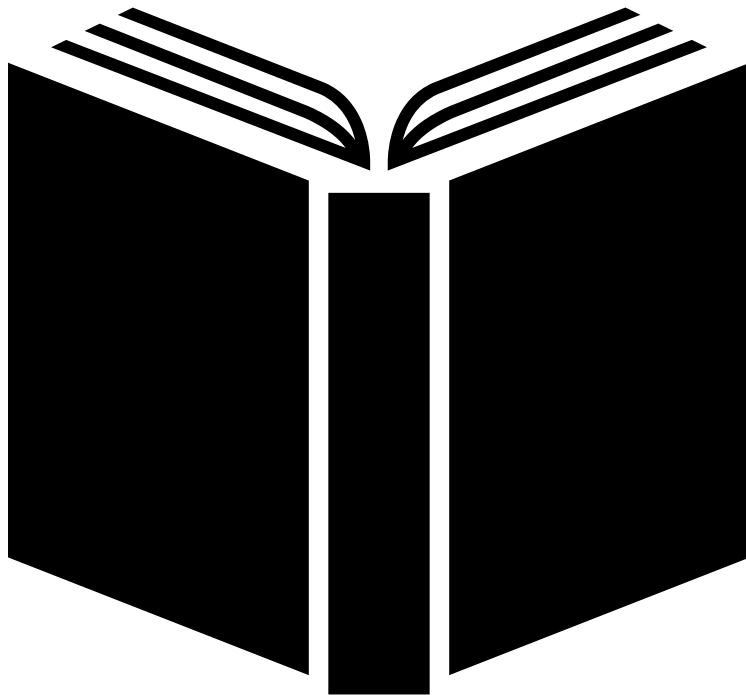


Enjoy Your Bible!



Material by Nathan Combs

| Date of Study | Subject |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 7/13/22 | Introduction |
| 7/20/22 | What Is the Bible? |
| 7/27/22 | Inductive Bible Study |
| 8/3/22 | Nathan at SOL camp |
| 8/10/22 | Observation |
| 8/17/22 | Interpretation |
| 8/24/22 | Application |
| 8/31/22 | Nathan at Nashville conference |
| 9/7/22 | Stories |
| 9/14/22 | Law |
| 9/21/22 | Poetry |
| 9/28/22 | Prophets |
| 10/5/22 | Wisdom |
| 10/12/22 | Letters |

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- How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee & Douglass Stuart
- New Testament Exegesis by Gordon D. Fee
- The Art of Reading Scripture by Ellen F. Davis & Richard B. Hays
- Living by the Book by Howard G. Hendricks & William D. Hendricks
- Independent Bible Study by Irving L. Jensen
- Read the Bible for a Change by Ray Lubbock
- Knowing Scripture by R. C. Sproul
- Hermeneutics by Henry A. Virkler
- The Last Word by N.T. Wright*

Note: asterisked titles indicate books I have especially found helpful

Introduction

“God’s sacred Word... is that inestimable treasure that excelleth all the riches of the earth.”
(From the preface to the King James Translation)

I. The Importance of this Class and its Direction

- I. The job of shepherds and teachers is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4.12).
- II. The way we know how to properly minister is through breathing in and living the words of God. The message of Jesus’ cross is the only thing that truly transforms hearts.
- III. It’s not enough for me to teach you what the Bible says. I must help teach you *how to teach yourself*. “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”
- IV. The goal of this class is not to guilt-trip you into getting into your Bible more often, but rather to learn how to *enjoy* your Bible more. *Side note*: guilt has its proper place (Acts 2), but by itself it’s an insufficient motivator for lasting change!
- V. Over the course of our class we’ll think about what the Bible is as well as a helpful study approach to use with it.

II. Barna Group Research on American Bible Reading

- I. Conclusions from December 2009:
 1. “Bible reading has become the religious equivalent of sound-bite journalism. When people read from the Bible they typically open it, read a brief passage without much regard for the context, and consider the primary thought or feeling that the passage provided. If they are comfortable with it, they accept it; otherwise, they deem it interesting but irrelevant to their life, and move on. There is shockingly little growth evident in people’s understanding of the fundamental themes of the scriptures and amazingly little interest in deepening their knowledge and application of biblical principles.”
 2. “The problem facing the Christian Church is not that people lack a complete set of beliefs; the problem is that they have a full slate of beliefs in mind, which they think are consistent with biblical teachings, and they are neither open to being proven wrong nor to learning new insights. Our research suggests that this challenge initially emerges in the late adolescent or early teenage years. By the time most Americans reach the age of 13 or 14, they think they pretty much know everything of value the Bible has to teach and they are no longer interested in learning more scriptural content. It requires increasingly concise, creative, reinforced, and personally relevant efforts to penetrate people’s minds with new or more accurate insights into genuinely biblical principles. In a culture driven by the desire to receive value, more Bible teaching is generally not viewed as an exercise in providing such value.”
- II. Many Americans say they wish they read the Bible more often.
 1. From 2011-2016, that number has slightly dropped from 67%-61%, but it’s stayed fairly consistent.
 2. If we poled this congregation, many of us would probably say the same thing.
- III. Why don’t we read as often as we should?
 1. The most popular survey answer (58%) was: I’m just too busy for it!
 2. This is one of the dangers Jesus warns about in the parable of the sower. The thorny soil represents the cares of the world + deceitfulness of riches that choke the word.

3. Other reasons not represented in the survey: we are confused by what we read (Matt. 13.19) or we're too distracted to read (Matt. 13.20).

IV. What is it that increases our hunger for the Bible?

1. The most popular answer was: "came to understand it as an important part of my faith journey" - 67%.
2. When we understand the Bible's relevance to our lives, it naturally draws us in!

III. Scriptures About Scripture

I. What do these passages teach us about how to learn and love Scripture?

1. Deuteronomy 6.4-9

2. Psalm 19.7-11

3. Ephesians 3.1-6

IV. Examining Our Perspective

I. Reading through it is more manageable than we might think!

1. How long do you suppose it takes to read the entire Bible aloud, slowly?
 - A. New Testament: 19 hrs., 10 mins.
 - B. Old Testament: 64 hrs., 20 mins.
 - C. Total: 83 hrs., 30 mins. *That's less than 3.5 days!*
2. The whole Bible can be read in a year by reading only 15-20 minutes per day.
3. The New Testament can be read in 30 days if you read an average of nine chapters per day, or about 35 minutes of reading each day.
4. According to Statista, the average American will watch 21 hours of TV per week in 2022, *not including* time spent on laptops, phones, and tablets. In that amount of time you could read most of the New Testament!

II. The format and accessibility of Scripture are not barriers at all.

1. In the middle ages, your town might have had one hand-written Bible in a foreign language chained to a spot in the local chapel. But we are living in a Bible renaissance!
2. If the traditional page layout of the Bible is off-putting to you (verses, chapters, headings, cross-references, etc.), you can buy Bibles that remove all of the clutter and allow for full immersion. Example: Crossway's Reader's Bible.
3. Bibles can be accessed in all kinds of digital ways: software, websites, apps.
4. Free high-quality audio of someone reading the Bible is easily accessed (ESV app).

V. Practical Suggestions

- I. Find or create a specific daily plan for what you're going to read.
- II. Follow a regular pattern for the time of day as much as possible (Daniel 6.10).
- III. Read in a place that's quiet and free from distractions (Luke 5.16).
- IV. Do your reading with others for accountability and greater insight.

What Is the Bible?

I. The Point of the Bible

- I. The Bible is not one book, but many!
 1. The Bible is composed of 66 different books (39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament).
 2. The authors range from Moses to Jesus' disciples and span approx. 1,500 years.
- II. The books as a whole tell a unified story.
 1. A story is an intentional sequence of events with a setting, characters, and plot.
 2. The Bible is a patchwork quilt of many stories, but they all lead to Jesus.
 3. We sing about the Bible as a story, but do we think about it as one?
 - A. "I love to tell the story; 'Twill be my theme in glory" - 268.
 - B. "Tell me the story of Jesus; write on my heart every word" - 191.
- III. The main character is God.
 1. Although this seems obvious, it's easy to forget and skew our perception.
 2. For example: the main point of the David and Goliath story is NOT: "you can face your giants like David did," but: "our awesome God humbles his enemies."
 3. God is the only character who remains at every point of Bible history.

II. Properly Using The Bible

- I. Use it to understand and enjoy God.
 1. The constant drumbeat of the prophets: "Then you will know that I am the Lord."
 2. Jesus did not primarily come down here to teach us how to live, but to reveal God's nature (John 14.6-7).
 3. Westminster Catechism - "Man's chief end is to *glorify* God, and to *enjoy* him for ever."
 4. Our behavior will be moral when we appreciate God. When we don't, the reverse will be true. "Therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge (Isaiah 5.13)."
- II. Don't use it merely as a dictionary.
 1. Some randomly look up verses and string them together without thought to context in order to draw a conclusion. This is sometimes called "proof-texting."
 2. Humorous example: Matthew 27.5, Luke 10.37, John 2.5!
 3. Bible books were meant to be read and understood as whole units of thought (Nehemiah 8.3, 1 Thessalonians 5.27).
- III. Don't use it as a self-help book.
 1. Although God certainly desires us to use the Bible to apply to our own lives (2 Timothy 3.16-17), it is not an owners manual.
 2. We should never approach Scripture with a "it's all about me and my life" attitude.
 3. We have the ability to justify anything if we're not careful (2 Peter 3.16).
- IV. Don't use it for argument ammunition.
 1. It is certainly true that the words of Scripture should be used to dismantle the lies of the devil in all their various forms (2 Corinthians 10.4).
 2. Our purpose is not to get involved in unproductive arguments and discussions (2 Timothy 2.15-16).
 3. Some Christians primarily identify themselves by how they stand on "the issues" and study the Bible for the reason of proving others wrong.
- V. Don't twist it for the sake of a hobby-horse.
 1. All good Bible students will have themes/passages that especially "click" with them.
 2. But don't allow your favorite passages to prevent you from seeing the diversity of teachings in Scripture!

III. The Story of Scripture

- I. Movement 1: Creation (Genesis 1-2)
 1. God original intention for humanity was rulership over the earth his image-bearers (Genesis 1.26-28).
 2. God also made humans to work in his presence (Genesis 2.15). Priestly language - the Hebrew word for work can also be translated "service/ministry" (example: Numbers 3.7-8).
 3. God wanted us to be his priest-kings.
- II. Movement 2: The Fall (Genesis 3-11)
 1. Instead of reigning and serving, humans rebelled and sinned. This led to exile from paradise (Genesis 3.23-34) and death (Genesis 3.19).
 2. Sin created discord between humans and creation (Genesis 3.17), which reached its climax in the flood.
 3. Sin also created discord between humans (Genesis 4.8, 6.11, 11.9).
- III. Movement 3: Reconciliation
 1. God's promises:
 - A. A family - through Abraham (Genesis 12.1-3).
 - B. A nation - through Moses (Exodus 19.3-6).
 - C. A kingdom - through David (2 Samuel 7.8-14).
 2. A Familiar Crisis - Exile.
 - A. Seems to put the promises in jeopardy (2 Kings 25). The covenant was broken.
 - B. However, God promised he would make a new covenant (Jeremiah 31.31-34) and a new king (Jeremiah 23.5).
 - C. The Old Testament concludes with unsolved problems - how will Israel be rescued so that it can bless the nations?
 3. Fulfillment in Jesus:
 - A. He is the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and David and frees Israel from exile (Matthew 1.1, 11, 17, 21).
 - B. He is also the means by which Israel blesses all the nations (Luke 4.16-19).
 - C. In order to do this, Jesus had to defeat the one who held the power of exile and death - the devil (Luke 11.21-22).
 - D. Jesus created a new covenant and a new Exodus through his death and resurrection (Matthew 26.26-28).
- IV. Movement 4: The Church
 1. Jesus' atoning work saved the Jews and allowed them to be a blessing to the nations, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Galatians 3.13-14).
 2. Jesus created peace between God and humans and between humans (Ephesians 2).
 3. Jesus' followers are now a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2.9-10).
- V. Movement 5: New Creation
 1. Harmony between humans, God, and the creation will be features of the "new heavens and new earth."
 2. We have a foretaste of that now through the current blessings of Christ, but we are not in the transformed world yet. "But according to his promise we *are waiting* for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3.13).
 3. When that day comes, we will worship God, serve him, and reign with him as his priest-kings (Revelation 22.1-5).
 4. God will fulfill his original intention for mankind!

Inductive Bible Study

I. Deductive vs. Inductive

- I. Deductive - starting with a question/topic, then going to Scripture to examine it.
 1. There's a place for this kind of study. Questions come up! "How does the Bible address _____?"
 2. Acts 15 - the Jerusalem Christians started with the question of: "Does God want us to circumcise the Gentiles coming to Jesus?" James went to Amos 9 to say, "No!"
 3. This topical approach requires a mature grasp of Scripture to do well!
- II. Inductive - starting with Scripture, then drawing conclusions after proper examination.
 1. Generally-speaking, this should be our regular approach.
 2. It gradually builds a holistic understanding of the Bible, it follows the Holy Spirit's agenda (instead of our own), and gives us the proper foundation for questions.

II. Observation: what does the text say?

- I. Pray first!
 1. We all have biases and preconceived ideas as a result of our culture, upbringing, etc.
 2. "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Psalm 119:18).
 3. When approaching this book, we should humbly ask the Author to help us understand what HE wants us to get out of it, not what we want to put into it!
- II. Read, read, read.
 1. Read repeatedly.
 - A. If possible, read a Bible book through in one sitting, then go back and read through various passages again.
 - B. With so much going on inside the Bible text, and since it was divinely authored, there is always more to see!
 2. Read in different kinds of ways.
 - A. Out loud. Abraham Lincoln quote: "When I read aloud, two senses catch the idea: first I see what I read, second, I hear it, and therefore I remember it better."
 - B. Listen to an audio Bible. Suggestion: Max McClean's ESV Listener's Bible.
 - C. Read Bibles in formats adapted to readers (e.g. Bibliotheca, ESV Reader's Bible).
 3. Read different translations.
 - A. Although I have one primary translation (ESV), I find it useful to have several others open when I study. This has at least two main benefits:
 - (1) It opens up your understanding of a passage when it's worded differently.
 - (2) Not everyone uses your particular English translation and it helps you in your interactions with others.
- III. Ask questions to get your bearings:
 1. Who? Who are the people mentioned and what details do we have about them? Do we know the author, the audience he's writing to, etc.?
 2. What? What are the instructions? What are people doing or not doing? What's the main issue or or idea(s) under discussion? Repeated thoughts?
 3. When? When does this take place in the scope of Bible history?
 4. Where? Where are the characters? Where did or will this happen?
 5. Why? Why was this written? Why is something mentioned or missing?
 6. How? How will it happen? How is it illustrated? How is it to be done?
- IV. Mark up your text!
 1. Harvard's biology professor Dr. Louis Agassiz: "a pencil is one of the best of eyes."
 2. We want to find out the original reason(s) why the author wrote to the first readers.
 - A. Mark repeated thoughts or words.

- B. Mark pivot words. Conclusion words (therefore, so, for, finally), contrast words (but, however, yet, nevertheless), comparison words (like, as, such as, also).
- C. Mark expressions of time words (then, after this, until, when, now, soon).
- D. Look for lists, which lead to important ideas and main points.

III. Interpretation: what does the text mean?

- I. Ask thought questions:
 1. If there's an Old Testament quotation, why is it brought in?
 2. Context: how does this help me better understand the Bible book I'm studying?
 3. Context: how does this passage fit into the overall story arc of Scripture?
 4. Outline your text (see page 12).
 5. What's the overall point of this paragraph or passage?
- II. Consult helpful resources:
 1. The Bible Project website is free and invaluable: www.bibleproject.com.
 2. E-Sword Bible Software is free and compatible for mac or pc: e-sword.net.
 3. Good commentaries recommendations: bestcommentaries.com.
 4. Check the cross-references in your Bible.

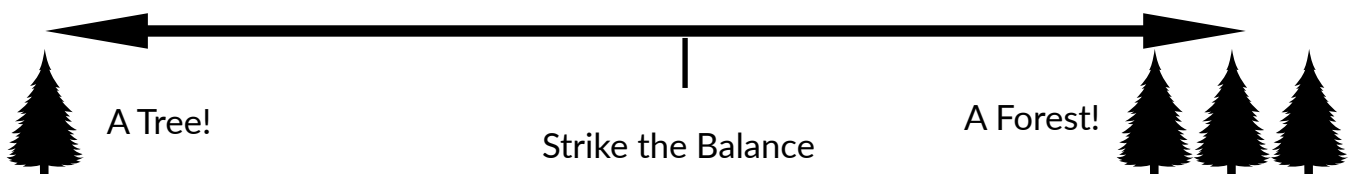
IV. Application: how can the text change me?

- I. Application is vital!
 1. If we're not allowing the text to change our hearts in specific ways, we are in serious danger of becoming Pharisaical hypocrites (Matthew 23.3).
 2. The Bible is designed to be a mirror that exposes/changes our souls (James 1.22-25).
- II. Principles of application:
 1. Apply to yourself, not just to others. Matthew 7.3-5.
 2. Apply specifically, not generically. Don't be content with vague principles.
- III. How do we apply? Ask good questions:
 1. How is the original context different from our context?
 2. How is the original context similar to our own?

V. Avoiding Two Extremes: be able to zoom in and out to see God's large and small messages!

- I. "Look at this one tree!"
 1. Some Bible students drill deeply down into one word or one verse or one idea and forget the rest of the passage they're looking at.
 2. This causes warped priorities and severe misunderstandings about what pleases God. See Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 23.23.
 3. Jesus zoomed way out in his Bible study to summarize all the law and the prophets in a few different ways: Matthew 7.12, 22.37-40.
- II. "Look at this forest!"
 1. Other Bible students make a habit to NOT drill deeply into specific words or verses: "We don't need to get technical, it's enough to just get the gist of the passage."
 2. The Bible writers DID write their letters with the expectation that we would look closely at individual words, like in Galatians 3.16.
 3. Jesus carefully examined words/phrases and expected others to do so: Mark 12.26.

Don't Miss the Forest OR the Trees



PRACTICE: Mark 6.45-52

Observation: Practicing Our Skills

This story was written by Samuel H. Scudder in 1879 about his experience with Harvard Professor J. Louis Agassiz. It is a classic way to introduce the fundamentals of firsthand discovery in study. As we read it, please use a pencil or pen to *mark the parts of the story that teach a lesson about observation skills*. You will be asked to share your findings at the end of the reading.

Agassiz and the Fish by a Student

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

"When do you wish to begin?" he asked.

"Now," I replied.

This seemed to please him, and with an energetic "Very well," he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.

"Take this fish," he said, "and look at it; we call it a Haemulon [pronounced Hem-yulon]; by and by I will ask what you have seen."

With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me.

"No man is fit to be a naturalist," said he, "who does not know how to take care of specimens."

I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray, and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly. Those were not the days of ground glass stoppers, and elegantly shaped exhibition jars; all the old students will recall the huge, neckless glass bottles with their leaky, wax-besmeared corks half eaten by insects and begrimed with cellar

dust. Entomology was a cleaner science than ichthyology, but the example of the professor, who had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish, was infectious; and though this alcohol had "a very ancient and fishlike smell," I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts, and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water. Still I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. My friends at home, too, were annoyed, when they discovered that no amount of eau de cologne would drown the perfume which haunted me like a shadow.

In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the professor, who had, however, left the museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting-fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of a normal, sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face—ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters view—just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour, I concluded that lunch was necessary; so with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the museum, but had gone and would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I

drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my fingers down its throat to see how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me—I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.

“That is right,” said he, “a pencil is one of the best eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked.”

With these encouraging words he added— “Well, what is it like?”

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknown to me; the fringed gill-arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshy lips, and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fin, and forked tail; the compressed and arched body. When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment:

“You have not looked very carefully; why,” he continued, more earnestly, “you haven’t seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself. Look again; look again!” And he left me to my misery. I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish? But now I set myself to the task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor’s criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and when, towards its close, the professor inquired,

“Do you see it yet?”

“No,” I replied. “I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before.”

“That is next best,” said he earnestly, “but I won’t hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish.”

This was disconcerting; not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be, but also, without reviewing my new discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.

The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

“Do you perhaps mean,” I asked, “that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?”

His thoroughly pleased, “Of course, of course!” repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically—as he always did—upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next. “Oh, look at your fish!” he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned and heard my new catalogue.

“That is good, that is good!” he repeated, “but that is not all; go on.” And so for three long days, he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid. “Look, look, look,” was his repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had—a lesson whose influence was extended to the details of every subsequent study; a legacy the professor has left to me, as he left it to many others, of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we cannot part.

A year afterward, some of us were amusing ourselves with chalking outlandish beasts upon the museum blackboard. We drew prancing star-fishes; frogs in mortal combat; hydra headed worms; stately crawl-fishes, standing on their tails, bearing aloft umbrellas; and grotesque fishes, with gaping mouths and staring eyes. The professor came

in shortly after, and was amused as any, at our experiments. He looked at the fishes.

"Haemulons, every one of them," he said. "Mr. _____ dry them."

True; and to this day, if I attempt to draw a fish, I can draw nothing but Haemulons.

The fourth day a second fish of the same group was placed beside the first, and I was bidden to point out the resemblances and differences between the two; another and another followed, until the entire family lay before me, and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves; the odor had become a pleasant perfume; and even now, the sight of an old six-inch worm-eaten cork brings fragrant memories!

The whole group of Haemulons was thus brought into review; and whether engaged upon the dissection of the internal organs, preparation and examination of the bony framework, or the description of the various parts, Agassiz's training in the method of observing facts in their orderly arrangement, was ever accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them.

"Facts are stupid things," he would say, "until brought into connection with some general law."

At the end of eight months, it was almost with reluctance that I left these friends and turned to insects; but what I gained by this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation in my favorite groups.

noticed many new features. "The pencil is one of the best eyes."

- The student was made to take time away from the fish and think about his fish all night. He mentions the "wakeful hours of the previous night."
- The professor forbade his student to use any artificial aid.
- Once he "set himself to the task with a will," he discovered many things he hadn't seen before. The manner of looking is important.
- After looking and meditation, the fish was committed to memory.
- It was important for him to compare his fish to other fish to see differences and similarities so he could see the forrest, not just the trees. "Facts are stupid things..."
- At the beginning of the story, he didn't have much interest in looking at a fish. At the end of the story, he didn't have much interest in looking at bugs! Don't judge a text before you've really looked at it (e.g. Leviticus)!
- Never be content that you have seen all the facts or with the facts alone.

Observations:

- Eagerness on the part of the student. Wanted to begin immediately.
- The first thing the Professor said was "Look!" and was his repeated instruction.
- In ten minutes the student thought he'd seen all there was to the fish. But after hours of looking, the student still had not seen the most obvious thing.
- The student hated looking at the fish until he decided to draw it. After he drew it, he

Interpretation: Practicing Our Skills

Heb. 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,

20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

29 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

30 For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay" (Deut. 32.35) And again, "The Lord will judge his people" (Deut. 32.36).

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Observation: What Does the Text Say?

- Mark repeated thoughts or words.
- Mark pivot words. Conclusion words (therefore, so, for, finally), contrast words (but, however, yet, nevertheless), comparison words (like, as, such as, also).
- Mark expressions of time (then, after this, until, when, now, soon).
- Look for lists, which lead to important ideas and main points.

Interpretation: What Does the Text Mean?

- If there's an Old Testament quotation, why is it brought in?

- Context: how does this help me better understand the Bible book I'm studying?
- Context: how does this passage fit into the overall story arc of Scripture?
- What is the overall point of the passage?

How to Outline:

- Find the natural divisions in the text (pivot words are especially helpful here).
- Use the key words you've marked to summarize the flow of thought in each section.
- Combine your summaries into one central thought for the whole text.

Application: Practicing Our Skills

I. Our Desperate Need for Application.

1. All Christians have sinful parts of our lives. 1 John 1.8 - "If we say we have no sin, we *deceive ourselves*, and the truth is not in us."
2. Therefore, all of us have a need for our hearts and minds to be changed.
3. This requires a great deal of humility. James 1.21 - "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and *receive with meekness the implanted word*, which is able to save your souls."
4. Discovering we are wrong and forming new habits and attitudes is never easy. There is always a temptation to simply use Scripture to confirm what we're already doing. Luke 10.29 - "But he, *desiring to justify himself*, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

II. Principles of Application

1. Apply to yourself, not just to others.
 - A. Don't just apply to the people in the text: "Here's how the Pharisees should have reacted to Jesus."
 - B. Don't just apply to the people around you in your church, your family, or your community: "so-and-so really needs to read this passage." Matthew 7.3-5.
2. Apply specifically, not generically.
 - A. How would you like it if your doctor kept your diagnosis at a general level? "Sir, you seem to have cancer." OKAY??? MORE DETAILS, PLEASE."
 - B. Don't leave your soul's diagnosis at the general level: "we shouldn't worship idols like them." That's laziness, not good Bible study.
 - C. Drive it deeper! Identify your objects of worship by asking: "What is it that I think would complete my life?" If God is not the answer, you have an idol.

III. How do we apply? Ask good questions:

1. How is the original context different from our context?
 - A. In some cases, the historical context is different
 - (1) The Israelites had their own covenant with God containing laws that do not directly apply to Christians, who are under a different covenant.
 - (2) For example, Jesus' followers do not take up arms to advance God's kingdom like the Israelites did in Canaan.
 - B. Cultural context is another consideration.
 - (1) Some practices were unique to certain areas and had a different significance.
 - (2) For example, the market places were filled with meat that had been previously sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8). Our meat does not.
2. How is the original context similar to our own?
 - A. In the first example: we are at war, but not in a physical way (John 18.36-37).
 - B. In the second example, we should still look for ways to not tread upon the consciences of fellow Christians, even if the specific situation is different.

IV. In-class workshop: study the passage on the next page and answer these questions:

1. How is this situation *different* from our own context?
2. How is this situation *similar* to our own?
3. What is the main application principle here?
4. What are some *specific* ways you can use this principle to become a different person?

John 13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him,

3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God,

4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.

5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"

7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."

8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you."

11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?"

13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.

14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

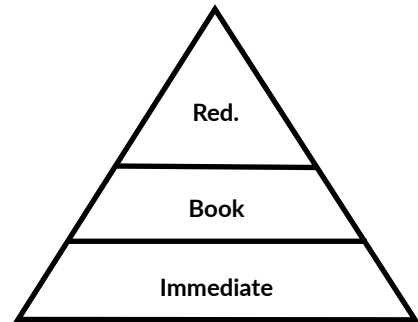
Stories

I. Stories and Scripture

1. Over 40% of the Old Testament is narrative.
 - a. Although bearing some resemblances to ancient epics, Biblical stories are unique.
 - b. "It is peculiar... that among ancient peoples only Israel should have chosen to cast its sacred national traditions in prose" (Robert Alter).
2. Narrative is important in the New Testament as well.
 - a. The gospels and the book of Acts tell a beautiful story of Jesus and the spread of his good news. The epistles are all built upon this foundation.
 - b. Jesus frequently used stories as a teaching technique (parables).

II. The Three Levels of Bible Narrative

1. The *Redemption* story - The story which ties all the other ones together: the plan of God to save his creation. This level is what Jesus spoke of in John 5:39 when he said "the Scriptures testify about me."
2. The *Book* story - Each story takes place in a Bible book that is telling its own larger story. For example, David and Goliath ties into 1 Samuel's theme of God's salvation & kingship.
3. The *Immediate* story - This level is speaking of the hundreds of individuals stories that make up the other two levels. For example, Abraham and Isaac on Moriah, David and Abigail, etc.



III. Story Characteristics

1. Characters - the "who" of stories.
 - a. Remember, God is always the primary character of every story in Scripture.
 - b. Another character is the narrator, the one telling the story.
2. Setting - the "where" and "when" of stories.
 - a. The setting is of great help in interpreting a story.
 - b. For example, the gospels record that John the Baptist preached in the wilderness. That hyperlinks us back to the wilderness years of Israel - a time of testing and spiritual dryness.
3. Plot - the "what" and "how" of stories.
 - a. Exposition, establishing the characters and setting. Luke 18:35-37 is a good example.
 - b. Tension, the moment of crisis in the story, as in Luke 18:38-39.
 - c. Resolution, as in Luke 18:40-43.

IV. How to Study Biblical Stories

1. Understand the purpose: to show God's work in the history of his people.
 - a. The main purpose of individual stories is *not* to teach moral lessons or hold up examples of right and wrong behavior.
 - b. Often, there are no instructions or comments on the morality of the characters in various stories (although there are exceptions, like 2 Samuel 11:27).
 - c. The narratives DO illustrate implicitly what is taught explicitly elsewhere in Scripture. For example: the ten commandments flatly teach that adultery is wrong. The story of David and Bathsheba illustrates why it is wrong.
2. Focus on the narrator's perspective.

- a. When storytellers narrate, they don't provide every single bit of information about a person or situation. Likewise, the Biblical narrator is "omniscient," but he only tells us what God wants us to know.
 - b. Occasionally he will give commentary (Example: 2 Kings 17.7-23).
 - c. Don't speculate on what the narrator did not reveal ("what happened to Jonah?!").
 - d. Don't miss the points of the story with unhelpful side-tangents ("Jonah's fish?").
3. Track his techniques: repetition, contrasts, etc.
- a. Repetition:
 - i. Key words: for example, note the word "brother(s)" in Genesis 37.
 - ii. Repetition also happens in the form of resuming a story after an interruption. For example, 37.36 is repeated in 39.1 when Joseph's story picks up again.
 - b. Contrasts:
 - i. Note the overlapping stories of Saul and David. Saul is described as the "tallest" Israelite (1 Samuel 10.23) and David the "smallest" (1 Samuel 16.11 - note marginal footnote). That's significant when you get to the story of Goliath - the tallest hung back while God used the smallest to bring victory.
 - ii. Rahab and Achan is another example in Joshua 2-7. Both hid something. She was a Canaanite, but acted in faith and was saved. Achan was an Israelite, but acted as a Canaanite and perished.
4. Pay attention to the dialogue.
- a. The first point of dialogue is an important clue to the story plot and the character of the speaker (e.g. Judges 14.2 - "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines...")
 - b. Note how long some people speak compared to others to help you understand emphasis (Potiphar's wife's invitation compared to Joseph's reply - Gen. 39.7-9).
 - c. The narrator will emphasize the crucial parts of narrative by having one of the characters repeat the narrative in a speech (Genesis 42.30-34, then 44.18-34).
5. Note the characteristics of the characters.
- a. Details about people are often sparse. Continually ask yourself, "why are we told that about him/her?"
 - b. For example, Esau is first described as "red, all his body like a hairy cloak" in Gen. 25.25, which sets up his animal-like personality and his interaction with Jacob.
 - c. Another example: we're told that Ehud was left-handed in Judges 3.15. This sets us up later for his show-down with Moab's fat king.
 - d. Take note of other details like: status ("wise," "wealthy," etc.), profession ("captain of the guard," "wife," "cupbearer," etc.), or tribe ("Midianites," etc.).
- V. 1 Corinthians 10.1-13**
1. How do the stories of Israel teach the Corinthians about God?
 2. How do those stories fit into the redemption story of Scripture?
 3. How were the Corinthians like the Israelites? How were they different?
 4. How can we apply the original story to ourselves?

The Law

I. The Law in Israel's History

- A. Israel needed a new identity - Exodus 19.5-6.
 - A. In Egypt, they were simply downtrodden slaves with no power or purpose
 - B. In the law, God wanted to fundamentally teach the Israelites who they were and what they would do.
 - C. "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a *kingdom of priests* and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel" (Exodus 19.5-6).
- B. Israel needed a new culture, separate from Egypt and Canaan - Leviticus 20.26.
 - A. "You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine."
 - B. Prior to their spectacular release from slavery, God's people had been living in a foreign land for hundreds of years. Practically-speaking, they *were* Egyptian.
 - C. After their release, they would go into a land ruled by Canaanite cultures with their own set of expectations for sexuality, food, dress, etc.
- C. Israel needed to understand and worship Yahweh, their God - Exodus 20.2-3.
 - A. The opening words of the ten commandments passage demand exclusivity.
 - B. They were used to worshipping the gods of Egypt. "And I said to them, 'Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.' But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. *None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt* (Ez. 20.7-8).
 - C. From their quick pivot to idolatry at Mt. Sinai and their constant grumbling about their conditions, it is clear that Israel did not know who their Lord was!

II. Two Basic Forms

- I. Apodictic law
 - 1. This type of law involves direct commands, the "dos" and "do nots," binding on all Israelites at all times.
 - 2. These laws are examples, rather than mentioning every possible circumstance.
 - 3. Consider Leviticus 19.9-14.
 - A. Observation: What stands out to you about the words God uses here?
 - B. Interpretation: What would these words have meant to Israelites?
 - C. Application: What can we draw out for ourselves here?
- II. Casuistic Law
 - 1. These are laws that focus on specific cases.
 - 2. These laws make up a large portion of the 600-plus commandments in the OT. None of them are explicitly renewed in the new covenant.
 - 3. Consider Deuteronomy 15.12-17.
 - A. Observation: What stands out to you about the words God uses here?
 - B. Interpretation: What would these words have meant to Israelites?
 - C. Application: What can we draw out for ourselves here?

III. Christians and the Law

I. The law of Moses was a covenant between God and the Israelite nation only - Deut. 4-5.

1. A covenant is a binding contract between two parties, both of whom have obligations specified in the covenant.
 - A. In OT times, covenants were often given by a powerful overlord (suzerain) to a weaker vassal (servant). The lord would provide protection and the servant was obligated to give complete loyalty.
 - B. Deut. 4.13 - "And he declared to you his *covenant*, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone."
2. Moses is specific that this agreement was for the Israelite nation alone.
3. "The Lord our God made a covenant *with us* in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today." (Deut. 5.2-3).

II. The law was never the permanent plan for God's people - Jer. 31, Heb. 8, Acts 15, Gal. 3.

1. Jeremiah 31.31-34 speaks of a "new covenant" that God would make with his people, in which he would write his law on their hearts.
2. Hebrews 8 quotes that very passage from Jeremiah to say that "in speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete" (vs. 13).
3. Peter, in speaking to Jewish Christians intent on making Gentile believers keep the law, said: "Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (Acts 15.10).
4. Gal. 3.24-25 - "So then, the law was our guardian *until Christ came*, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, *we are no longer under a guardian.*"

III. The law is still extremely valuable for learning about God's character and our purpose - 2 Tim. 3.16, 1 Pet. 2.9.

1. We should not go to an extreme by saying Christians should follow an obsolete covenant, nor should we go to the other extreme
2. We have inherited the purpose of Israel. Peter uses Exodus 19.6 to speak about what Christians are. How can we understand our identity if we don't understand Israel?
3. 2 Tim. 3.16 - "*All Scripture* is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." What did "all Scripture" include at the time Paul wrote this? Certainly not the collected New Testament!

IV. Christians should only follow the parts of the law which Jesus and his apostles renew.

1. For example, the two greatest commandments from Deut. 6.5 and Lev. 19.18 are taught again in the new covenant.
2. There are also fundamental creation principles from Genesis that predate the law of Moses that are still in effect (e.g. male and female roles, marriage, respecting life, etc.).
3. We are also expected to use common sense to extract principles when appropriate.
 - A. Paul did when speaking of his right to be financially supported by his teaching.
 - B. 1 Cor. 9.9 - "For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned?"

Poetry

One third of the OT is written in poetic language. Every OT book except Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, and Malachi contain at least some poetry, though in some cases it's only a few verses or chapters. Some books are almost all poetry (Psalms, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Lamentations, Hosea, etc.).

Poetry communicates truth just like prose does, but in a different form. Read Judges 4.17-22 and Judges 5.24-27 about the death of Sisera. *What differences do you see in these two passages?*

I. The Power of Biblical Poetry

I. It helps us retain God's thoughts

1. In ancient times people did not have easy access to written materials. Most people learned by listening and remembering what they heard.
2. Poetry is generally easier to memorize than plain writing. You can probably more easily remember the words of songs than sentences from books or speeches.

II. It stimulates our imaginations

1. Rather than simply report an event or idea in a straightforward way, poetry is able to help us step into visual pictures in our minds and experience God's perspective.
2. Proverbs 8:27 - "When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep."
 - A. The point of this passage is not to prove the scientific fact that the world is round.
 - B. The point is to imagine God setting up the universe alongside of Lady Wisdom.

III. It stirs our emotions

1. One of the reasons why the Psalms are so popular is because they articulate the entire spectrum of human feelings. We all experience anger, sadness, joy, anxiety, etc.
2. Not only that, we are taught about what to do with our emotions through poetry like Lamentations, Psalms, etc.: take them all to God (c.f. 1 Peter 5.7).

II. Features of Biblical Poetry

I. Brevity

1. When you compare the two versions of Sisera's death, you'll notice that the poetic section is shorter than the narrative.
2. Hebrew poetry is written in short lines packed with meaning. Many of our modern translations indent the poetic sections so they're easier to notice.
3. Important hint: make sure you read it following the punctuation, not the line breaks. Don't just pause because it's the end of a line.

II. Imagery

1. We are familiar with the expression: "a picture is worth a thousand words." Word pictures also say a lot.
2. Some common forms of imagery include:
 - A. *Personification*: something non-human is described in human terms. In Psalm 148.3, the sun, moon, and stars are told to praise God, something only people do.
 - B. *Simile*: a comparison using the words "like" or "as." Psalm 42.1 - "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God."
 - C. *Metaphor*: A direct comparison. Psalm 23.1 says "The Lord is my shepherd," not "The Lord is like my shepherd."
 - D. *Hyperbole*: Exaggeration for effect. Psalm 61.2 - "From the end of the earth I call to you."

- E. *Anthropomorphism*: Describing God in human terms. “The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a *mighty hand* and an *outstretched arm*” (Deut. 26.8).

III. Parallelism

1. Poetry in English tends to focus on parallel sounds (rhymes) or rhythms (beats): “Jack and Jill went up the hill.”
2. Instead, OT poetry focuses on parallel *thoughts* by connecting lines together.
3. Notice Judges 5.26:
 - A. “She sent her hand to the tent peg
 - B. and her right hand to the workmen’s mallet.”
4. The most common relationship between poetic lines is close similarity (called “synonymous parallelism”).
5. *Usually, the second line will focus the first line in some kind of way.*

III. Practice:

I. Explain how the second line focuses the thought of the first line in these verses:

1. Psalm 145.10 - “All your works shall give thanks to You, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless You.”
2. Isaiah 1.3 - “An ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”

II. Identify whether the following verses are examples of metaphor (M), simile (S), personification (P), anthropomorphism (A), or hyperbole (H).

- _____ 1. “He is like a tree planted by streams of water.”
- _____ 2. “Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.”
- _____ 3. “The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands.”
- _____ 4. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their hosts.”
- _____ 5. “The Lord is my rock and my fortress.”
- _____ 6. “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God.”
- _____ 7. “For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.”
- _____ 8. “Wisdom shouts in the streets, she lifts her voice in the square.”
- _____ 9. “God will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready.”
- _____ 10. “You have been my God from my mother’s womb.”

Prophets

Altogether, there were 16 prophets of God in the Old Testament who wrote down the messages they received. Of these 16, four were “major” prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) who wrote down relatively large books and 12 were “minor” prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) who recorded shorter books. Some prophets were written to foreign nations (Nahum & Obadiah), or at least contain sections addressed to them. In the Major Prophets alone, over 25 chapters and 680 verses are in this style.

I. Understanding the Prophets

A. The prophets were God’s covenant policemen

1. The covenant law that God gave to the Israelites through Moses didn’t just include regulations and statutes for the people to keep, but also described blessings and curses that would follow them depending on their future actions (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 4, 28-32). Thus, God indicated to his people that he was not merely giving Israel his law, he was also going to enforce it!
2. Similar to the modern job of policeman, the job of the prophets was to enforce the laws of God and forcefully point to the consequences of obedience and disobedience.
3. When we examine the 16 prophets who wrote down God’s messages, we notice something interesting about their timeline. All of them fall within the narrow time window of 760-460 B.C. These 300 years cover the time prior to and following the Babylonian/Assyrian exiles.
4. Why don’t we have books of prophecy in Abraham’s day, or Joshua’s, or David’s? Because in the days of the divided kingdom, as Judah and Israel slipped into spiritual darkness, there was a greater need for covenant enforcers!

B. The prophets’ message was unoriginal

1. When we hear the word “prophet” in our culture, we typically think of a person who foretells the future. While it’s certainly true that God’s prophets spoke messages that anticipated coming events, they most often spoke God’s thoughts about the cultural situation at the time they were prophesying.
2. The way they addressed current events was by speaking and writing down messages that were unoriginal to them. In other words, as God’s covenant enforcers, He inspired the prophets to deliver to their generation the content of the original Mosaic covenant’s promises and warnings.
3. Therefore, what we read in the prophets are not new ideas that had never been taught before, just new wording of the same teachings that God had spoken through Moses in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
4. They mainly cried out against oppression of the weak, ritualism, and idolatry.

C. The prophets’ message was not their own, but God’s

1. When we read the prophets, it’s easy to see that each messenger had his own unique style, vocabulary, personality, concerns, etc. The prophets, however, never claimed to speak their own words when prophesying.
2. As you read through their writings, you’ll notice that the messages are often punctuated with phrases like, “Thus says the Lord,” or “declares the Lord.” A majority of the time, in fact, the prophetic message is relayed directly as received from the Lord, in the first person, so that God speaks of himself as “I” or “me.”
3. Unlike modern-day preachers who freely choose to preach the gospel, the prophets were chosen by God to speak for Him (Exodus 3, Jeremiah 1). Therefore, both in their

original commission and in the words they preached, the prophets were directly guided by God's Spirit to speak for Him.

II. Prophetic Writing Styles

A. Ambassadorial Speech

1. It was not uncommon for prophets in the OT to boldly intrude on the royal court's throne room to declare a message. From this experience arose a formal manner of presentation that such social setting demanded: the speeches of ambassadors.
2. They usually involve: 1) The sending of the king's exact words, either an accusation or an announcement and 2) The ambassador's explanation of those words.
3. In written forms, the messenger would introduce his report by declaring his commission from the King. This was normally followed by the messenger formula: "Thus says the Lord," which then led to a second accusation or announcement of judgment with a second messenger formula.

B. Salvation Oracles

1. These comforting messages fall into two main groups: promises of salvation and proclamations of salvation.
2. There's usually three components: 1) a reassurance that God's promise was still true, 2) the basis for this reassurance, and 3) the future change of judgment into blessing.

C. The Woe

1. These messages begin with a strong word of dismay, using the word "Woe!" or "Alas!" The exclamation is usually followed by a description of sinful behavior.
2. Some believe that the social setting for these words was the cries of despair lifted up at a funeral. Regardless of the origin of this genre, it is certainly true that the prophets cried out in despair over the stubbornness of the people.

IV. The Lawsuit

1. In the prophets, God will figuratively summon Israel or Judah to appear in court to hear the case that has been gathered against them.
2. The various parts of the lawsuit are as follows: 1) An appeal for the jury to listen closely (a jury is usually made up of the heavens and the earth), 2) the questioning of the witnesses and a statement of the accusation, 3) the prosecution's address to the court, usually a contrast of God's act of grace with the people's sin, and 4) a call to repent and obey God.

V. The Enactment

1. Visual aids are powerful ways to communicate thoughts.
2. Sometimes God gave his prophets pictures to act out in addition to the messages they spoke. The (sometimes extreme) symbolic actions reinforced their words.

III. Practice (Identify the different writing styles of these passages):

I. Amos 9.11-15

II. Isaiah 3.13-26

III. Habakkuk 2.6-8

IV. Isaiah 38.1-8

V. Isaiah 20

Wisdom

I. What are the wisdom books?

- A. Basically, wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life.
 - 1. The basic meaning of the Hebrew word: "skill." Skill in living life the way God intended.
 - 2. Wisdom is a personal attribute of God that he wove into the fabric of our universe (like light).
 - 3. This gives us a framework for understanding why guidance from God needs to be followed.
 - 4. Analogy: I could try to use a shirt as a pair of pants, but I would destroy it.
- B. Wisdom literature is written to apply the fear of the Lord to our everyday lives.
 - 1. In the Old Testament: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.
 - 2. In the New Testament: the book of James comes the closest to this style.
 - 3. Job 1.1 - "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who *feared God* and turned away from evil."
 - 4. Proverbs 1.7 - "*The fear of the LORD* is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."
 - 5. Ecclesiastes 12.13 - "The end of the matter; all has been heard. *Fear God* and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."
 - 6. Song of Songs - the passionate love between a man and his lover is bound by the fear of God - "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that *you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases*" (2.7, 3.5, 8.4).
- C. The perspective of wisdom books.
 - 1. The law and the prophets are written from a "top-down" perspective: "Thus says the Lord..."
 - 2. The wisdom books are written from a "bottom-up" viewpoint. Proverbs examines how life usually works on the ground level. Job addresses the issue of when life does not work the way it should (when the righteous suffer). Ecclesiastes explores whether anything in this life can offer ultimate satisfaction.

II. How do we interpret them?

- A. Carefully!
 - 1. Don't just read in bits and pieces.
 - a. For example, Ecclesiastes 3.2 says there is "a time to be born and a time to die." Some snatch this out of context to say that God protectively selects our timespan.
 - b. In reality, though, the writer is making a point about the ebb and flow of life and how it is beyond our control, regardless of whether a person is good or bad.
 - 2. Understand terms cautiously.
 - a. When Proverbs 14.7 says "Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge." What is a fool? Does this mean Christians should withdraw from people of lower education, mental abilities, etc.?
 - b. No! Rather, a fool is essentially an infidel, someone who scoffs at God and his ways and acknowledges no higher authority than himself.
 - 3. Follow the line of argument.
 - a. Consider Job 15.20 - "The wicked man writes in pain all his days, through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless." Is the Bible teaching that wicked people are never happy? No, these are the incorrect words of Eliphaz, whose words are condemned at the end of the book.
 - b. But unless you read through the entire book of Job, that won't be clear to you.

B. Specific comments on each book:

1. Proverbs

- a. A book primarily addressed to young men, specifically Solomon's son (1.8, 10, 2.1, 3.1, etc.). It contains a series of speeches about wisdom (sometimes by wisdom herself), then a longer collection of short sayings written by a variety of people.
- b. The proverbs are practical and easy to understand. However, they are not legal guarantees by God, but general truths about life. In fact, the Hebrew word for proverb is *meshallim*, which means "figures of speech."
- c. They are excellent (and illustrative!) ways to shape behavior and thought. Consider Proverbs 6.27-29.

2. Job

- a. A book which deals with the issue of human suffering from the perspective of humans and the spiritual world.
- b. Most of the book is made up of long dialogues between Job and his three friends.
- c. There are many speakers in the book: Job, his wife, his three friends, a random young guy, Satan, and God, but not all of these are accurate in their speech.
- d. Conclusive truth comes at the end of the book when God finally comes to respond to Job's challenge in chapters 38-42.
- e. We learn that we have no right to criticize God until we know what he knows.

3. Ecclesiastes

- a. A book written by a "preacher" king from David's family about his experiences trying to find meaning under the sun.
- b. He discovers that death comes to all living things, human or beast, rich or poor, of and nothing in this life provides ultimate meaning. The flow of the book jumps around from one issue to the next, rather like the stories of older people.
- c. He ends his search concluding that keeping God's commands and fearing him is the whole point of man's existence.

4. Song of Songs

- a. A collection of passionate (but not pornographic) poems about love and marriage, featuring a man and his wife.
- b. This is a poetic view of marital love, not an exact description of Solomon's home.

III. How do we apply them?

A. Find the basic core of truth in every section.

1. Since we don't live in an ancient agricultural setting, we'll need to understand *their* context first and then put it into our own.
2. Since people never change, there will be universal ways to apply everything we read.

B. With an eye on the New Testament.

1. Remember this: ultimately, the wisdom books point forward to Jesus "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2.3).
2. As wise (and inspired!) as these books are, they were written before God came to us in human flesh. Ultimate answers are found in his Son.

Letters

I. About 1st century letters

- A. It was the primary way to communicate across long-distances.
 - 1. Scholars have collected about 14,000 letters from the Greek and Roman cultures, which gives us a lot of interesting comparisons to NT documents.
 - 2. Some letters were informal, private letters between family members and friends. Others were more formal and were intended for public gatherings/groups.
 - 3. The NT letters fall somewhere in-between. Some were more personal (Philemon and 3 John) and some were more public (Romans, Corinthians).
- B. Interesting facts
 - 1. The average ancient letter was 87 words, though more public figures generally wrote longer letters (Cicero averaged 295 words). The NT letters tend to be longer, especially Paul's (averaging 2,495 words).
 - 2. Letter writing could be costly, partly because of the materials (papyrus and ink) and partly because professional scribes (an amanuensis) were often used. One author estimates that 1 Corinthians would have cost \$2,000 to produce in today's dollars.
 - 3. There was no postal service, so letters were sent by private messengers (example: Tychichus in Eph. 6.21-22).
 - 4. Typically, these letters were read out loud (example: 1 Thessalonians 5.27 - "I put you under oath to have this letter read to all the brothers").

B. Typical Parts of Ancient Letters

- A. Introduction
 - 1. The writer's name: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God..." (Col. 1.1).
 - 2. The name of the recipients: "To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae" (Col. 1.2).
 - 3. A greeting: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father." "Peace" was the typical Jewish greeting and "Grace" was a modified version of the typical Gentile greeting.
 - 4. Thanksgiving and prayer. Ancient greek letters usually began with a prayer to the gods. In the NT, God and his Son are praised. Almost all of Paul's letters begin this way (Col. 1.3-14).
- B. Body
 - 1. It's important to understand that the NT letters are occasional. In other words, they were written to address specific situations, not because the authors wanted to write down theological treatises for posterity.
 - 2. Therefore, when we read them it's as if we are listening to one side of a phone conversation. We won't always know what the other side is saying, but often we can have some idea.
- C. Conclusion. This part can contain a variety of different matters.
 - 1. Final exhortations (Col. 4.2-6).
 - 2. Instructions and comments about fellow workers (Col. 4.7-17).
 - 3. Final greetings (Col. 4.18).
 - 4. Signature (Col. 4.18).

C. How should we interpret them? Understand context!

A. Historical context

- 1. Remember this: a text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his or her readers!
- 2. Pay attention to basic details in the text (who, what, when, where, why) that can give us a sense of the unstated issues and circumstances of the letter.

3. Research cultural issues as you come across them (like the head covering in 1 Cor. 11). Extra resources like commentaries and Bible dictionaries are helpful here.

B. Literary context

1. Letters are meant to be read in one sitting. Make sure you do that with the NT letters.
2. Since the content of the letters is meant to connect together, try to think in paragraphs. What is the main point of each paragraph and how do they fit together?
3. Then think even broader: how does this letter fit with the others by the same author, the rest of the NT, and even the rest of the Bible?

D. How should we apply them?

- A. Figure out how your situation is different from the original context of the letter.
 1. The gap between us and the NT letters is smaller than many other sections of Scripture.
 2. However, there are many issues discussed that we do not directly face (whether to eat food in an idol's temple, for example).
- B. Think through ways in which your situation is similar to what was originally happening.
 1. None of us deal with the issue of eating meat in an idol's temple.
 2. Nevertheless, we DO have to think through participating with the world in a way that compromises our spiritual lives.

E. Practice: Philemon

- A. Observation:
 1. Who are the people mentioned and what details do you notice about them?
 2. What are the places and timeframes mentioned in the book?
- B. Interpretation
 1. What information about the historical context of the letter would be helpful?
 2. Where did Paul mention the central characters elsewhere in his letters?
 3. How does Paul's request fit with other teachings in his letters and the Scriptures?
- C. Application
 1. In what ways is Paul's situation different from our own?
 2. In what ways are we called upon to do something similar to Philemon?