direct conversation depicts Moses as the person God will use to save his people from slavery in Egypt.<sup>50</sup>

The interpreter needs to identify each scene of the narrative because the focus is on the main character(s) as well as summarizes the words and actions to reflect the narrator’s view and purpose of recording the details.<sup>51</sup>

The interpreter must determine the point of view from which the narrative is recorded by observing how the writer tells the story, what character is the focus of the story, and if the narrator expresses thoughts and emotions of the character or criticize his actions.<sup>52</sup>

The interpreter must look at the units within the scene and their relationship with one another because the meaning of the scene is understood by discovering how the units are structured.<sup>53</sup>

### **Read and Think Horizontally and Vertically**

Reading and thinking horizontally means comparing the Gospels to discern each narrator’s unique theological perspective. For example, by comparing Luke with Matthew and Mark, we see that Luke often introduces statements about Jesus’ prayer life,

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<sup>50</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 96.

<sup>51</sup>Brent Sandy and Ronald Giese Jr., *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 80.

<sup>52</sup>Sandy and Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 80.

<sup>53</sup>Stein, *The Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 81.

revealing his interest in Jesus’ intimacy with the Father, showing Jesus as the friend of sinners and outcast in Jewish society, most notably Samaritans (Lk 10:25-37), tax-collectors (19:9-14), poor people (16:19-31) , and women (10: 38-42). Interpretation and application of a given passage in the Gospels should stress the particular emphases of the Gospel in which the passage occurs, rather than blurring its distinctives combining it with other parallels. In other words, we should respect the integrity of each story since the Holy Spirit inspired four Gospels instead of one; so each author has a unique story to tell.

Example: The Seven Sayings of Jesus from the Cross

Luke	John	Matthew/Mark
1. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing..”	2. To Mary: “Dear woman, here is your son..” To John: “Here is your mother.”	
3. “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”	4. “I am thirsty...”	5. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
6. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”	7. “It is finished.”	

Reading and thinking vertically means to read the Gospels on their own terms, following the progress of each narrative from introduction, to conflict, to climax, to resolution.

Following the story from top to bottom—that is, from beginning to end.

**Conclusion**

**Discussion**

What is the most biblical interpretation of the passage, 2 Samuel 6:6-8, “Now David and all the house of Israel were dancing before Yahweh, with all kinds of musical instruments made from ash trees, and with zithers, harps, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals. When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzza reached out to the ark of God and took hold of it, because the oxen had stumbled. Then the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Uzza, and God struck him down there because of the indiscretion, and he died there beside the ark of God. David was angry because Yahweh had burst out against Uzza, and

he called that place Perez-Uzza until this day.”?

- a). Uzza died because of his foolishness by trying to prevent the ark from falling.
- b). The excitement of David as a result of the return of the ark cost Uzza his life.
- c). Uzza’s carelessness and an act of irreverence were reasons for his death.
- d). God’s harsh discipline meted on Uzza is an indication that sacred tasks must be done in sacred manner.
- e). The roughness and bad nature of the way caused the stumbling of the oxen that threatened to throw the ark from the cart. The nature of the road cost Uzza’s death.

APPENDIX 4

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate the biblical interpretation curriculum that I developed and distributed to the teaching pastor and leadership team of Cornerstone Church of Waterloo, Wisconsin (described in the “Goals” section of chap. 1).

<b>Biblical Interpretation Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Lesson to be Evaluated:</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The material is clearly relevant on accurate interpretation of Scripture.					
The material is biblical and theologically consistent.					
The material includes vital information on how to interpret Scripture accurately.					
The material clearly lays out principles to be used to train others on accurate interpretation of Scripture.					
The points of the material vividly support the purpose outlined in the thesis which are easy to comprehend.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is detailed in its coverage of the material.					
Generally, the lesson is sharpe, clear and could be communicated by another person.					

## APPENDIX 5

### T-TEST: PAIRED TWO SAMPLE FOR MEANS

Table A1. Pre- and post-project survey results

	Pre-test Total	Post-test Total
Mean	35.8	34.66667
Variance	11.31429	10.66667
Observations		15
Pearson Correlation	0.448635	
Hypothesized		
Mean Difference	0	
Df	14	
<i>t</i> Stat	1.260619	
P(T<= <i>t</i> ) one-tail	0.114026	
<i>t</i> Critical one-tail	1.76131	
P(T<= <i>t</i> ) two-tail	0.228052	
<i>t</i> Critical two-tail	2.144787	

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## ABSTRACT

### IMPROVING BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AT CORNERSTONE CHURCH IN WATERLOO, WISCONSIN

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020  
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The focus of this research was the development of biblical interpretation training for Cornerstone Church Waterloo, Wisconsin. The need was born out of the importance and present situation in society regarding the manner in which Scripture is handled by preachers and laypeople. Therefore, I developed a curriculum that I used to train adult members of CCWW in order to spark their interest in reading, studying, understanding, and improving their ability to interpret and teach Scripture accurately. In view of such use, this project examined the biblical and theological basis for accurate interpretation of Scripture, the canonization of the Scripture, the basic principles of interpreting Scripture, and the principles of interpreting Old and New Testament narrative.

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