**EXEGETING SCRIPTURE LIKE A PRO:**

*Learning the Principles of Reading & Interpreting Scripture*

A LEADERSHIP STUDY COURSE

Led by

Pastor Matt Timmons

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved,*

*a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

2 Timothy 2:15

**EXEGETING SCRIPTURE LIKE A PRO:**

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

The pudgy old man didn’t have a great reputation as a God fearing leader. His kids had grown up to be swindlers. He himself liked to eat more than he liked to conduct religious services. Yet one night he offered advice that would change the course of his nation’s history.

There he lay, snoring away, likely shaking the rafters with each slumberous breath—as only a rotund fellow can do. Into this sonorous sleep rang the rudeness of a young boy’s “Here I am!” Again. Despite the groggy fog that clouded sleep deprived brain, Eli understood that the boy had been hearing the voice of God calling to him. He directed the young Samuel to go lie down again. This time, when the voice summonsed him, he was to respond, “Speak Lord, for your servant listens.”

Though he was a dim whited fool in the eyes of God, Eli’s counsel brought about a new birth of light and salvation for the nation of Israel. The boy would listen and become God’s agent for a cultural revolution.

The task of every Biblical leader today is essentially the same: to say to God, “Speak Lord, for your servant listens.” If you wish to be one who brings about a radical change in your community or sphere of influence, you must let God speak.

The only difference between the days of Samuel & Eli and today is the manner of listening. In our era the servant of God must tune his ear to the revelation inscribed upon the pages of the Bible. For it is there that the “voix Christi” (i.e. the voice of Christ) is heard. The manner of speech may not be as dramatic, but the power is equal. And to those who listen, God grants understanding & wisdom.

**Our goal: To understand the meaning of *any given* passage of Scripture**

In order to listen to God though, we must demonstrate some literary skill. Since the voice of God is embedded in stories and letters and laws that were written thousands of years ago, we must learn some of the techniques of interpretation. If we are going to know what God says, we must be dedicated to using the tools that will grant us a clear understanding of the text He has given.

Our goal, so to speak, is to suck the marrow out of every portion of Scripture. The Bible contains many different kinds of literature (stories, letters, laws, poetry, etc). Each book, each chapter, and perhaps even each line, has a specific thing that it is trying to communicate. All of these contain messages that are here to improve our walk with Christ and make us more conformed to the image of God’s Son. Thus, we should be dedicated to reaping as much of the great harvest of Truth that we can.

We will thus be engaged in the work of Biblical interpretation. We may also call this exegesis. The word comes from the Greek language (ex = out of, hegeisthai = to guide, or lead; to lead out). The idea is to search out the meaning and gain an understanding of what is being communicated in any given text.

**Initial Principles**

Principle 1: To do this we must keep in mind that every passage has one meaning. It may have many applications, but it only has one meaning. Our duty is to seek to determine what it is that this passage is trying to communicate.

The meaning, of course, is directly tied to author’s original intent. What a passage means is what the author intended it to mean. So we must ask, “What was the original author saying his audience?”

In other words, we are not looking for “what the passage means to me.” We are looking at what the original author wanted to convey. Our job is to uncover the author’s original intent. This we will do if we seek to abide by the principles of interpretation.

Principle 2: Of course, if we are going to rightly interpret any given passage, we must interpret the Bible literally. By this we mean we must read the Bible with a view towards understanding its literary features.

So, when it talks about trees “clapping their hands” we must keep in mind that it isn’t saying that trees have hands. When it talks about a dragon standing on the shore, we’ll need to consider if that meant a literal dragon, or was it using a literary device to describe Satan (or Satanic forces).

In sum, we must attempt to understand the author’s original meaning through the grammatical-historical method. That is to say, we must read the Bible like we would any other book, examining the grammar, style, context, historical setting, etc.

Our method in biblical interpretation, then, will be to break the passage down into its constituent parts so as to discover the overarching point that is being communicated (sometimes called the “theme” of the passage). By uncovering the theme and how it is developed through its respective parts we will come to grasp the meaning God intends.

Principle 3: Biblical interpretation (as with Biblical leadership) demands humility. We must readily admit that we are faulty creatures. We are prone to harass God’s word and twist it into something that it does not say. We must also admit, with the Apostle Peter, that there are some portions of Scripture that are simply difficult to understand. Thus, while we seek to do our honest best to be faithful to the text, we must always let Scripture be our guide. Scripture must interpret Scripture.

Principle 4: Interpreting Scripture is an art and science. We may also add that it is, to some great degree, miraculous. The Spirit gives light to the eyes and understanding to the heart. Without divine grace all our efforts are in vain. Due to the extent of our sin & ignorance, when we come to the text, our minds must be restrained, guided, and governed every bit of the way.

Even though the study of Scripture is a spiritual exercise demanding heavenly power, it is still an exercise in normal study. Thus, the meaning is not found in some transcendental experience or revelation, but rather through the intentional examination of the text and use of the interpretive techniques. To these we will now turn.

**EXEGETING SCRIPTURE LIKE A PRO:**

THE STEPS OF EXEGESIS

**1. IDENTIFY THE GENRE (THE LITERARY FORM)**

The meaning of a text depends to a great extent upon its literary form. If we do not understand which genre we are dealing with, then we will likely misunderstand what the text is trying to say. Consider the following examples and why it is important to understand the genre behind it. What would happen if we interpreted them as a historical or bare fact?

“Once upon a time there were three bears…”

“Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless.”

“He cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.’ And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.”

“Long ago and far away…”

There are many different genres in the Bible. We have psalms, we have proverbs, parables, letters, laws (legal material), prophecy, history, and apocalyptic material. Each of these literary forms has certain rules to follow. Each genre has certain principles of interpretation. In order to comprehend God’s message to us through that particular literary form we have to understand how that form works.

For instance, epistles are interpreted differently than narrative literature. Poetry and proverbial literature have their own rules of interpretation. Historical narrative has its own unique set of rules as well. Consider the following:

In historical narrative truth is communicated factually through the language of the narrative. We are looking for historical facts. We are also looking for features of narrative like plot and characters and so forth, but with historical narrative we are looking for facts.

However, when it comes to a parable, what are we looking for? If Jesus told a parable, we are not looking for historical facts, we are not looking for the question of whether the good Samaritan was an actual character or actual person in history. We are looking for the moral lesson that Jesus wants us to understand or the truth that he wants us to understand from that story.

Then again, if Jesus tells a proverb, how does that change our method of interpretation? We are not necessarily looking for an absolute truth. Instead, we are looking for a general truth that teaches us how to live life in light of God’s truth, God’s wisdom. So, different literary forms are interpreted differently.

That is our step one, identify the literary form.

Questions for Discussion: Genre

1. What genre is the book of Colossians?
2. How might reading/interpreting Colossians differ from reading/interpreting the book of Psalms? The book of Jeremiah? The gospel of Matthew?
3. Compare Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. What do they all have in common? What would you say is different?

**2. CONSIDER THE GENERAL CULTURAL CONTEXT**

Context, they say, is king. Without it, biblically speaking, all hell breaks loose. This is why people will often say that “Any text without a context is a pretext.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It has been said that “Every heretic has his verse.” Every immoral deed may be said to have some grounding in Scripture. We know that even Satan was a pro at quoting Scripture (see the temptations of Jesus).

At worst, if we do not put each verse in context, we allow anyone to use Scripture to justify their foolish whims and evils. At best, we put ourselves in a position where we miss the real richness of what God intends.

It is important to note that there are different kinds of context. The first is the general, cultural context. This is any kind of information about the region or people that may help to understand the text. We may say that these items pertain to the “setting.” Consider the different kinds of cultural context:

Historical Context

Each Bible passage was written at a particular time and in a particular place. It was created within a specific historical setting and that shapes its meaning. Your text will require you to be familiar with political figures, their decrees, & state of their rule. The Bible mentions Pilate, Artaxerxes, Nebuchanezzer, Babylon, Rome, Persia, Herod, Ishmaelites. These places, powers, and people will have a role to play in your interpretation.

The Bible also has a lot to say about farming, fishing, and tax collecting. We read that “A sower went out to sow,” that Peter threw his net on the other side of the boat, that Zacchaeus threw a party for Jesus. All of these are historically connected ideas that will have some bearing on what a text means. As you study a passage, you will need to do research to discover what (if any) significance they have.

Example: Simon the Zealot & Matthew the tax collector [Matthew 10:1-4]

**Homework**: The book of Jonah and Nahum both deal with the city of Nineveh. Research the two books and the historical situation of each. What is crucial to understand about each book’s historical setting? What do you need to know about Nineveh to rightly interpret each book?

Religious Context

The Bible spans 4,000 years and covers thousands of miles (Spain, Egypt, & Assyria). As you sweep across its pages you’ll be submerged into a world of diverse religious activity. There are Jews, Egyptians, and Babylonians, each of which has their own customs and religious beliefs. We read about Samaritans somewhat frequently in the New Testament. We are told that Peter spends the night with a “tanner.” The Pharisees get their underwear in a ruffle because Jesus’ disciples pick some grain. And, of all things, Pharisees conspire with the Herodians!

What’s the big deal? Well, nothing if you do not know anything about the religious landscape that shapes the text.

Your job is to become familiar with the religious dynamics of all these peoples to find out. These details are mentioned for a purpose. And if you want to understand Elijah & his miracles, you’ll have to come to grips with the worship of Baal.

**Homework:**

1. What is a phylactery? Where is it mentioned in the Bible? Why is it mentioned there?
2. Matthew 16:13-20 - What is the religious landscape of Caesarea Philippi? How does it help to understand this text?
3. What is the religious context of the book of Colossians? How would you find it out?

Geographical Context

Along with the historical and religious context we must keep in mind the geographical context. The Bible is set in mountains and plains, by water outlets and desert wilderness. There are roads and ranges, seas and seasons. What’s more, certain places have certain ideas or events associated with them. All of these things can have bearing on one’s understanding of a passage.

Consider the following: The Bible often talks about going “up” from Bethel to Jerusalem, but Bethel is located to the north of Jerusalem. Wouldn’t it be more accurate to say, “He went down to Jerusalem?” Understanding that Jerusalem is built on top of a mountain will clarify the supposed problem.

Example 1: Where is Jericho located? Does knowing this help understand why God would forbid the rebuilding of Jericho after its walls fell?

Example 2: Joshua 22 – how does knowing the geography help understand the passage?

Example 3: John 4:3-4 - What does the geography reveal here?

Example 4: Philippi vs Caesarea Philippi

**Homework**: Read 1 Kings 18-19 and study the two mountains, Carmel & Horeb.

Where are these two mountains located? What is the distance between them? How does knowing the location help you understand chapter 18? Why would Elijah go to Mt. Carmel in the first place? Why did he choose Horeb as his destination when he left?

Cultural Context

As you read the Bible, you enter a land that is radically different from your own. If a foreigner came to America and heard you say, “This is the bomb!” they may freak out (especially if they were previously living in the Gaza Strip!).

Likewise, after reading a letter from a friend your British friend may exclaim, “By jove! That really scores six!” The average American will have no clue what is being communicated. This is because he is not familiar with the game of Cricket. In this British pastime scoring six would be the equivalent of a home run in baseball, racking up 6 points (the highest amount of points possible in a single play).

All in all, your British friend was merely giving an exclamation of great joy at having received good news. Yet it was lingo that was couched in the deep recesses of British culture. The only way to understand it would be to have some familiarity with the day to day customs in England.

In the same way, there are discrepancies of language between 21st century English and 1000 BC Hebrew. For instance, Hebrews can become “red in the nose” meaning that they are vehemently angry (a lot of Bible translations already make this change for you).

Hebrew people eat different things, have different kinds of occupations, and build their homes/cities in different ways. These all make a difference in how you understand a passage. Your job is to understand the culture as much as you can so that you gain the full meaning of each passage.

Example 1: Proverbs 15:25 says, “The LORD tears down the house of the proud.”

What does “the house of the proud” mean? What is the significance of tearing it down?

The “house” doesn’t just mean the building he lives in and calls home. It indicates his “household.” It is the entirety of his house, meaning the people who are his personal relations (wife, children, etc). The Jews understood their inter-covenantal connected-ness. The man was the head of the house. As such he was the covenant representative. He acted on behalf of those whom he represented. So his decisions not only affected himself, but all who were under his authority (i.e. his family). See also Num. 16, 1 Cor. 15:22

Example 2: Matthew 16 – What does it mean that “The gates of hell shall not prevail”?

The gates were the places of authority. It was where the leaders sat to make decisions. When Jesus said that the gates of hell would not prevail, he was saying that the Satanic powers throughout the world would not stand. The gospel would go forward and be victorious.

**3. CONSIDER THE BROADER LITERARY CONTEXT**

Just as your passage a historical and cultural setting, it has a literary context. Each word in the Bible is set within a sentence. Each sentence is set within a paragraph. Each paragraph is set within a chapter/section. Each section within a book, and each book within the larger context of the Bible. Unless you are reading Genesis 1:1, there is something that came before your passage. There may also be something that follows. You have to now consider all of the narrative and/or literature that came before and after your text. If you don’t, you may have some real problems!

For instance, you may be studying some of the Levitical laws. God’s word will say that if your brother dies and does not leave any children, you must marry his wife and seek to have offspring with her. If you read that in isolation, you will think that you need to go and propose to your recently widowed sister-in-law.

Or you may be reading that part of the OT that says you are not to eat certain kinds of food. Must you then decide that your obsessive preoccupation with bacon is now not kosher? If you do not take into consideration the broader context (specifically Acts 10 and 15), your pallet will be doomed to never taste its greasy delights again.

Let’s look at another example. Consider Genesis 5:7-11.

Seth lived after he fathered Enosh 807 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died. When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered Kenan. Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan 815 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died.

How do you interpret this verse? Taken by itself, it will be somewhat difficult. But understanding that it comes after Genesis 1-4 will help. Man was first created to be immortal (chapter 2). But as a result of Adam’s disobedience, death came into the world (chapter 3). Thus, in Genesis 5, we see how death spread to all men, even those who are supposedly “good” (i.e. the godly line of Seth, as opposed to the wicked line of Cain).

As you read and re-read the Bible you will become more familiar with the literary context. More details will begin to stand out to you the more you become acquainted with the content of the Bible. You will begin to make connections that will brighten your understanding of the text of Scripture. Let this be an encouragement to you, if you are new to the Bible, to simply keep reading the Bible. And if you are a tenured Bible reader, keep reading. New insights will stand out more and more.

All this is to emphasize the necessity of understanding the broader literary context of the Bible. God’s revelation is given in progressive installments. The events of the past shed light on the meaning of later stories and their details.

For instance, Elisha enters the land of Israel at Gilgal in 2 Kings2:13-14. Earlier in the Bible we read that the Israelites entered Israel at Gilgal after completing their wilderness wondering. Does this have bearing on the Elisha story? Perhaps it is saying that a new conquest is coming, one where the Lord will conquer His people and establish His kingdom in their midst.

In Matthew 5 we read that Jesus went up on a mountain and began to teach his disciples. In Exodus, Moses went up a mountain and received the law. What we find is that Jesus emulates Moses. He implicitly shows that He is the greater Moses and greater lawgiver.

In Genesis we read about the Spirit hovering over the waters. In Jesus’ baptism the Spirit descends like a dove, imitating His hovering over the waters. Christ is represented as the New Creation, the one who will bring new life to the world.

All of these examples show how the literary context of a book is important to understanding each text. We might add, in this regard, that each text has an immediate context and a broader context. The immediate context is the passage of Scripture that immediately precede or follow your specific passage. The broader context has to do with the entire book or epistle in which the passage lies (or, in the case of narrative literature, the books that precede).

Let’s think for a moment about the immediate literary context of a passage. Words have meaning, but typically words are shaped by the rest of the words in a sentence. They derive their meaning from the words that surround them.

Take the word “trunk.” By itself, you do not know if it means a trunk of a car, an elephant’s nose, or a large piece of luggage. More context is needed to give the word “trunk” its true meaning. Or, to put it another way, the immediate context shapes your understanding of what the word means.

In a similar manner, the immediate context will help determine what a string of words or a whole means. For instance, Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Does this mean that I can lift a 1000 lbs because of Jesus? Not at all. The immediate literary context has to do with bearing afflictions and contentment. Paul is saying that he can lose everything and still be content because of God’s grace & strength.

Another example is the oft misquoted passage “Judge not.” Many people take Jesus’ words to mean that they should not pass judgement on any human action, no matter how immoral it is. However, the immediate literary context will show that this is not the case. In Matthew 7 Jesus is talking about hypocrisy and how one should not judge when he is doing the very same thing. Jesus tells his audience to take the log out of your own eye, then you may take the speck out of your brother’s eye. In sum, God will judge you if you try to hypocritically judge others.

The broader literary context is also important to keep in mind as one interprets Scripture. In other words, each passage of Scripture is to be read in light of the whole book in which it is found and, subsequently, the whole cannon of Scripture.

For example, the story of David & Goliath is a popular Sunday school lesson. Pastors and teachers will talk about how this little boy beat this large and imposing man. The lesson then revolves around how you can beat the giants in your life and overcome obstacles.

This is a case of failing to read the story in light of the broader literary context. The book of 1 Kings was written to show how the kingdom of God advanced (and failed). Prior to the encounter with Goliath we read how David was anointed by God to be a king and deliverer of God’s people. Moreover, 1 Kings is part of the larger story of redemption which began in Genesis 3.

Understanding the broader literary context then, sheds much light on the Goliath story. The point of David’s confrontation with the giant is not that we have power to overcome big obstacles in life. Rather, it’s the exact opposite! It is a lesson on how God saves his people when they are completely powerless to save themselves!

Another example may come from the life of Joseph and his encounter with Potifier’s wife. This text is often interpreted to be a primmer on how to escape sexual temptation. However, this particular incident is part of a wider, ongoing story of God’s deliverance—which is highlighted in the last chapter of Genesis (50:20). God’s people were in the land of Canaan and a famine was about to come upon them, one which would have wiped them out completely.

Joseph’s being sold into slavery, put in prison, and eventually raised to the highest ranking official in Egypt was God’s way of saving them. Thus, from the broader context we come to understand that Joseph was a deliverer. His confrontation with Potifier’s wife was a test. Despite his being imprisoned, the deliverer proved faithful. In this way he is a type of Christ—the faithful deliverer, who suffered for their salvation.

Both of these examples show us that all of Scripture is to be read in light of the larger story of salvation. The broadest literary context of each passage is Genesis 3:15 and the first promise of the gospel.

In sum, when considering the literary context, we might think of the following:

* Words are placed in sentences -
  + Sentences are placed in paragraphs –
    - Paragraphs are placed within chapters/sections -
      * Chapters/sections are placed within books -
        + Books are placed within the whole cannon of Scripture.

**Example:** 1 Chronicles 27:1-2

**Homework:** Read 1 Kings 16:34 – what is the literary context of this passage? What came before it that helps to shed light on it? Now Read 2 Kings 2:19-22. How does the literary context affect this passage?

**4. CONSIDER THE LITERARY STYLE**

The way something is written will often determine its meaning. For instance, the following sentences use the same words, but they are written differently. The stylistic differences cause each to be understood in a radically different manner.

I’m not mad at you.

I’m not mad *at you.*

I’m not **mad** at you.

I’M NOT MAD AT YOU!!

The beauty of language is that our words can be strung together in different ways. A different mood or meaning can be created just by the choice of words, the emphasis or placement of those words, or other stylistic enhancement. So, as we study the Scripture, we should always keep in mind that how something is said will determine what is being said.

1. Literary devices

The Bible uses a variety of expressions and literary devices by which to communicate. The most common device is *repetition*. Repetition is akin to bold face type or italics in today’s font world. If we would want to emphasize something, we would change the type setting to bold or italics. The authors of Scripture could not do this. Typically, when they wanted to state something in a clear and pronounced way so as to highlight it, they would do so through repeating the word, phrase, or idea.

Consider the following examples:

*Holy, holy, holy.*

*King of kings, the holy of holies*

*Amos 4:6-11*

Another kind of literary device are *figures of speech*. One example is a *simile*, which is a comparison using like or as. Another figure of speech is a *metaphor*, which is any comparison that does not use like or as.

There are also many other kinds of literary devices. *At the end of this document you will find a list of many different literary devices. You would do well to review and commit them to memory. Understanding these forms of communication will enhance your ability to grasp the meaning of Scripture.*

1. Word choice

Words are the fundamental building block of communication. But different words can have different nuances and therefore affect the meaning of a passage. Or, adding certain words can affect how the sentence is understood. For instance, what is the difference between, “I’ll take an ice cream cone” and “I’ll take an ice cream cone now.” The sentence takes on a greater urgency by adding a simple three letter word.

In the Greek language it is not always necessary to use pronouns, especially the first person pronoun “I” (Gk = ego). So when John writes “Ego eimi” (I am) in his gospel, he emphasizes the word “I.” When Jesus says “I am the door” or “I am the good shepherd” John emphasizes the “I am” (which corresponds to YHWH/LORD). It is a declaration of Jesus’ divinity.

In Matthew 5, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn.” This is a simple sentence. But understanding that there are three different words in the Greek language that can mean “to be sad” is key. The word in this instance means more than just being a little down or even to shed some tears. It means “to bewail” and thus gives one the impression that Jesus is talking about a strong grief and excessive (perhaps even loud vocalizing of) sorrow be expressed over sin.

1. Word Placement

Where the author choses to place the words in a sentence can be just as important as which words he chooses to use. This is particular to Greek as the language does not necessarily adhere to the standard subject-verb sentence structure. In English we would say, “Julie hit the ball a long way.” In the Greek language the sentence structure is more fluid and one could say, “long way hit the ball Julie.” Placing “long way” first in the sentence may give the distance of the hit primacy (emphasizing that it was hit a VERY long way).

**5. CONSIDER THE STRUCTURE**

When studying a passage it is necessary to consider the overall its structure. This may provide some clues, if not the full key, to understanding the passage. The structure has to do with the arrangement of the content and how it all fits together. In other words, we must ask how of the passage divides up. Can it be broken into smaller sections? If so, we must then ask how these sections relate to one another? Take for instance the structure of the book of Daniel…

Chapter 1.  The book starts out with the nation going into exile.

Chapter 2.  It’s a dream by Nebuchadnezzar about four different kingdoms.

Chapter 3: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego face certain death because they refuse to worship the king—and God rescues them!

Chapter 4: Nebuchadnezzar is warned by God and then judged.

Confession of Nebuchadnezzar: 4:34-35

Chapter 5: Belshazzar is warned by God and then judged.

Chapter 6: Daniel faces certain death because he refuses to pray to the king—and God rescues him!

Chapters 7-8.  Dreams by Daniel of four different kingdoms.

Chapter 9.  Now, seventy years have passed and it’s time for the nation to *return*from exile. .

You could appreciate the book of Daniel without having noticed this structure. But certainly knowing the particulars of its design enhances that appreciation.

Chiasm - This structure is typically called Chiasm. Chiasm is the repetition of words/ideas in a parallel fashion so that the most important item is listed in the middle. In sum, the middle becomes the core point.

A ABA Examples: Judges 3, Matthew 6:24

B

A’

Parallelism - Another structural feature is called parallelism. It is putting two ideas in line with one another. The book of proverbs is mainly parallel ideas in one sentence. But parallelism can be expressed on a larger scale. For instance, read John 18:12-27. What do you think the author is trying to communicate?

A ABAB

B

A

B

Inclusion/ Inclusio - Or sometimes called “bookends” - Beginning and ending a section with repeated ideas. This is a way of setting off a main idea.

Examples: Luke 2:40-52; Psalm 150

Sentence Diagraming – This is frequently useful in the epistles. Diagraming sentences allows you to find the main clauses (themes) and how the subordinate clauses relate to it.

Example: Col 1:3-8 ESV

the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

*We always thank God …. when we pray for you,*

* since we heard of your faith

in Christ Jesus

* and [since we heard] of the love that you have

for all the saints,

because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Here we clearly see the triad of faith, hope, & love. It encapsulates the entirety of the Christian life [Faith (doctrine), Love for the saints (ethics/law), hope (eschatology)]. The word “Because” actually means “on account of” or “which springs from.” Their faith and love spring forth from their eschatology.

They have another life to live. Having been given eternal life and the promise of life in heaven, they are eager to grow in faith and love.

We can now easily form a theme and outline for teaching:

A case of Apostolic thanksgiving

1. Who he thanks
2. Why he gives thanks

Christian character encourages Apostolic exaltation!

1. Its nature
2. Its origin

**Examples:** Psalm 1, 1 Peter 1:1-2

**6. CONSIDER THE WORDS**

A. The meaning of Words

“Doing word studies is an important part of good Bible study. Word studies involve more than simply looking up the meaning of a word in the dictionary. It involves understanding how a word fits into its immediate context and how an author used a word throughout his writings.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

We will consider how to do word studies in a future lesson. For now, consider this: 2 Pet 1:21, Acts 27:15

B. The tense of words

If you are able to dig into the original languages a little, it can often help, especially when it comes to understanding if your verb is past, present, future, etc. For instance, Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but *be filled* with the Spirit.”

Consider also Matthew 7:7, which in the ESV is translated, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” A more accurate translation would bring out the tense of the verbs like so, “Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking and it will be opened to you.”

C. The kinds of words

There are different kinds of words (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc). Each word is significant for conveying meaning and knowing what kind of word it is will help identify the subject of a sentence. For instance,

The boy threw the ball.

The subject of the sentence is easy to determine here (the boy). The boy is involved in a certain kind of action (throwing a ball). The sentence can become more “wordy.”

The young boy with the blue baseball cap suddenly threw the ball with wild passion towards the catcher’s open mit.

Despite the addition of many more words, the sentence’s subject and theme is still the same - the boy threw the ball. The second sentence merely added more description and information through adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. We learn more about how he threw it and where he threw it. We also learn a little more about the boy (he was young & wore a baseball cap).

Part of your work in exegesis may involve analyzing the different kinds of words that are used in a sentence. At times you will need to wade through a long sentence in order to find its central point.

Consider the following sentences. What would you say is the basic theme?

On Friday noon, July the twentieth, 1714, the finest bridge in all Peru broke and precipitated five travelers into the gulf below.

The fragrance radiating from the luscious red rose which her beloved Samuel had given her caused her to recall their first rendez-vous.

Now do the same with this sentence. What would you say is the central point?

7In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

As you read and study Scripture, be on the look out for what are sometimes called “key connectors” or “linking words.” Like threads that connect different kinds of fabric these words are used to connect different concepts. Some ideas may be compared or contrasted. In such cases the Bible may use the following kinds of words - *and, but, or, neither, like.*

Another kind of connector are prepositions (to, from, so that, along, in, into). These are all important to take note of when doing exegesis.

Consider this sentence: “I threw the ball and the stick at her because she was mean.” The linking words are “and”, “at”, and “because.” The word “and” links the two things I threw. “At” indicates the direction/destination. “Because” tells the ready why these items were thrown.

In the following examples, identify the linking words and state what its purpose is.

**Example 1:** Psalm 107:1

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. “for” tells why you should give thanks

**Example 2:** Gal. 1:8-10

8But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. 10For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

**Example 3:** Ephesians 1:7-10

7In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

**CONNECTORS:**

10 KINDS OF LINKING WORDS

**1. Temporal** – Describes the time or occasion when the proposition will occur. A temporal clause answers the question “when?” Key Words: when, while

**2. Manner/Means** – Describes the means or the manner in which the proposition is carried out. Key Words: by, through

**3. Grounds** – Describes the cause, reason, or grounds for the proposition or action. Key Words: because, since, for

**4. Inference** – Describes the logical conclusion or result that comes from a previous proposition. Key Words: therefore, thus, consequently

**5. Purpose** – Describes the purpose for a proposition or action. They answer the question “why?” Key Words: to, in order that, so that

**6. Result** – Describes result/outcome of the proposition. Key Words: so that, with the result that

**7. Condition & Corollary** – This is a paired set of labels that should be used together. Together a pair of condition-corollary phrases describes a potential condition for the proposition or action to occur. These will very often appear in the form of an “if . . . then” clause, though not always. Key Words: “If…then”

**8. Concessive** – Describes a circumstance in spite of the proposition or action. Key Words: though, although, yet, but

**9. Content** – A content clause gives another proposition that describes or qualifies a preceding one. Key Words: that, lest

**10. Description/Explanation** – A classification for clauses not easily definable with other categories but modifies a proposition with additional information (either by describing or explaining the proposition).

1. A “pretext” is a reason given in justification of a course of action that is not the real reason [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.equip.org/article/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-1/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)