

Lesson 6 (Part 1)

New Testament Literature:

Acts

The Genre is *Theological History*.

Issues in interpretation:

- a. Because it is history, it can be interpreted *Literally*.
- b. Remember the *Luke - Acts* connection.
- c. Clear outline – Acts 1:8
- d. The unhindered _____
- e. Significance of *Pentecost*
- f. Discern the *Normative* (what is required for all NT Churches) from the *Descriptive* (what they did in the first century).

Epistles – Epistolary Literature

In the 1st century there was a fairly standard protocol for writing a letter.

1. *Begin with the name of the sender*
2. *Name of the receiver*
3. *Greeting*
4. *Personal section (1 Thess. 1:3 – 3)*
5. *Reason for the Letter (1 Thess. 4:1)*
6. *Salutations (1 Thess. 5:26)*
7. *Closing Wish (1 Thess. 5:27*
(1 Thess. 1:1)

Pauline Epistles

1. Letters to _____
2. Letters to *Individuals*
 - a. *Pastoral* Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus) -
 - b. *Prison* Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon) – are written during Paul’s imprisonment and focus on the cosmic truths about Christ and the church, including Christ headship, the Church as His body, spiritual warfare

- c. Deutero-Pauline (some of the Pauline letters that are currently debated as to the authorship of Paul – some propose that these writings were completed by an Amanuensis or Secretary)

General (Catholic) Epistles

General Epistles are: Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1-2-3 John, and Jude

- They are general in nature because there is not a *Specific Destination*. James starts off as a *Letter* and ends like a *Sermon*.

Embedded Genres in the epistles

1. *Hymns* – Phil. 2:5-11
2. *Domestic Codes* – Eph. 5:21-6:9
3. *Vice and Virtues List* (a listing of virtues that are good for a person to have) James 3:17-18; 1 Cor. 6:9-10

Issues of interpretation

1. Good hermeneutics is when you *Discover Original* author intent.
2. Be able to separate the *Normative* from the *Specific*. (1 Cor. 7:1)

Revelation Genre

It cannot be categorized under any certain kind of genre.

- Revelation is some sort of combination of all three. Epistle, prophecy or apocalyptic.

3 Basic approaches to Revelation

1. *Historical* approach – all of the symbols in Revelation refer to people and events in the first century.
2. The *Prophetic* approach – this says that the book of Revelation predicts the future.
3. The *Symbolist* approach – says Revelation is not historical, neither is it prophetic, however, it does contain timeless truth in symbolic form.

Inductive Study Method

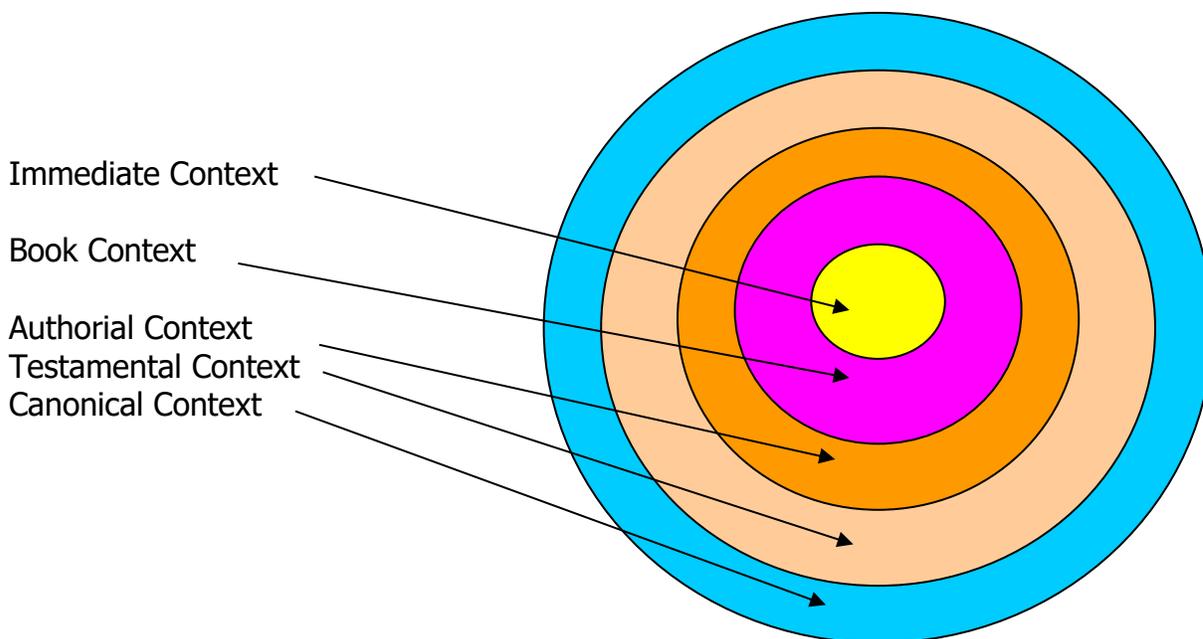
The Search for Meaning

Putting into practice what we have learned so far, you can honestly say, “I have done my homework.” You have observed the text, and in doing so you have laid the essential foundation for understanding what the book you are studying is all about. You have not neglected the one thing that is needful for accurately interpreting the Word of God. You have taken the time to read and re-read. You have looked at key people, key events, and you can say, I have “Observed” the entire text. You have looked at it as a whole and you understand it’s context. You have taken the areal view of the property (the text) and you understand the layout and what it is saying as a whole. Now, it’s time to get on the ground and explore the land by foot. You want to see if the land is sloped, if it is rocky, if there are streams, is it suitable for what you are wanting.

In inductive Bible Study this is what we call Interpretation. You still have questions and you want to know what certain things mean. You want to continue to interpret the Scripture correctly and handle it accurately. So here are some basic principles to follow...

1. **Remember, Context is King.** When you interpret anything, a word, a verse, a teaching it must always be considered in the light of (a). The surrounding verses and chapters. (b). the book in which it is found. (c.) the Entire word of God.

Circles of Context



The first thing that should happen is that you should look at the text and determine your own understanding of the text, write it out – what is it saying, what is the main point– before you look at any commentary.

Ask the following questions: **(1)**. Is my interpretation of a particular section of Scripture consistent with the theme, purpose, and structure of the book in which it is found? **(2)**. Is my interpretation consistent with other Scriptures about the same subject, or is there a glaring difference? **(3)**. Am I considering the historical and cultural context of what is being said?

For example: **2 Timothy 2:16** says, “...avoid worldly and empty chatter...” Does this mean that Christians should not tell funny stories or talk about the mundane things of the world? A careful examination of the text will shed light on the meaning of this statement and show that the subject being considered is the gospel and the need to handle it accurately, not whether or not a Christian should tell funny stories. Let’s look at it...

2 Timothy 2:14–18 (NASB95)

An Unashamed Workman

14 Remind *them* of these things, and solemnly charge *them* in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers.

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

16 But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,
17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,

18 *men* who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.

Who is speaking?

Who is he speaking to?

What things is he talking about in verse 14?

Why is he telling Timothy this?

Remember, not every question (Who, what, where, when, how and why) can be answered in every text but you want to answer as many as you can.

Never take scripture out of context to make it say something that is contrary to the text. Even if what you might say would be considered a “Blessing to that person,” always handle the Word objectively; then subjective blessings will be based on truth, not error.

- 2. Always seek the full counsel of the Word of God** – Don’t accept a teaching just because someone has used one or two verses to prove their point. Those verses could have been taken out of context and the over all passage may have been ignored because it didn’t fit their point. For example:

In the “prosperity gospel teachings” John 15:7 is used quite a bit. “... ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.” Does this mean that you can ask anything at all from God and He will give it to you? The answer is NO! The Bible has a lot to say on the subject of prayer. Take the whole counsel of God not just an isolated verse.

3. **Remember that Scripture doesn’t contradict itself** – Scripture will never contradict itself. If it appears to then your interpretation of at least one passage is incomplete or wrong. Sometimes it may be difficult to reconcile two seemingly contradictory truths taught in Scripture. For example: the sovereignty of God in “choosing” those who will be saved (called “Election”) and the responsibility of man (man’s free will). It’s hard to reconcile these two teachings together in our minds; because they don’t seem to fit together. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches both. So what do you do? When two truths are taught in scripture that seem to be in conflict, remember we are finite and don’t fully understand the things of God. Let God say what He says without trying to correct or explain Him. Simply humble your heart in faith and believe what God says, even if you can’t understand or reconcile it at the moment.
4. **Don’t base your doctrine on an obscure passage of Scripture** – An obscure passage is one in which the meaning is not easily understood. Because these passages are difficult to understand even when proper principles of interpretation are used, they should not be used as a basis for establishing doctrine. For example: 1 Corinthians 15:29 Paul answers a question, “... what will those do who are baptized for the dead?” Does this mean that we are to be baptized for the dead? Is this a teaching that should become a doctrine for believers to practice? No this isn’t a doctrinal statement. Without doing more study on the passage it shouldn’t be taken as a doctrine that should be applied to your life.
5. **Interpret Scripture Literally** – Take the Word of God at face value, in its natural, normal sense. Look first for the clear teaching of Scripture, not some hidden meaning. (Too much of that goes on in Bible Studies where some teacher wants to find some “hidden golden nugget that no one has ever seen before”) Recognize the figures of speech, the similes, the metaphors and so forth. Interpret portions of Scripture according to their literary genre.
6. **Look at the author’s intended meaning of the passage** – Always try to understand what the author had in mind when you interpret a portion of the Bible. Don’t twist verse to support a meaning that is not clearly taught. For example: As we looked at Judges 6 a couple of weeks ago, Gideon put out a fleece to make sure he was hearing God correctly. He was afraid and needed assurance on the will of God. This however, is NOT a teaching on putting

out fleeces every time you need re-assurance on the will of God. This is a historical account of what Gideon did and is not a doctrinal teaching on how we should discern the will of God. There are no instructions anywhere in the Bible that suggest that putting out a fleece is the proper procedure to follow in determining what the will of God is.

7. **Check your conclusions by using reliable commentaries** – Up to this point you have been asked to stay away from commentaries and let the Word of God do all the speaking. But Commentaries do have their place. Commentaries come in several varieties. Some are strictly devotional and are not what you want to use for in depth Bible Study. Some commentaries are analytical and they are more helpful for in depth study.

It is vital to use commentaries that examine the text with integrity and give explanations and comments that are in keeping with the context. Also, you will want to use commentaries that have been written by scholars who are known to hold to the inerrancy of the Word. Try to use more than one commentary on a single book to get a different view. **Note:** Be very wary if in your study you find something that on one else has ever seen before. God probably would not blind godly men to truth for almost 2,000 years and suddenly reveal it to you.

As you consult these various commentaries, remember that no one person has a corner on all the truth. You may disagree with the writer on one thing and agree on another, but don't discount all an author says just because you don't see everything the same way. And don't believe it just because a godly person who is a scholar says, "This is what it means." Check out the interpretation according to the inductive principles you have been given. Bring all you read up against all you've seen as you have observed the text yourself.

Checklist to use when drawing conclusions from your interpretation:

- Do not contradict the context of the book, chapter, or passage you are studying. Context is King.
- Do not violate the general theme of the book you are studying.
- Check to see if your conclusions are in accordance or agreement with what the author said in other books of his writing.
- Make sure your conclusions do not violate other Biblical truths.
- Make sure your conclusions are not "prejudiced" to one particular doctrine or school of theology, as this often distorts one's interpretation.