



Series: Understanding Scripture

Lesson: Introduction

Author: Stafford North

## Introduction to the Teacher

All of us as teachers have presented to a class our understanding of what a passage of scripture means. It may have been "Blessed are the poor in spirit" or "Cut off your hand," or "repent and be baptized." And certainly an important part of what a teacher should do is to explain to others what various passages mean.

Perhaps an even more important task we could take on, however, is to teach students how to find the meaning of passages for themselves. This will not only make better Bible students of them, but it will also help them to be in position to think for themselves and to become teachers of others. There is much agreement but some disagreement in the area of how to understand scriptures. Most Bible students would have great agreement on most principles of Bible study. Every one would agree, for example, that a study of the context of a passage is very important or that we need to consider word meanings. All agree that history and archaeology can contribute to understanding a passage. There would be less agreement, however, on how to use an example or how to the Old Testament applies to us.

A word often used to describe this field of "how to interpret" is "hermeneutics." The term is actually a Bible word which means "to explain" or "to interpret" or "to translate." Some use the term "hermeneutics" to cover the principles by which we seek to understand scripture. Others use "hermeneutics" to speak only of the step of applying scripture to our own circumstances once its meaning has been determined, and still others use the word to cover both understanding and application. Since there are different theories of hermeneutics, we will be seeking to let the Bible lead us as much as possible as we come to learn both the principles of how to interpret and how we should apply these principles to a particular passage. Often we will be looking at how one Bible writer understands and applies something written by another Bible writer. While they had the inspiration of the Spirit in understanding other passages, their method of interpreting often provides guidance we can use.

We will study ten fundamental principles for interpreting scripture. These are really principles that we would use in understanding any communication from others. The Bible, and the New Testament in particular, was written in the language of the common people and they were expected to understand it much as they would have any writings. As we shall see, there really are not special rule for understanding Scripture, although each different piece of writing requires a little of its own adaptation of the principles. We will also practice in using some of the common helps to Bible study. As a result of this study, we hope your students will be able to do the following:

1. list and explain ten principles of Bible study.
2. use the ten principles in discovering the meaning of a passage of scripture.
3. use standard tools for Bible study such as a concordance, a Bible dictionary, a commentary, historical and archaeological sources and the internet.

We will suggest assignments for you to give the students and some evaluations which you can use to encourage them to learn outside of the class meetings. Your class will be more likely to reach the objectives stated above if you will use the evaluations suggested for each class session. If students expect some evaluation in class over the previous lesson, they will spend some time reviewing and that will mean they will learn more. For many in your class, this study will really be beneficial. Encourage them and help them keep a focus on the benefits of this study. If you want to see some additional studies of passages that would lend themselves to class study, go to my Web site at [www.oc.edu/stafford.north](http://www.oc.edu/stafford.north). There you may look under articles and find several studies of particular passages that would give you additional samples to use for the class if you have more than just the 13 lessons. One of these, on The Silence of the Scriptures, would make a very good addition to the lessons provided.

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Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 1  
Author: Stafford North



## The Nature of Scripture

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can explain how communication takes place.
2. The student can list the steps by which the Scriptures have come to us.
3. The student can explain the nature of inspiration and cite one passage that discusses it.
4. The student can give an example of how words can mean different things and thus require some interpretation.
5. The student can explain that there is an objective meaning to scripture.

#### Preparation:

1. Have copies of the Handout 1 ready for the class (found at the end of the lesson).
2. Have copies of the Worksheet 1 ready for the class (found at the end of the lesson).
3. Be sure all students have Bibles to look up passages and pens for writing.
4. Have access to a chalkboard, marker board, or overhead projector. Write key words and statements on the board or show them on the projector.

#### Theme:

As we start on our quest to learn how to be better at understanding the Bible, it is important to know something about how communication takes place and how God has communicated His message to us.

### Lesson Plan for Conducting the Class

#### Introduction: (about 10 minutes)

1. Call the roll or start a new one. It is important that students know you are interested in their attendance.
2. Make any necessary announcements.



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3. Have a prayer and songs as may be the custom in your class. Songs you may want to use at this and later periods are: Give Me the Bible, Break Thou the Bread of Life, How Shall the Young Secure their Hearts, Jesus Loves Me, Wonderful Words of Life, Thy Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet, How Firm a Foundation, Wonderful Words of Life. Thy Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet might make a good theme song to sing each class meeting.
4. Share with the students the topic for this quarter. Say something along these lines: "This quarter we will be studying the topic of 'Understanding Scripture.' We will study some of the principles about how to understand the Bible and how to use some of the tools for Bible study. In studying these, we will learn more about a number of interesting passages which will serve as illustrations for how to understand Scripture. We will all be better students of the Word as result of our time together." Try to give your students some "sell" about the class to motivate them to want to be part of the study. Also tell your students that learning is always improved when there is evaluation. Knowing we will be evaluated helps us remember better and to study more. So you will have for students as they enter class each week a short "written review" to pick up as they enter the classroom. The student can get one if he/she chooses and then can write in the answers. At the beginning of class each time, you will give a brief review of the previous lesson which will include the answers to the written review. "The scores will be published in the church bulletin." Just kidding. Since you will check your own paper, only you and those you tell will know how you did. If students will participate in this part of the study, they will learn a lot more. Encourage them to take notes on the worksheet each time and to review it before they come to class.

#### Learning Experiences: (about 30 minutes)

1. Q: What does the term "shoot-out" mean to you? A: A gunfight at OK Corral. A way to break a tie in soccer. A football game where there was a lot of scoring. A close election. (Get several possible answers from the class.) Q: How do we know which answer is intended when someone uses it? A: By the context. By who is speaking. By the situation.
2. Q: What does the word "run" mean? A: Run a race. Operate a machine. Stand for political office. Conduct a meeting. Manage a company. Q: How do we know which meaning? A: By the context. By who is speaking. By the situation.
3. Q: What does the word "cleave" mean? A: To cleave together like in marriage. To split apart as with a meat cleaver. The same word can mean "stick together" or "split apart."
4. The point is that language does take some interpretation. And we make this interpretation almost continuously as we communicate with each other. Our experience with language helps us know how to sort out meanings. And, as we shall soon see, the same ways we know how to understand each other will be the same methods we use in understanding the Bible.
5. Look at this drawing about how we communicate. (Give Handout No. 1. and begin your explanation of it. Ask the students to write in the numbered steps below the drawing as you give them.) Look first at the person "A." He has an idea he wants to send to person "B." A's goal is to make B think the same thought he is thinking. But how does he get him to do this? Note the steps and write them in the blanks. Help me come up with the steps. Q: What happens first? A:

(1) "A" thinks the thought himself.

Q: What happens next? A: (2) "A" encodes the thought into words or body movements which have meaning. Q: What happens next? A: (3) "A" transmits the code. We have shown oral transmission but the transmission could also be in written form and in body language. Q: What can happen between the sending and receiving? A: (4) Static can be on the line. Interference—noise, distraction, etc. (5) "B" receives the coded thought. Q: After receiving the code, what does "B" do? (6) "B" decodes the message. To do this correctly, he must be giving the same meaning to the symbols as A. If he does this well, then step 7 happens. (7) "B" thinks the thought "A" wanted him to think.

6. Q. Where along this process can it go wrong? A: Fuzzy thinking on "A's" part. Poor coding by "A." Using words not clearly understood—a different language. Poor transmission—not speaking or writing clearly. Interference to the transmission. Poor reception. Poor decoding. Receiver not thinking well.

7. Q: Apply this to the process of God getting His message to us. Go through each step.

A: God conceives the thought clearly, encodes the message and guides a prophet who writes it down. The written message goes through various stages of transmission in copying and translation. We receive the written message and seek to decode it. Then we think the thought God wanted us to think.

8. Give out Handout 2. Ask the students to look at the drawings on the right and try to figure out what descriptions to write on the left. Q: What do you think should go in No. 1? What does the drawing suggest about this first stage of the process? A: Not yet written down. So we can describe this stage as "God Reveals." Write this in blank 1. Q: What goes in No. 2? Now the message has been written down. A: Inspired Man Records. Write this in as No. 2. (We use the term "man" here in the general sense of human beings as the Bible often does. There were some female prophets during Bible times and their words are sometimes included in Scripture. Those whom God chose to write down Scriptures in permanent form were men.) Let's discuss this process of "Inspired Man Records." Q: Did God ever dictate "word for word" what the inspired man was to write? A: Yes. Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and seven letters to seven churches (Revelation 2 and 3), the words Jesus spoke, and other places. Q: Are there places where the writer does not seem to be working from dictation? A: Yes. Paul's epistles where Paul writes about particular circumstances about which he already had information and to which he gives a response. Also Luke says he did research to get information for Luke/Acts (Luke 1:3).

9. So, what does it mean for people to be inspired? To answer this let's look at three passages. Someone read aloud 2 Peter 1:20-21. Q: What do we learn from this passage about the process of revelation? A: The prophet did not originate the message. He was not speaking just from himself. Each prophet was "moved by" or guided by the Holy Spirit in what he wrote. Someone read 1 Thessalonians 2:13. Q: Whose word did Paul say was delivered in what he wrote? A: The word of God. Now read Ephesians 3:1-5. Q: What Paul had written to the Ephesians was revealed by what source? A: The Holy Spirit. Now someone read 1 Corinthians 2:10-13. Q: How does Paul say he received the message he had given the Corinthians? A: "Through the Spirit." Q: From whom did the Spirit get the message? A: God the Father. Q: Did the Spirit's guidance come just to give the general message or was His guidance to the level of the words used? A: Words "taught by the Spirit." This corresponds with the meaning of 2 Timothy 3:16 when it says, "All Scripture is inspired by God."

10. With this level of exactness, down to the word level, Jesus would agree on the basis of His use of Scripture. Read Matthew 22:29-32. Q: What topic have the Sadducees asked Jesus about? A: The resurrection. Jesus says they are mistaken about this topic because they have “not understood the Scriptures.” That’s our subject: Understanding Scripture. So Jesus tells them about a passage they have not understood—Exodus 3:6. Here God said to Moses, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Q: What connection does this have to the subject of the resurrection of the dead? A: When God was speaking with Moses, these men had been dead hundreds of years, yet God speaks of them in the present tense—I am the God. So Jesus’ point turns on the tense of a verb in Scripture. That is the exactness with which we can approach Scripture. The very tense of the verb is precisely what God wanted it to be.
11. So, sometimes God or Christ or the Holy Spirit dictated the exact words the inspired person was to write. At other times, the writer used information he already had and his own style of expression, but the Spirit guided the outcome to make it exactly like He wanted it to be. If a speech writer can write in the style of various speakers for whom he writes, we should not think it beyond the power of the Holy Spirit to utilize the style and knowledge of the person He is using to write down the message God wants delivered.
12. When we say “Inspired Man Records,” then, we mean that God, through the Holy Spirit, guided those who wrote in such a way that the product was what God wanted it to be. We believe this original revelation was without error in its content and expression. The document actually written (or dictated) by the inspired person is called “an autograph.” When the sixty-six such books of our Bible are taken together, they comprise “the truth” of which Jesus often spoke. Read John 8:32 and John 17:17, for example. This is an objective message from the mind of God to the mind of men. It has a meaning which God wants us to understand and use.
13. Now let’s go to item 3. Q: What happens next in the process? What words would you put in No. 3? A: Copies are made of the autograph. And so we may say “Man Copies.” Write that down. Q: Are the copyists inspired? A: No. But the copying was done very carefully by specially trained scribes. Q: Are all of the copies on your drawing exactly alike? A: No. Q: What does this represent? A: That some variations occasionally crept in, variations like misspellings, word order inversions, skipped words, and sometimes one scribe would write something in the margin and the next person copying might insert that into the text. Q: Do we have any of the autographs left? A: No. Q: So can we be sure that we have in the original language of Scripture exactly what the autograph said? A: Yes, for all practical purposes. And that brings us to point 4.
14. Look at item four on the chart. Q: What does this suggest to you? A: That someone has studied all the copies and returned the text exactly like it was in the autograph. Let’s call this step “Man Compiles.” Write that in. This step suggests the work of textual critics who examine the copies and from them determine what the original had said. These people are not inspired either, but they spend years in language study and many more years in doing their exacting work. There are about 5,000 manuscript copies of portions or all of the New Testament books, some going back to the second century within twenty-five years of the autograph. In addition to these, there are thousands of early translations of the Greek text into other languages which can also help determine the original wording. As scholars read and compare these, they are able to eliminate copying errors that have crept in over the years. To illustrate this process on a very simple level, let’s suppose I were to dictate a paragraph to you and were to ask you all to write it down. Do you think everyone one would get it exactly right? Would there be misspelled words? Words left out? Words in the wrong order? Very likely. But suppose someone took what each had written down and looked at them all. Do you think that person could reconstruct what I dictated? Of course.



Most of these copies would agree on each sentence. Textual critics tell us that there are now only a few passages in which there is any doubt about the actual wording and these do not affect any essential teaching of the Scripture. For all practical purposes, then, we have the original text.

15. A very interesting illustration of the accuracy of our copies came from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Since they pre-date the New Testament, there were only copies of Old Testament passages found there. One of those was a complete text of the book of Isaiah. Prior to this time, the earliest copy available was dated about 950 AD, some 1700 years after the autograph. The Dead Sea copy from 100 BC would bring a thousand years closer to the original in one step. Great anticipation awaited the opening and reading of this scroll. The answer: no significant differences in the content from the 950 AD manuscript. The copying had been very accurate. So, Step 4—Man Compiles.
16. Look at Step 5. Q: What process do you believe this represents? A. Translation into different languages. So write in “Man Translates.” Once the original text is determined by textual critics, then comes the process of translation into different languages. Of course these translators are not inspired either, and translations differ. Some think that because the translations into a language are not all the same, that we can no longer trust the Bible. Some even have the idea that the more translations that are made, the further from the original we get. In view of this, there are three very important points to make about translations: (1) Every respected translator goes back to work with the original language. Even when an existing translation is being revised, scholars go back to check the original text. So additional translations do not necessarily mean we get further away from the original. (2) While the wording in translations differs, the message they present is so similar that one can take any well-known translation and from it learn to do what is necessary to be saved. On particular passages, one may certainly have reason to prefer one translation over another, but any of the standard translations is sufficiently accurate to convey the basic message of God. (3) A very good way to study is to use more than one translation. Comparing them is a good way to get more insights into the meaning.
17. Translations may be evaluated on the basis of three basic criteria: (1) accuracy, (2) readability, and (3) acceptance. The first two, accuracy and readability are somewhat in tension. If the translation is made more “word for word” in an attempt to be more accurate, it will likely become less easily read, for languages do not match “word for word.” As the translator, however, seeks to make his translation easier to read, he will necessarily have to do some interpreting along with his translating. This is why it is good to compare translations. If one is a “looser” translation, such as the NIV, and the other is a “tighter” translation, such as the NASV, the student can learn from comparing the two. The third standard, “acceptance,” is important because when studying with another person, we need to use a translation in which that person has confidence. Usually, that will mean a translation done by a group of people rather than by just one person and one that is well-known.
18. Recall the communication chart? God originated the message and empowered a human agent to transmit it. It has gone through several stages in the transmission process: copying, compiling, and translating. But now we can receive it, work through the meaning of language, and think the thought God wanted us to think. That’s awesome! We read the Scripture and think the thought God wanted us to think!
19. Now we come to the bottom line. How shall we view Scripture when we come to interpret it? Here are four fundamental principles that lay the basis for our approach to Bible study.
  1. The Bible is of divine origin. The Holy Spirit revealed to and guided those who wrote it so it would be exactly as God wanted it to be.
  2. The very words of the text of Scripture may be studied carefully to discern their precise meaning.
  3. Both the nature of revelation and the teaching of Scripture is that the Bible is “truth” and has an objective meaning we should seek.
  4. The process by which we have received our Bibles today is sufficiently precise for us to have confidence that we have God’s message to study.

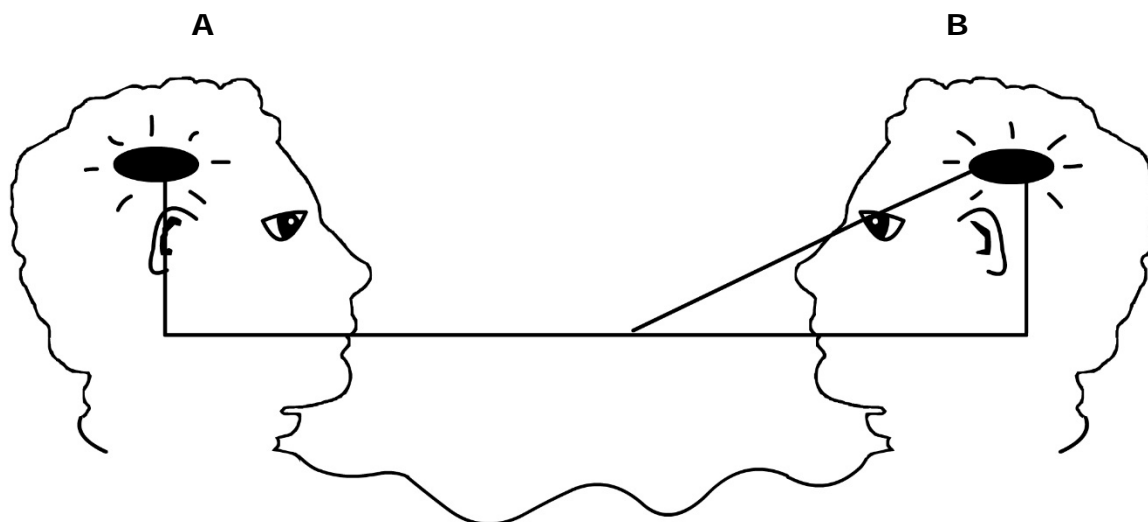
Application: (3 minutes)

1. Q: If these things we have just stated are true, what conclusions would you draw about our study of the Bible? A: We should want to study because the Bible contains God's message for us. We can study with exactness because the Bible is revealed in a very careful manner. We should use the best tools and techniques we can for Bible study because learning correctly the message God has for us is very important.
2. Our study of this topic of understanding Scripture will help all of us be more effective in our study of and application of the Bible.

Assignment: (2 minutes)

1. Prepare for the "written review" by studying Worksheets 1 and 2 you have filled out and come to class next time ready to show what you have learned.





1. A \_\_\_\_\_ the thought.
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ the message.
3. A \_\_\_\_\_ the code.
4. Possible \_\_\_\_\_ on the line.
5. B \_\_\_\_\_ the code.
6. B \_\_\_\_\_ the message.
7. B \_\_\_\_\_ the thought as A intended.

Complete the chart below as you move through the lesson. Be able to write the steps at the left and make a simplified drawing (without words) to suggest the message of the drawings at the left.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

Note that this step occurs before the message was written.

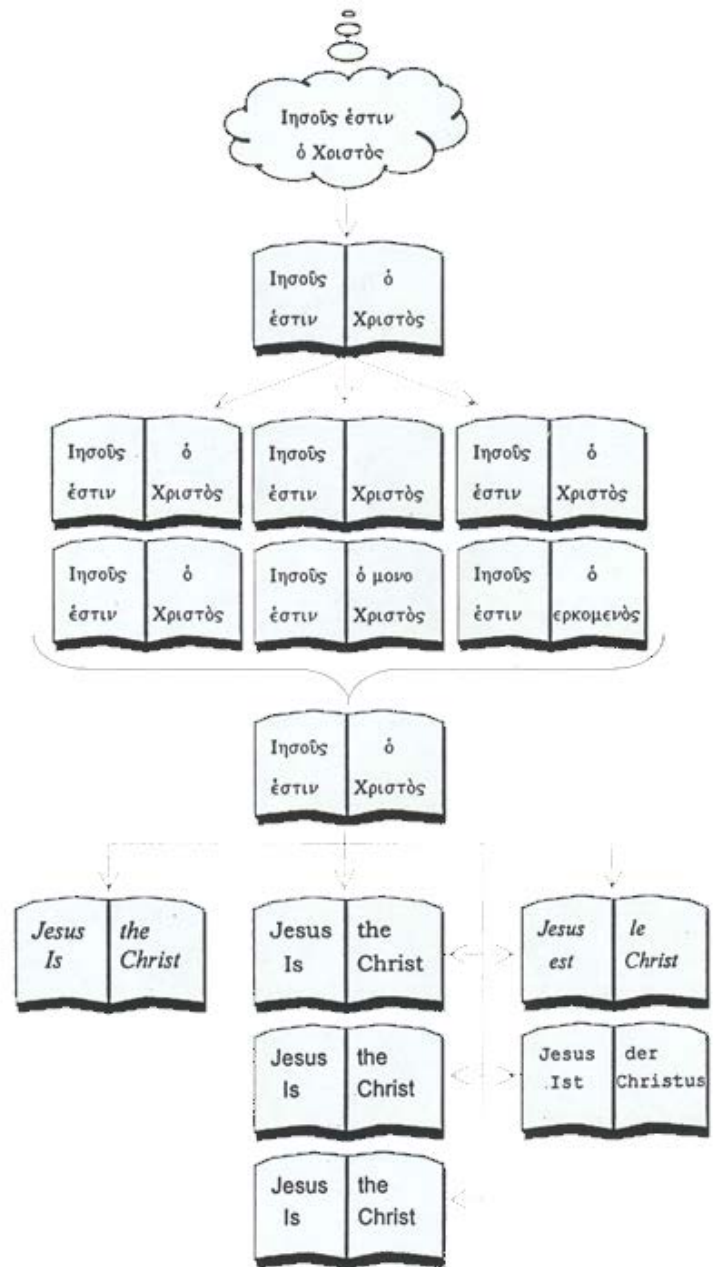
2. \_\_\_\_\_

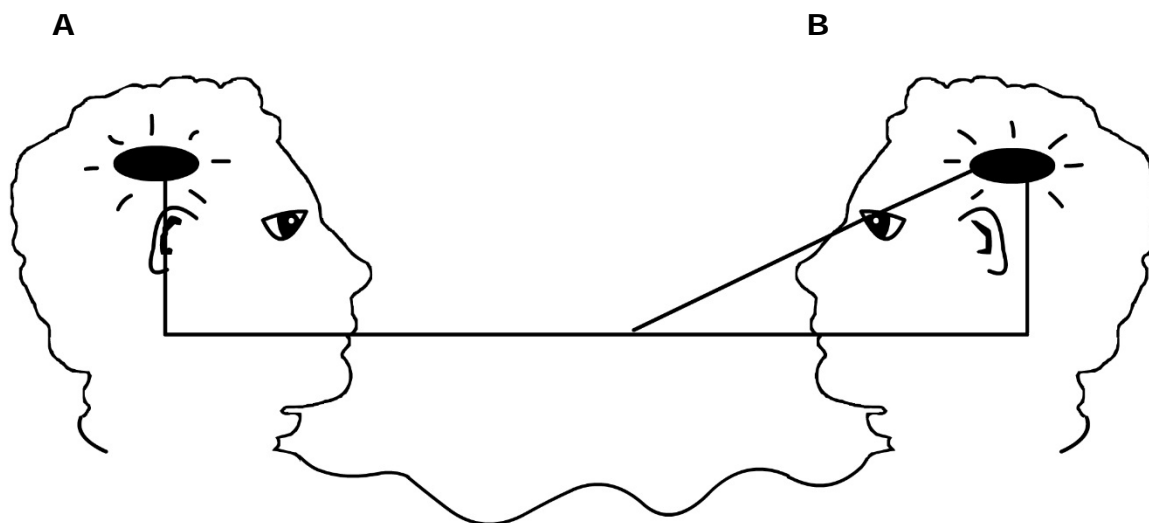
3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

Note the arrows and that some have arrows from two places. Why?





1. A thinks the thought.
2. A encodes the message.
3. A transmits the code.
4. Possible static on the line.
5. B receives the code.
6. B recodes the message.
7. B thinks the thought as A intended.

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 2  
Author: Stafford North



## Principles for Understanding Scripture (1)

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can explain what it means to “know the conditions.”
2. The student can list five different types of conditions that could help establishing the meaning of Scripture and can give an example of each.
3. The student can look up in Bible study tools information about conditions that can cast light on a passage of Scripture.

#### Preparation:

1. Have copies of Written Review No. 1 to hand out at the beginning of class. (At the end of this lesson.)
2. Have a copy of Written Review No. 1 with the answers for the teacher.
3. Have Bibles and pens for all students as needed.
4. Have copies of Worksheet 2 for this lesson ready to distribute. (At the end of this lesson.)
5. Have a chalkboard or overhead projector on which to display key words, ideas, and scriptures.
6. Have a map on which to show Elijah’s travels—either on the screen, the wall, or as a hand-out. A map which you could print as a handout is included.

#### Theme:

Certain key background information about a passage of Scripture can be very helpful to our understanding it like those who first received it. These are: the situation, the history, the geography, the archaeology, and the culture.

## Lesson Plan for Conducting the Class

Introduction: (about 10 minutes)

1. Call the roll and make arrangements to contact those who are missing.
2. Make any necessary announcements.
3. Have a prayer and songs as desired.
4. Check the answers to Written Review No. 1. Do this as a brief review and as a reward to those who have studied and learned the answers. While you will not ask for scores, you can commend those who do well. You could pass around a sheet and ask everyone who took the test to record his/her score somewhere on the sheet. You could average these to obtain the class average. You could work the following week to see if the average can be improved. Here are the answers to Written Review No. 1: 1-c; 2-d; 3-a; 4-c; 5-e; 6-b. Be sure to show appreciation to all who participated and encourage all to be ready for another written review next week.

Learning Experiences: (about 30 minutes)

1. Over the next few lessons, will study ten words that will give us important clues to a better understanding of Scripture. Each student should seek to memorize these ten words so he/she will be able to run them through his/her mind when studying a passage. Not every one of these will be helpful in studying every passage, but often just remembering the word will give a clue to finding the best understanding of the passage.
2. The first word to learn is conditions. There are often a variety of circumstances in the background of a passage that will illuminate it. We will look at five elements under conditions.
3. The first element of conditions is situation. What circumstances about the writer or the audience for the writing were special? Was there a time of stress, a particular problem to be met, a recent event that was overshadowing them, something about to happen? Here are some passages that will mean much more when we know the situation. (Review as many of these as you have time to do as examples of "situation" and ask class members to pick one of these to remember as a sample of why it helps to know the situation.)
  - a. Read Philippians 4:4-6. Q: What do we know about where Paul was when he wrote this epistle? A: In prison. Read Philippians 4:4-6. These words have special power when we know they came from a man in prison.
  - b. Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Q: What was Paul's situation at the time he wrote these words? A: Awaiting execution in Rome. Think of how that gives a special significance to these words.
  - c. Read Psalm 51:3, 9-12. Q: What has happened in the life of the writer that brought forth these words? A: David's sin with Bathsheba.

4. A second element of conditions is history. What do we know about the history surrounding the events of the passage, either from the Bible or from other sources, that would throw light on its meaning? (Review as many of these samples as you have time for and ask each person to select one of them to remember as an example of "history.")
- a. Matthew 2:13-18. The story of Herod having the children killed. Q: What do we know from history that makes this account about Herod to fit well with his personal qualities? A. He was paranoid. He built several palaces and fortresses for his own security. He had his favorite wife and two sons killed because he thought they were plotting against him. Such a man would certainly have ordered the execution of children.
  - b. In Daniel 5 we read the story of a feast ordered by Belshazzar, King of Babylon. For many years, there was no historical record of a Babylonian king named Belshazzar. Critics said the Bible was mistaken. About the middle of the nineteenth century, the British Museum received a large number of clay tablets from ancient times. One of these contained the name of Belshazzar. The tablet, from King Nabonidus, last of the Babylonian kings, mentions his son, Belshazzar. Other documents show that although Nabonidus was the actual king, his son reigned in the city of Babylon while the father dealt with matters of the kingdom elsewhere. This information not only is helpful in confirming the accuracy of the Bible story, but also in understanding the words of Daniel 5:16. There the king offers Daniel the "third" place in the kingdom. Since Belshazzar was only number two, it is natural that the highest place he could offer was number three.
3. A third element of conditions is geography. From the Bible and from other sources, we often can know something about the locations mentioned in the Bible that will help us understand a passage. (Use as many examples as you have time for and ask the class to pick one they wish to remember as their example for geography.)
- a. Much of the story about Jesus takes place on and around the Sea of Galilee. Q: What do we know about this large lake that would help us in understanding these passages? A: It was about seven miles wide and thirteen miles long and very deep. It was nestled between hills on the east and on the west, which means that winds coming from the north were channeled across the sea, making it subject to very quick turbulence. It was a place where many fished from rather small boats with both oars and a sail to make their living. Its southern outflow became the River Jordan. Read Luke 8:22-25. Q: How does this information help with understanding the story? A: They could certainly be far enough from shore to be unable to make it to land in such a storm. The boat was large enough to carry several people but small enough to be seriously affected by the winds and waves. The suddenness of the storm was characteristic of the Sea of Galilee. Experienced boatmen still were afraid. Knowing the lake, they were greatly amazed at how quickly the wind died down.
  - b. Ethiopian in the chariot. Many translations say that the place where the Ethiopian was riding was "desert" (Acts 8:26). So, if it was a desert, how could there be enough water to baptize him by immersion? By studying the area from Jerusalem to Gaza, we learn that it is not a desert like the Sahara but a rather deserted place. It has, however, occasional streams or pools of water. So, geography solves that problem for us.



- c. Following the story of Elijah certainly requires the use of geography. (Provide a map for your class to follow—on the overhead, a wall map, a map in their Bibles, or a map you have printed and handed out.) Find these locations as I tell the story: Elijah lived near the Brook Cherith, east of the Jordan. When that dried up, he went to Zaraphath near Sidon. When the famine was severe in Samaria, Elijah sent word to Ahab to meet him at Mt. Carmel. There Elijah demonstrated that his God was the true God. After killing the prophets of Baal at the Brook of Kishon, Elijah went back to the top of the mountain and had his servant look toward the sea (what sea?). Ahab rode to Jezreel but God allowed Elijah to reach there first. From there, after Jezebel's threat, Elijah fled to Beersheeba. Note how following the story with a map makes it much more vivid in our minds and how much more aware we are of the distances involved.
4. The fourth element of conditions is archaeology. Thousands of artifacts have been discovered in the lands of the Bible that illuminate things the Bible says. (Study as many as you have time for and ask each student to select one case he/she will remember as a sample of this point.) Q: What archaeological discovery do you know about that has helped us understand something in the Bible? A: (See what the class comes up with. Here are some you can bring up if the class doesn't. Use as many as you have time for.) (1) In 2 Kings 18-19 we read of an attack on Judah when Hezekiah was king in 701 BC. The Bible says the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, came against many cities in Judah including Lachish. From there he sent envoys to Jerusalem asking Hezekiah to surrender. On the advice of Isaiah, Hezekiah refused. He trusted in God. Then Sennacherib moved his army to Jerusalem. The Bible says that in one night God killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers through a pestilence. So Sennacherib and those remaining left and did not conquer Jerusalem. That is the Bible account. From Sennacherib himself we have two important records about this event. One of them is a six-sided prism on which he left a written record. The other is a set of wall reliefs prepared for his palace walls in which he depicted the conquest of Lachish in visual form. From these two records we learn that Sennacherib conquered 46 cities in Judah, that he did conquer Lachish, that he did go to Jerusalem to confront Hezekiah, and that he "shut up Hezekiah like a bird in a cage," but he does not claim to have conquered Jerusalem. From the wall reliefs we can see what the soldiers and the Israelites looked like and the way in which the battle was carried out. (To see pictures of these two items and get more information about them, go to [www.oc.edu/stafford.north](http://www.oc.edu/stafford.north). From the menu on this website go to Tour of British Museum. Among the items described here are these two.) (2) Hezekiah's tunnel, mentioned in 2 Kings 20:20 has been found. (3) Other cases: the names of many Bible characters such as Caiaphas, Erastus, David, Ahab, and many others have been discovered in archaeological finds; a cylinder from Persian King Cyrus mentions that he let people captured by the Babylonians return to their homeland and rebuild their temples as the Bible says he allowed the Jews to do; the palace of Sargon, a person many said did not exist, has been found near ancient Nineveh and this Sargon corresponds with the Sargon of Assyria mentioned in Isaiah 20:1; the theater in Ephesus where the riot took place (Acts 19) has been discovered and is still in good condition; the marketplace in Athens where Paul walked and saw the idols and Mars Hill where he spoke have been found; and there are many more.)
5. The fifth element of conditions is culture. So many times knowing the culture in which a Bible event is taking place will help us understand a passage as did those who first received it. Q: What is some information about culture from Bible times you already know about that helps us understand certain passages in the Bible? A: (Let the class bring up those they can recall. Others you may want to mention are:

washing the feet of one who came into the house, greeting with a kiss, wearing scripture passages on the head and arm in a phylactery, shunning of lepers, the relationship between Jews and Samaritans, marriage customs, the use of spices to bury and to anoint, and religious practices of both Jews and pagans.) Q: Look at the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 and note knowledge of what customs help us understand the passage. A: Using lamps for light. In their culture, the lamps were small and needed more oil frequently. Olive oil was usually burned. The practice of waiting for the bridegroom to come to the home of the bride and then of having a feast. The exclusion of those not present on time (at least in this case).

6. Now comes the question, how do we learn the information about the five conditions when we come to study a passage? Here are some tools that can help. (Have a sample of as many of these Bible tools as you can to show.)
  - a. First see if any other place in the Bible provides additional information about the conditions. The story of Sennacherib's coming to Lachish and Jerusalem, for example, is told not only in 2 Kings 18 and 19, but also in 2 Chronicles 32 and in Isaiah 36 and 37. (Ask students if their Bibles give references to those other locations with the 2 Kings 18 and 19 passage.) Taking these passages together will give more of the conditions and, thus will help in understanding. Many Bibles have references such as these in a center column, as footnotes at the bottom of the page or in some other way. Let students see what their Bibles provide and encourage them to make use of such references. So, a Bible with such references can be helpful in finding out more of the conditions if there are other related passages.
  - b. Second, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias are very good for finding such information as archaeological findings, historical background, and customs. Look up such terms as Lachish, Sennacherib, Hezekiah, and Isaiah for more information on these people and places. Some Bibles will have a short Bible dictionary in the back but these are very limited. It is much better to have something like the 3-volume, Illustrated Bible Dictionary published by Intervarsity Press. It is a very good one, is basically conservative, and is available from on-line book stores for about \$60.
  - c. A good commentary will often provide useful background information about the people and places and customs.
  - d. A Bible atlas will specialize in different maps that focus on particular time periods. Ask students to look in the back of their Bibles to see what maps are available there. Sometimes a place is known in the Old Testament but was no longer around in New Testament times. So getting a map that covers not only the place but the time period you are interested in can be helpful.
  - e. There are also books that specialize in the customs and life of various periods in Bible history. These can provide useful information about dress, housing, travel, life-style, and many other details.
  - f. Books on archaeology can be very helpful such as John McRay's Archaeology of the New Testament.

- g. Bible software packages can be very helpful in looking up verses, comparing different translations, and even studying words in original languages.
- h. The internet can also give useful information about history, archaeology, and culture. Go to your favorite Internet search engine like Yahoo or Google and type in the name of what you are looking for. The more specific the entry, the better. So Nebuchadnezzar will be more likely to get information about the Daniel period than just Babylon. Some of the information on the internet can be very helpful but some of it may not be accurate because there is no screening process through which it goes, such as the editor at a standard publishing company.

Application: (3 minutes)

1. This study should help us be more committed to looking for information about passages to help us understand them. It is not enough just to read the passage cold without searching for more information about it. Remember these five factors in conditions: situation, history, geography, archaeology, and culture.
2. As you listen to sermons and Bible school teachers, check to see if they are helping you to understand a passage by providing useful information about conditions.

Assignment: (2 minutes)

1. Use your review sheet to study the five elements of conditions we have considered and be able to write them down with an example of some Bible passage that you can understand better because you had that type of information.
2. Check out the book of Obadiah for next week. See what you can learn about it from the type of sources we have mentioned. Our next class will begin by asking you to share what you have learned about these five elements of conditions that can help us with our understanding of that one-chapter book from the Old Testament.

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Written Review over Lesson 1  
Author: Stafford North



(For use with Lesson No. 2)

Mark the one correct answer in each question.

In inspiring people to write Scripture,

- God dictated every word.
- God gave an idea to people and let them put the message in their own words.
- God guided the process, using different means of revelation, so that the outcome is exactly what He wanted.

The document the Bible writer himself produced is called

- The cardiograph
- The polygraph
- The seismograph
- The autograph

The end product of the process of communication which the originator seeks is for another to:

- Think a thought
- Hear a sound
- Decode a message

Step 2 in the process by which we got our Bible is:

- Man Copies
- Man Translates
- Inspired Man Records
- Inspired Man Creates

The number of Greek manuscripts containing some or all of the New Testament books is close to:

- 1000
- 2000
- 3000
- 4000
- 5000

Which of the following is a passage from which God has told us something about the nature of inspiration?

- 1 John 3:10
- 2 Peter 1:20
- 1 Timothy 1:11
- 1 Corinthians 9:21

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Worksheet No. 2  
Author: Stafford North



The first of the ten principles we want to learn is \_\_\_\_\_.

Under conditions, the first of the five elements to note is \_\_\_\_\_. A passage I want to remember that illustrates situation is \_\_\_\_\_.

The second of the five elements of conditions is \_\_\_\_\_. A passage I want to remember that illustrates history is \_\_\_\_\_.

The third of the five elements of conditions is \_\_\_\_\_. A passage I want to remember that illustrates geography is \_\_\_\_\_.

The fourth of the five elements of conditions is \_\_\_\_\_. A passage I want to remember that illustrates archaeology is \_\_\_\_\_.

The fifth of the five elements of conditions is \_\_\_\_\_. A passage I want to remember that illustrates culture is \_\_\_\_\_.

Below are some of the tools for Bible study I think would be helpful for me:

FOR THE WRITTEN REVIEW AT THE NEXT CLASS PERIOD, KNOW THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF "CONDITIONS" AND BE ABLE TO GIVE A SCRIPTURE FOR A CASE WITH EACH.

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 3  
Author: Stafford North



## Principles for Understanding Scripture (2)

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can explain the meaning of the word “genre” and what it means in biblical interpretation.
2. The student can list at least five different genre used in Scripture.
3. The student can name at least one principle that will assist in interpreting each of the different genre.
4. The student can describe how to approach the structure of a passage based on its genre.

#### Preparation:

1. Have copies of Written Review No. 2 to hand out at the beginning of class.
2. Have Bibles and pens as needed.
3. Have copies of Worksheet No. 3 for students to use during this lesson.
4. Have a chalkboard or overhead projector on which to display key words, ideas, and Scriptures.
5. Be prepared to discuss what we learn from our study of conditions and Obadiah.

#### Theme:

This lesson will help students understand how two additional principles, genre and context, can help us understand Bible passages.

### Lesson Plan for Conducting the Class

#### Introduction: (10 minutes)

1. Call the roll and make arrangements to contact those who are missing.
2. Make any necessary announcements.
3. Have a prayer and songs as desired.



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4. Check the answers to Written Review No. 2. The answers for that written review are: 1—conditions. 2—situation, history, geography, archaeology, and culture. You can let a few students give their scripture citation. Encourage all to be participating in getting good notes during class, reviewing them, and then checking themselves with the written review each time.

#### Learning Experiences: (about 30 minutes)

1. In our last lesson we studied about the first of our ten principles for understanding Scripture: conditions. As an assignment, we asked for you to look at the book of Obadiah. As I call the name of each of the five elements of conditions, tell me something that element reveals about the book of Obadiah. (Hopefully your students will have learned some of the following through their study.) Situation. Judah has been taken captive and Edom has been happy about it. Probably this was after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. History. The trouble between Jews and Edomites goes back to Jacob, father of Israel, and Esau, father of Edom. Long-standing feud. Edom would not let Israel cross its land. (Numbers 20:21). David subdued them (2 Samuel 8:13-14). They revolted (2 Kings 8:20-22). Geography. The land of the Edomites was in the mountains around the city of Petra. Remember the movie “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” as they went through that long break between the rocks and came out facing a building carved into the perpendicular cliff wall. That is the entrance to the ancient city of the Edomites although the building itself was carved by the Nabateans after they conquered the Edomites. Verse 3 makes reference to their mountain hide-out as it speaks of those who “live in the clefts of the rock” and who set their nest in the stars living in a place protected by such natural defenses had given them a false sense of security, particularly about what the God of the Jews could do to them. Archaeology. The ruins in and around the ancient city of Petra, probably called in the Bible by the name Sela or Teman, reveal much about the Edomites. They had altars on top of their mountains and strong defenses but, as Obadiah predicted, but this site today is desolate. As a people they were conquered by the Nabateans and were intermingled with them so that no Edomites remained. Just as Obadiah said, “they will be cut off forever” (v. 10). Culture. The Edomites worshipped an array of pagan gods. They had a rather high standing among nations because they controlled caravan routes and were able to charge those who crossed their territory. They were also a trading center. Their culture also included a strong hatred of the Jews and, because of this, they “gloated” over the fall of the Jews. But, says Obadiah, God will bring them down and Mount Zion will eventually triumph over the mountain of Esau (vss. 17, 19). (Teacher: the point here is to let the class experience the fun of looking up information about Scripture and seeing how it will illuminate their studies. Be sure they get to sense this.)
2. Today we add another element of Understanding Scripture: “genre” (pronounced “johnre”). This is a term used in literature to indicate different types of literature: poetry, drama, novel, short story, etc. As one reads or studies these different genre, he/she should approach the selection according to its type. If you are going to a movie, for example, you like to get in the proper frame of mind for the genre of that movie. If it is science fiction—like Star Wars—you come ready for action and thrills. If, on the other hand, you are going to see Sleepless in Seattle, you would be ready for a different genre—romance.
3. Q: What are some of the different types of literature God has chosen to use in the sixty-six books of the Bible: A: Poetry, Narrative/History, Epistle, Prophecy, Law, Proverbs, Sermon, Apocalypse. (Get a list something like this one on the board.) Of course, some books make use of several of these genre in the same book.
4. Let’s look briefly at some of these genre, asking how our approach to each might be a little different.

- a. Poetry. We may define poetry as writing that uses imagination, figures of speech and sometime of rhythmic structure. Q: Where in the Bible would we find the most poetry? A: Psalms, Song of Solomon. Q: What special features of poetry might be helpful to us as we seek to understand it? A: More emotion, more imagination. Often uses figures of speech. In Hebrew poetry, the second line often repeats the meaning of the previous one with somewhat different words. We need to think of the poetry's primary use—a song for worship, a meditation, a reading. Look at Psalm 19:1. Q: What do you see in this verse that corresponds with the characteristics we have listed? A: Emotion. Repetition of the meaning of the first line by the second line. Figures of speech because inanimate objects are said to speak. Probably a song for public worship.
- b. Narrative/history. Much of the Bible is in this style which tells a story. Q: Can you name some books that are primarily narrative? A: Genesis, Exodus, Matthew, Acts, and many more. Sometimes biography is listed as a separate category. We are attracted to stories, remember them better, and use them as a primary method of teaching. God has also used this method. Q: What are some things to remember about understanding narrative? A: The value of the story is usually not in the details but in the overall impact. Stories make their point less directly than law but still have a message to give. The narrative often has an emotional element with which we can identify. The structure in narrative/history is usually a chronological set of sequential events. The narrative will often have elements of drama such as a conflict or problem and how that matter is resolved. Daniel and the Lion's Den, for example, or Noah and the flood or the crucifixion. Recognize the purpose of the story: to convey a moral lesson, a lesson about character, a lesson about a doctrinal truth, a lesson about relationships, a message about the character of God, or a story to tell of some significant event in God's plan of salvation. Particularly if God or inspired leaders have acted in the narrative, then we are expected to use the case as something from which to draw conclusions. We need to note the story's time period so we know to which of God's covenants we should connect it.

Look at the story of the thief on the cross in Luke 23:39-43. Q: At the time of this story, what covenant of God were the people living under? A: The Mosaic Covenant. Q: What is the message we are to get from this story? A: That in the midst of all the criticisms hurled His way as He was on the cross, at least one person believed in Him and was rewarded. Q: Is this story included to show us how we should be saved under the Covenant of Christ? A: No. During Jesus' life, He had power to grant forgiveness as He chose such as with the man let down through the roof. He left instructions to be given after His death, however, about how one could be saved under the New Covenant. Q: Are there stories in the Bible to show us how to be saved? A: Yes. The conversion stories in Acts. These tell how the message of salvation was preached after the death of Jesus. There is no indication that anyone in the Christian age took the thief's case as a basis of how to have sins forgiven.

- c. Epistle. We may define epistle as a letter an inspired writer sends to one or a group to convey instruction, deal with a problem, and/or establish a relationship. Q: What are some books we would classify as epistles? A: All of Paul's writings and others as well. Look at Revelation 2 and 3 and note there are seven epistles from Jesus in these two chapters. Q: What are some principles we should remember when reading epistles? A: That they are usually written to deal with a particular situation and we need to understand the epistle in light of those circumstances. The more we know of the background of the situation the more likely we are to understanding the meaning of the epistle. There are personal



elements to an epistle we should recognize. Epistles often have a structure we need to recognize as they move from point to point. Usually the structure of an epistle is characteristic of letters of that time: salutation including the name of the ones addressed and the writer, the message of the epistle, and the close often with personal comments. The content portion of the epistle, particularly if lengthy, will be structured in a way that the author can best convey the message. It is very important to determine the organization of his points in order to grasp his meaning. Then each portion of the content section can be studied within the organization of the whole. We can make applications of the teachings in the epistles to the extent we have similar circumstances to deal with. Some have called the epistles “love letters” and have concluded that there are no instructions or commands in them to be obeyed. This would be counter to the nature of many of the epistles and certainly counter to what Paul wrote in an epistle to the Thessalonians: 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.

- d. Prophecy. Books of prophecy usually partake of two elements: forth telling and foretelling. That is, the prophet often brings a message for the particular time and place in which he lives. He preaches a sermon. Sometimes the prophets also reveal what will happen at some future time. As we approach prophetic literature, we need to note which mode the prophet in when we are studying his message. The structure of a prophecy will depend on the nature of the message and will vary widely among prophetic sections. Some prophecies are organized around the nations being mentioned, some around events being foretold, some around current events. Determining the structure of the prophecy, however, is a very important part of its study. Q: While there are prophecies that occur in many books of the Bible, what are some books you would consider to be primarily prophecy? A: Revelation, most of the minor prophets, much of the books of the major prophets, sometimes in the psalms, sometimes in the gospels as Jesus prophesies. Often prophecies are mixed in with other genre in the same book. Open your Bibles to the book of Daniel. Let’s look at each chapter to see what genre that chapter is. Q: What is chapter 1? A: Narrative. Q: Chapter 2? A: Narrative and prophecy. Q: Chapter 3? A: Narrative. Q: Chapter 4? A: Narrative and prophecy. Q: Chapter 5? A: Narrative and prophecy? Q: Chapter 6? A: Narrative. Q: Chapter 7? A: Prophecy. Q: Chapter 8? A: Prophecy. Q: Chapter 9? A: Narrative and prophecy? Q: Chapter 10? A: Narrative. Q: Chapters 11 and 12? A: Prophecy.
- e. Law. This would include statements of direct commandments and passages that are primarily instructive about what God expects of us. Q: What are some examples of this type of passage? A: Parts of Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy. Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Passages in Paul’s epistles that give direct instructions to be obeyed. Galatians 6:2 speaks of fulfilling the “law of Christ,” so there is “law” included in the teaching of Christ as well as in the Old Testament. Sometimes the structure of law is just a list of commandments. Sometimes it states some general topic and then gives a number of commands about that theme. Sometimes it is organized around different moral issues. Q: How do we approach such passages? A: First to know to whom the command was given and the situation in which it is to be obeyed. Then we seek to ask the way in which that command would be applied to us, if at all. Q: What is a command in the Bible that we think we should not follow today? A: Build an ark or something similar. Q: What is a commandment that we should follow today? A: (Something like the following may be suggested.) Make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18). Repent and be baptized for remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Do not show partiality (James 2:1).
- f. Proverbs. Q: What is a proverb? A: A short, memorable statement usually summarizing a truth about human experience. Q: What is some non-biblical



proverb you know? A: "A stitch in time saves nine" or "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," or any of a hundred others. In understanding a proverb in the Bible, we need to remember two or three things. (1) A proverb states what is usually true but there may be exceptions. (2) A proverb is not a command but an encouragement to a particular action. (3) In the book of Proverbs, many of the proverbs are in double statements with the second half either echoing the first half or presenting the opposite. Have someone read Proverbs 22:6. Q: Is it usually true that a child raised in the way he should go will stay with that lifestyle? A: Yes. Q: Are there exceptions? A: Yes. We have all seen a child that apparently was raised right who turned wrong. Q: Does this mean the Bible was wrong? A: No. This is a proverb and must be understood as a statement of what is generally true. When studying the genre of proverbs, then, we must understand the nature of this kind of statement. Q: Are there proverbs in the Bible outside of the book of Proverbs? A: Yes. John 1:46 would seem to be an example of a common saying in Jesus' day. And there many other proverbs in the Bible.

- g. Sermon. Many books of the Bible contain sermons although none is entirely of this genre. Many of the books of Old Testament prophets contain sermons they preached. The gospels contain sermons or public discourses of Jesus and Acts provides sermons by Peter and Paul. To study this genre, we must look at the occasion to learn who is speaking, to whom he is speaking, and what is the nature of the problem or need being addressed. We should look outline the sermon to find the major points and how they are developed. We should also look for the ways the speaker is seeking to inform or persuade the audience to come to a certain conclusion or action. We can also assess the outcome of the sermon. Q: What are some sermons in the Bible? A: Sermon on the Mount, Peter on Pentecost, Paul on Mars Hill, Amos to the people of Samaria.
- h. Apocalypse. Apocalypse is a genre in which the author is usually given a vision, uses highly figurative language often involving animals and other features of nature, uses numbers in a figurative way, and speaks about some coming event that will seriously affect one or more nations. To interpret the apocalypse, one will usually look for the clues given to identify the characters involved, such as who the various animals or other features represent. Any other factors that can be identified in a general overview of the passage should be noted. Then the student may start through the apocalypse with those identifications in mind. The apocalypse is usually structured around the elements or events in the vision. Often it is in a story form which provides for a progression of events. Q: What are some apocalyptic passages in the Bible? Passages in Daniel and Ezekiel would be of this type as would the book of Revelation.

- 5. So the point is that as we read different parts of the Bible, we need to ask what type of literature we are studying. Different genre require a somewhat different approach. Some have taken this good point to an extreme, however, suggesting that there are no commands in epistles or any absolute truths to be gained from a narrative. Let's use the point about genre to help us come to a better understanding of all Scripture but let's not push it too far and fail to get from God's message what He intended.

Application: (3 minutes)

- 1. Back to Obadiah. Q: What is the basic message Obadiah was giving? A: Those who are proud and think they can prevail over God and His people will be brought down and destroyed. Q: What genre is Obadiah? A: Prophecy. Q: Can you think of a passage that gives this same message in a different genre? A: Proverbs 16:18—pride goes before a fall (a proverb); Galatians 6:7—what you sow you will reap (epistle); 1 Corinthians 10:12—let



the one who stands be careful lest he fall (epistle); 1 Peter 5:5—God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (epistle but written much like a proverb). So God has used various genre to reveal the same basic message.

2. The lesson of humility is a good one for all of us—not just for the ancient Edomites.

Assignment: (2 minutes)

1. Use the attached worksheet to prepare for the “written review” over genre next week. Be ready to list several types of genre and to mention at least one thing we have learned about how to learn from each type.

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Written Review No. 2  
Author: Stafford North



(For use with Lesson 3)

1. What is the first of the ten principles of understanding the Bible we learned?
  
2. List the five elements we gave for that principle and a scripture reference you want to associate with each.
  - a.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - e.



Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Worksheet No. 3  
Author: Stafford North



The first principle for understanding the Bible is \_\_\_\_\_.

The second principle for understanding the Bible is \_\_\_\_\_.

Genre means a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

In the space by each number below, write the name of a genre studied, a book of the Bible that represents that type of genre, and at least one principle we should keep in mind when studying that type of genre.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 4  
Author: Stafford North



## Principles for Understanding Scripture (3)

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can explain the concept of context as it applies to Scriptures.
2. The student can demonstrate the use of context by describing its application to a particular passage.
3. The student can explain the use of the principle of “who said it and to whom” which we call “speaker/audience.”

#### Preparation:

1. Have copies of Written Review No. 3 to hand out at the beginning of class. (At the end of this lesson.)
2. Have copies of Worksheet No. 4 for student to use during this lesson. (At the end of this lesson.) Work through this worksheet for yourself, filling in the blanks as you prepare, so you will be able to be sure the students get their blanks filled in. You should do this for all the worksheets as you prepare the lessons to follow.
3. Have Bibles and pens as needed.
4. Have a chalkboard or overhead projector on which to display key words, ideas, and Scriptures.

Theme: This lesson will help students understand how to determine the context of a passage and how to use that context in interpreting it. It will also explore the principle of speaker/audience in interpreting Scripture.

### Lesson Plan for Conducting the Class

#### Introduction: (about 10 minutes)

1. Call the roll and make arrangements to contact those who are missing.
2. Make any necessary announcements.
3. Have a prayer and song as desired.
4. Check the answers to Written Review No. 3. 1—c; 2—Narrative/History, Law, Proverbs, Poetry; Prophecy, Epistles, Sermon, Apocalypse; 3—let some members of the class read what they have written about some of these and let the class answer whether what they have written is correct; 4—a is false and b is false.



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## Learning Experiences: (about 30 minutes)

1. We have now studied two principles about understanding scripture: conditions and genre. Today we study the third and fourth—context and speaker/audience.
2. Q: To what does context refer? A: Using the material before and after the passage we are studying to help illuminate its meaning. A series of concentric circles can help us understand this concept.

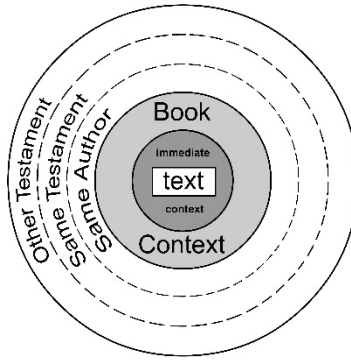


Figure 1 Circles of Context

So if we are studying a particular verse, we look first at that verse within its paragraph. What is the theme of the paragraph and what is its structure? And what do these tell us about the verse we are studying? Then we must look at the paragraph within the chapter of which it is a part. Then we must look at the chapter within the setting of the book and its theme. We even can carry the question about context to the place of the book within its Testament and its Testament within the story of the entire Bible. Thus, the question of context reaches not only to the immediate verses just before and just after the passage we are studying, but even to how that passage fits in the broader setting of Scripture. A statement some have used to express the idea of “study the context” is: “read the verse before and the verse after.” That is very good advice, but the principle extends even beyond the verse before and after.

3. To help us practice using the principle of context, let’s look at some particular passages. (Teacher—use enough of these to make the point but unless you have extra class meetings, use only enough of these to leave time to discuss the second principle for the day—speaker/audience.)
  - a. Have someone read 1 Corinthians 13:1-2. Q: In verse 1, about what action does Paul speak? A: Speaking in tongues. Q: In verse 2, about what actions does Paul speak? A: Prophecy and faith. Q: Are these actions mentioned in the preceding chapter? A: Yes. All three are defined in verses 8-10 as spiritual gifts. Q: How does the last part of 12:31 relate to 13:1-2? A: Paul is seeking to show the Corinthians that the most important thing for a Christian is not exercising special miraculous gifts, but, rather, that love is “the most excellent way.” Q: How does Paul make his point that love is more important than spiritual gifts? A: By showing that exercising the spiritual gifts without love would be of little value but love, by contrast, is useful even without spiritual gifts. Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, then, must be connected with chapter 12 for us to understand its full meaning. Since chapter 14 as well as chapter 12 is primarily about spiritual gifts, we have to look at chapter 13 as Paul wrote it: a passage about love in the middle of his discussion of spiritual gifts to show that love is the more excellent way. And making such connections is “using the context.”

- b. Turn to Acts 16:31. Read this verse. Q: What does Paul tell the jailor to do to be saved? A: Believe on the Lord Jesus. Q: Should we conclude from this verse that all one must do to be saved is to “believe on the Lord Jesus?” A: No. Before coming to that conclusion, we should look at the context—the verses before and after. Q: What do the verses before tell us about the jailor? A: That he is a pagan who did not believe in Jesus. The earthquake and Paul’s message to him, however, cause him to want to know more about Paul’s religion. So Paul starts by telling him of the need to believe in Jesus. Q: What does verse 32 say? A: They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to the others in his house. So what we read in verse 31 is not all he told him. Q: From what verse 33 says, what, would you reason, was included in this additional teaching? A: That he should show a change of heart (evidenced by the washing of their wounds), and that he would be baptized, which he and his household immediately did. To look at only verse 31, then, would be to take that verse out of its context.
- c. Read James 3:1. Is James really discouraging us from being teachers? Let’s look at the context of the passage from verse 1 to verse 12. Q: What is the theme of this section? A: The careful use of the tongue. Q: What connection is there between this theme and James’ statement about not many being teachers? A: Teachers use the tongue and, just as with other uses of the tongue, there is a danger we will not use the tongue properly. Seen in this context, then, James wants us to understand that when we teach we take on a high level of responsibility to use our tongues, our language, well. Since we are all commanded to teach (Matthew 28:18-19), James is not telling anyone not to teach. He is, rather, reminding us to exercise care when we teach because we will be held accountable for what we say. We will also be held accountable for not teaching if we have the opportunity for doing so. Seeing this statement in the context of his discussion of the use of the tongue helps us get the right message from his statement.
- d. 1 John 2:18 says, “This is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming.” If one read only that much of the statement, he might conclude that a single great opponent of Christ is coming right before the end of the world. But let’s look at the context. Someone read 1 John 2:18-19 and 2:22-23. From these verses, let’s answer some questions about “antichrist.” Q: What is the number of antichrists to be? A: Many. Q: When will they start coming? A: Already started in John’s day. Q: What is an antichrist? A: One who denies that Jesus is the Christ. So, from the context, we learn that there are many antichrists, that they began coming in John’s day, and that they were those who denied that Jesus was the Christ. John’s use of “the last hour” is a Greek expression to mean “a critical hour.” John says, then, the church, at the time he is writing, faces a critical time because there are those arising, even from within the church itself, who are denying the divinity of Christ. Another verse in the same epistle, 1 John 4:3, says that “every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” and is, therefore, the spirit of the antichrist, which was already in the world. This verse simply confirms from a broader context what we learned from the earlier passages. Using the context has helped us to get the clear meaning of “antichrist” as John uses the term.
- e. Turn to 1 Corinthians 1:17. Someone read this verse. Some have concluded from this verse that Paul discouraged people from being baptized because, he says, Christ did not send me to baptize. In fact, in verse 14 he says he is glad he had only baptized two of them. Should we take this to mean that Paul did not preach baptism and was glad when very few were baptized? Let’s look at the context. Someone read 1:13-17. Q: What is Paul’s point in these verses? A: Don’t be divided according to the person who baptized you. Q: Had all those in the Corinthian church been baptized by someone? A: 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.” So, yes, all in the Corinthian church had been baptized. In fact, we do not know of any who were members of

early congregations that were not baptized. Q: So why does Paul say he was glad he had baptized only two and was not sent to baptize? A: Since some were dividing the church according to the person who baptized them, Paul was glad the number he had personally baptized was only two. Not much of a sect could start with only two. And he is further making the point that who baptized a person is not important. The important thing is whether they have heard the right message. So his important job was to preach. He was not sent to be the one who actually immersed people, but the one to do the teaching. Others, who could not teach as effectively as he, could do the actual baptizing. When we understand Paul's words in the context in which they fall, then, we understand he is not devaluing baptism. Rather, he is glad that he had not personally baptized enough to for those he baptized to separate themselves into a sect. He also wants their common baptism experience to be a uniting act rather than a dividing one. If Paul had not taught baptism as a requirement for salvation, he could not then write the Corinthians in 12:13 and refer to the fact that all had been baptized.

5. Now let's turn to another of our ten principles: Who said it and to whom? We represent this idea with the words "speaker/audience."
  - a. Look at Malachi 1:1-7. Notice as someone reads this passage slowly how the speaker changes back and forth. If we took one of those verses and were not aware of whether it was the Lord's words or the people's words, we would easily misunderstand it.
  - b. Someone read John 9:31. Q: Who says these words? A: The blind man who was healed. Q: Was he inspired to deliver messages from God? A: No. He was just stating a generally accepted truth. What he says may or may not be in harmony with what other verses teach on this topic. This verse cannot be taken as the final word on this subject because of who said it.
  - c. Q: Does the Bible ever give a correct, inspired report of what someone says who is not telling the truth? A: Yes. Q: Can you give an instance of this? A: Satan speaking with Jesus at His temptation and at other times he spoke. Statements of Job's friends such as Job 4:7-8 are accurately recorded but are not necessarily in harmony with God's teaching. The Bible's reporting of the statement is inspired, but the statement itself could be what someone is saying which might not be a message from God.
  - d. Asking who is speaking will be very important because the speaker could be Satan, or Jesus, or a prophet, or someone just voicing an opinion. And that will have a major effect on how we interpret the meaning of the passage.
  - e. It is also important to ask, "Who is being addressed?" In Acts 8:22, for example, an apostle tells of Simon who has sinned that he should repent and pray for forgiveness. Q: Is that a good message to give a person who has never come to Christ? A: No. Q: What do we know of the man being told to repent and pray? A: That he has already been baptized, so Peter is telling Christians what to do after they sin and not those who are not yet in Christ. Q: When Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan, to whom did He particularly address the message? A: To the Jewish leaders who had a strong aversion to Samaritans and who were proud of their own achievements. To note this helps give the parable an even stronger meaning.

Application: (3 minutes)

1. So we must ask two more important questions: "What is the context?" And "who said it to whom?" Jesus said, for example, "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave" (Matthew 10:11). Does this



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mean we cannot stay in hotels when we travel? Let's ask our two questions? Q: What is the context? A: Jesus is sending out people on a limited mission, just to their own countrymen and in a very small area of the world at a time when taking strangers into your home was very common. Q: What do we learn from speaker/audience question? A: Jesus is speaking to the twelve as He sends them out locally where they could stay with their own people. This is not a statement intended for all Christians in all places.

2. Four principles so far: conditions, genre, context, speaker/audience.

Assignment: (2 minutes)

1. Study your notes and be ready for a written review at the next class.
2. Study Revelation 3:20 about Jesus knocking at the door in light of context and speaker/audience. We'll discuss this passage next week.



(For use with Lesson 4)

Below is the description given for each of five different genre used in Scripture. In the blank provided, write the name of this genre. These are not in the order studied in the last lesson. Just below the description, write the name of a book of the Bible that would fit into this genre. In the space after each description and the place for its name, describe one principle to use when interpreting this genre.

a. A letter written by an inspired person to an individual or group. Example of this genre: Principle to use:

\_\_\_\_\_

b. A book of the Bible that gives its message in story form. Example of this genre: Principle to use:

\_\_\_\_\_

c. A short, memorable saying that capsules human experience or God's wisdom. Example: Principle to use:

\_\_\_\_\_

d. Teaching or commandments that instruct us in particular behavior. Example: Principle to use:

\_\_\_\_\_

e. A book that is primarily a prediction about the future, sometimes in figurative language. Example: Principle to use:

\_\_\_\_\_

Mark each of the following as true or false:

- a. T or F A book in the Bible will be composed of only one genre.
- b. T or F One cannot draw doctrinal conclusions from a narrative.

Write the words inside the circles to represent the concept of "context."

To understand 1 Corinthians 13:1 and 2, we need to look back at chapter \_\_\_\_\_ and ahead to chapter \_\_\_\_\_. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 12:31 about "a more excellent way" refers to his description in chapter 13 of \_\_\_\_\_.

In Acts 16:31, Paul tells the jailor to "\_\_\_\_\_ on the Lord Jesus and you will be \_\_\_\_\_."

The jailor was a \_\_\_\_\_ who knew little or nothing about Jesus. So this was a good beginning point. Verse 32 tells us that Paul "spoke the \_\_\_\_\_" to him and those in his house. So he told him more. After this, the jailor was \_\_\_\_\_.

In James 3:1, James says, "Let not many of you be \_\_\_\_\_." The theme of this section is the careful use of the \_\_\_\_\_. James means that since teaching involves using the tongue, we need to be aware of the \_\_\_\_\_ teachers have when we teach.

In 1 John 2:18, John says, "This is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming." When we study in the context what John says about antichrist, we understand the following:

There would be \_\_\_\_\_ antichrists.

Antichrists will start coming in \_\_\_\_\_.

An antichrist is one who \_\_\_\_\_ that Jesus is the Christ.

"Last hour" means "a \_\_\_\_\_ hour."

In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul says he was not sent to \_\_\_\_\_, but to preach the \_\_\_\_\_.

How many of the Corinthians had Paul personally baptized?

Paul was disturbed because the Corinthians were calling themselves after the person who had \_\_\_\_\_ them.

From 1 Corinthians 12:13 we learn that all the members of the church in Corinth had been \_\_\_\_\_.

From the context we learn that Paul was emphasizing that his role was to \_\_\_\_\_, which included the message of \_\_\_\_\_, but that he did not personally do much of the baptizing.

The next principle to learn about asks \_\_\_\_\_ said it to \_\_\_\_\_. We represent this as \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_.

In Malachi 1:1-7, the speaker changes back and forth between \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.

In John 9:31 a person says, "We know God does not hear \_\_\_\_\_." This person was a blind man Jesus \_\_\_\_\_. He was stating a generally accepted truth but was not speaking by \_\_\_\_\_.

To learn the teaching of the Bible on this point, we would have to look at other verses. The Bible sometimes quotes a person who is making a statement that is not \_\_\_\_\_. The report is accurate but we must know who \_\_\_\_\_ it. An instance of this is when \_\_\_\_\_ spoke at the temptation of \_\_\_\_\_.

We also need to know to \_\_\_\_\_ the person was speaking. In Acts 8:22, Peter spoke to Simon and told him to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ that his sins could be forgiven. It is important to note that Simon was already a \_\_\_\_\_. So this is not a teaching for those who are outside of Christ. Matthew 10:11 tells those going with the message of Christ to stay in people's homes. The context shows this is given to a small number of people who are going to preach \_\_\_\_\_ to home and among their own countrymen.

Four principles so far:

FOR NEXT CLASS PERIOD, BE READY FOR THE WRITTEN REVIEW AND STUDY REVELATION 3:20  
BY LOOKING AT THE CONTEXT AND SPEAKER/AUDIENCE.



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Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 5  
Author: Stafford North



## Principles for Understanding Scripture (4)

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can demonstrate different ways of learning about word meanings in Scripture.
2. The student can explain the term "syntax" and give an example of how this is an important principle in understanding Scripture.

#### Preparation:

1. Have copies of Written Review No. 4 to hand out at the beginning of class.
2. Have Bibles and pens as needed.
3. Have copies of Worksheet No. 5 for students to use during this lesson. Teachers should fill out one of these for their own use prior to the lesson. This will help them be sure all the key words are covered.
4. Have a chalkboard or overhead projector on which to display key words, ideas, and scriptures.
5. Be ready to discuss Revelation 3:20 with the class in terms of context and speaker/audience.

Theme: Proper interpretation of Scripture requires careful study of individual words and analysis of the syntax of a passage.

### Lesson Plan for Conducting the Class

#### Introduction: (10 minutes)

1. Call the roll and make arrangements to contact those who are missing.
2. Make any necessary announcements.
3. Have a prayer and songs as desired.



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4. Check the answers to Written Review No. 4. The answers are: 1—The circle should have the following words—passage, paragraph, chapter, book, Testament, Bible. 2—1 Corinthians 13:1; Acts 16:31; James 3:1; 1 John 2:15; 1 Corinthians 1:17. 3—speaker/audience. 4—Christian.

#### Learning Experiences: (about 30 minutes)

1. We studied so far, four principles to use in understanding scripture. Q: What are they? A: Conditions, genre, context, and speaker/audience. We assigned Revelation 3:20 for study last week. Q: Who spoke these words. A: Jesus. Q: To whom does He say, "Open the door?" A: To Christians in Laodicea. Q: What has He said to them previously? A: That they were lukewarm and He would spew them out of His mouth. But that He loved them and urged them to repent. Q: What does Jesus mean by saying He is knocking on the door? A: I am begging you to let me back into your life. Q: Would Jesus admonition to repent and let me into your life fit equally well for someone who is not already a Christian? A: No. It would have to be adjusted. There is a sense in which He wants into their lives too, but the conditions would be different. Knowing to whom this admonition was given is important in understanding it as well is the context in which it was said.
2. Obviously one of the important ways to understand a communication is a precise understanding of the meaning of the words used—so our next principle is "words." Q: In what languages was the Bible originally written? A: Hebrew and Greek. Q: Do we have these original texts to study from? A: Yes. As we saw in the first lesson, we have been able to reconstruct the exact texts as they originally were in virtually all of the Old and New Testaments. For the most precise word study, it would be good to know the meaning of the word in the original language, but, even in the translated language, studying words is an important practice.
3. One way to learn a word meaning is to look it up in the dictionary. But regular dictionaries often do not approach a definition as it might be used in the Bible. Q: How, for example, would a modern English dictionary define the word "baptism?" A: It would give all of the present uses such as sprinkling, pouring, and immersion without regard to the original meaning of the term. So an English dictionary can be helpful, but we must go beyond this to find Bible meanings of words. Q: What are other ways to study Bible word meanings? A: (Teacher—here is a list many of ways students will list. Let them work on this a while and if there are some here they do not mention, you can add them to the list. Have some sample books of the types mentioned to show in class and to let people browse through afterward.) Compare English translations where the word is used. Books which list several translations side by side are very good for this purpose. Use a Bible word study book such as ones by Vine, Robertson (Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament), and Kittel. These books provide good background study of words appearing in our English Bible. A good concordance such as those by Young and by Strong will give a variety of definitions for a word and often will list under different meanings those passages which make different uses of the word. The concordance will also list other passages in which the word has been used and studying these will often help us have a better understanding of the word's meaning. Good commentaries will discuss word meanings as they describe the meaning of a passage. Those who know the original languages of Hebrew and/or Greek, can look up the words in lexicons of those languages. And even those who do not know the languages can use several different Bible software programs which allow one to track an English word back to its Greek or Hebrew word and from there to a definition of that original word. All of these methods are useful and should be used by good Bible students.

4. Remember that finding a word meaning is much more than just learning its basic definition. Often the context must tell us which of the possible meanings of a word the author intends in the passage we are studying. Q: What does the word “elder” mean in the New Testament? A: Those who oversee the work of the church? Q: What does “elder” mean in the following passages? Matthew 15:2. A: Jewish religious leaders. 1 Timothy 5:1. Any older man. 1 Peter 5:1. Elders in the sense of the overseers of the church. 1 Peter 5:5. Younger men should submit to older men, not just to the elders of the church. This would seem to be the case because of the contrast between younger and older. Q: How do we determine which meaning of a word to use? A: Normally the context and who says it to whom will give us the clues.
  
5. Let’s look at a few examples of how word study can benefit our Bible study.
  - a. Q: What is the root meaning of the word “baptize.” A: Immerse. So when we come to this word, we should always think in terms of immersion, being submerged. The meaning of the word helps us, then, to understand the act of baptism.
  
  - b. Q: Did the Greeks have more than one word for our word “love?” A: Yes. Their word philos, meant the love of friends for each other. Their word agape means to love in the sense of treating people kindly whether they are good to us or not. Their word eros had reference to romantic love and from this word we get our word erotic. It is helpful as we come across the word “love” in our Bibles, then, to know which of the Greek words is being used because that will help us understand the meaning. The word for “love your enemies,” for example, is agape, which means treat them well. It does not mean we are to feel toward them as we would our friends. Some translations will have a footnote to show the difference. Sometimes we may need to find the answer in a commentary or on Bible software that allows us to look up words in the original text.
  
  - c. Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek,” in Matthew 5:5. Q: What does the word meek usually mean to us? A: Someone who is weak and often pushed around. But this is not the meaning of the term in Scripture. Jesus meant something like, “strength under control” or one who can respond to criticism with gentleness. The Greeks used the word to refer to a horse that had been broken—still just as strong, but now willing to accept orders. Q: Where can we learn such things about the words of Scripture? A: From good commentaries, Bible word study books such as those by Vines, Kittel, and Robertson, from Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, and from Bible software packages.
  
  - d. An interesting case of word study comes as we look at John 6:53. Here Jesus says, “Whoever eats my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life.” Q: What does Jesus mean here by His flesh and blood. A: We know that “flesh” could mean Jesus actual flesh and “blood” His actual blood. But we think that must not be the meaning because no one ever did eat His actual flesh and we can’t do it now. So we are led to look for a different meaning to the words. Some have connected this to taking the Lord’s Supper. If we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Supper we will have eternal life. But would Jesus here be referring to that supper not even instituted yet? And would He be teaching that if we just eat the supper we have eternal life? Let’s let the context help us with the word meaning here. A few verses later, in verse 63, Jesus says, “The words I have spoken

to you are spirit and they are life." So, Jesus means that we must eat and drink of His teaching and then we can have eternal life. That is the meaning of the song, "Break thou the bread of life" which is not a song about the Lord's Supper but a song about partaking of His word.

6. Now let's turn to another principle: syntax. This is a word we don't use very often, but an important concept for us in our study of scripture. The word syntax refers to the way language works—particularly in word groups. Before we can understand a passage, then, we must not only look at individual words, but at words in groups. This word covers, then, such things as words in phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs. It also speaks to such things as forms of words, pronouns, and the connecting words that put other words together.
7. Open your Bibles to Romans 8. Let someone read the first word in each verse and note how many of the verses begin with a conjunction—a connecting word like "therefore," or "because," or "for," "and." To understand this passage, then, one must not take verses in isolation but must track back to see the connections indicated by these words. Have someone read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Q: Does Paul here mean that each of us is God's temple or that we together are God's temple? A: Here he is speaking of all of us together as God's temple. We know this because he uses the plural when he says "you yourselves." This is not so evident from the NIV but is from other translations which use the word "ye" and also from the original language. Now read 1 Corinthians 6:19. Q: Same question. Is this singular or plural? Am I a temple of the Holy Spirit or are we collectively that temple? A: Now Paul uses the singular and means that each of us individually is a depository of the Holy Spirit and we must live moral lives that reflect that indwelling. Read 1 John 3:9. Q: Does this mean that one who has been born of God cannot commit a sin? A: No, it means will not continue to sin. The NIV here translates "will continue to sin" while the NRSV has "do not sin." The Greek verb here is in a tense that suggests "continuous action" rather than a one-time event. The passage means, then, that Christians do not live in continuing sin even though we will sin at some points along the way. 1 John 1:8 says that if we claim we do not sin, we are liars. The previous verse says that "if we walk in the light . . . the blood of Jesus [keeps on] cleansing us from our sins." From the same book (context), we get additional information. As we walk in the light we will occasionally stumble (sin), and, when we do, Jesus blood can cleanse us when we confess our mistake. But this is different than walking in the darkness, which represents "continuing in sin" (v. 6). This last case represents how useful it can be to look at such things as the tense of the verb and a study of the whole sentence. And this is the type of thing we do as we consider syntax.

Application: (about 3 minutes)

1. The effective study of Scripture must involve a study of individual words and of words in groups such as phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. It also means that we think about pronouns, conjunctions, and even the tense of verbs. Bible study can and should be an exact process and we need to remember that God has given us His word in a form that allows this exactness.
2. Ask the students which verses we studied today have been most helpful to them.



Assignment: (about 2 minutes)

1. Use the worksheet to prepare for the written review to be given at the next class meeting.
2. For the next class meeting, study Ephesians 6:1-4. Look up the meaning of some of the key words. Ask how this section connects with the preceding chapter. Analyze by asking such key questions as "Who?," "What?," and "Why?" Questions like these help to see connections and this is part of what syntax is about.



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Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Worksheet No. 5  
Author: Stafford North



Some ways I could learn the meaning of a word are:

Some words to illustrate the need for studying word meanings are:

Syntax refers to the way \_\_\_\_\_ works, particularly in word \_\_\_\_\_.

This covers such things as looking at words in \_\_\_\_\_, clauses, \_\_\_\_\_,  
and paragraphs. Studying syntax also deals with forms of \_\_\_\_\_,  
and connecting words.

Some samples of the uses of "syntax" are:

STUDY FOR NEXT TIME EPHESIANS 6:1-4.

LOOK UP SOME OF THE KEY WORDS. HOW DO THESE VERSES CONNECT WITH THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER? ASK OF THE VERSES SUCH QUESTIONS AS WHO? WHAT? AND WHY? THESE ARE ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS THAT HELP US SEE HOW ELEMENTS OF THE PASSAGE CONNECT.

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 6  
Author: Stafford North



## Principles for Understanding Scripture (5)

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can explain how we know whether to take something figuratively or literally.
2. The student can name five common figures of speech in the Bible and can define each.
3. The student can name an occasion in the Bible when each of the five figures named is used.

#### Preparation:

1. Have ready to distribute Written Review No. 5.
2. Have ready to distribute Worksheet No. 6. Fill out one for yourself.
3. Have sufficient Bibles and pens for the class.
4. Have access to a chalkboard or overhead projector.

Theme: To understand how to interpret Scripture, we need to know when figurative language is used and how to interpret it.

### Lesson Plan for the Teacher

#### Introduction: (10 minutes)

1. Call the role and plan contact with those who are absent.
2. Make necessary announcements.
3. Songs and prayer as desired.
4. Give the answers to Written Review No. 5. No. 1—Word study book, commentary, Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, compare English translations, concordance, other passages that use the word, Bible software packages. No. 2—context. No. 3—c. No. 4—b. No. 5—d. Discuss briefly the questions asked about Ephesians 6:1-4. Some words which should be defined are obey, honor, exasperate, bring them up, training, instruction. This section connects with the previous chapter because Paul gives a sequence of three relationships in which there is a responsibility of leadership and of submission: husband-wife; parent-child; master-slave. The “who” in 6:1-4 is parents and children. The “what” is bringing them up and obey. The “why” is “it is right,” “first commandment with promise,” and so as not to “exasperate” the children.

## Learning Experiences (about 30 minutes)

1. Q: What are the principles of interpretation we have studied so far? A: Conditions, Genre, Context, Speaker/Audience, Words, and Syntax.
2. Today we take up the seventh of our ten: Figures. The Bible makes use of figurative language which we must decode in order to understand the message given. Before looking at specific types of figures and how to interpret them, let's look first at the whole question of figurative language. Q: Do we use figures of speech in our everyday conversation? A: Yes, a lot more than we may think. Q: Can you give some examples of figurative expressions in our conversations? A: (Let the class come up with some. Here are some illustrations as you may need them to explore this question.) "I'm freezing to death" actually means I'm uncomfortably cool but no one calls the paramedics. "I'm burning up" means I'm warmer than I would like to be but certainly is not a request to call the Fire Department. "Faster than a speeding bullet" may be literal for Superman but for a speedy tight end, it is only figurative. An athlete may be "big as a barn," "loose as a goose," "a lean, mean machine," or may "fly like a butterfly and sting like a bee." A driver may be "burning up the road," "flying low," or "high as a kite." The point is that our regular language is filled with figures and we are able to properly switch from literal to figurative and to interpret them.
3. Q: When such statements as the above are made, how do we sort through what we hear to know that these are figures and not to be taken literally? A: We apply a rule something like this: if a statement, on its face, is obviously impossible or beyond our belief, then we switch from our literal hat to our figurative one to see if we find a better fit. If, for example, the person is obviously not on fire, then we take the "burning up" words to be figurative. Since we know that no person can possibly be "big as a barn," we switch to the figurative style when someone uses such words. And we make this switch back and forth from figurative to literal frequently in many conversations.
4. The Bible is similar to most other written material. It is meant to be taken literally except when something appears beyond reality if taken literally. When it is, we are expected to switch to figurative. Just a couple of examples. Jesus says "I am the water of life," and we know He is not water. So we look for something about Jesus that could be like water and we find it in seeing that just as our physical bodies cannot live without water, so our spiritual nature cannot live without Jesus. For another case, David said, "The Lord is my shepherd." Obviously David was not literally a sheep lying down in a green pasture and God was not some man walking around with a crook in his hand. So, the words are figurative, intended to convey that God treats us even better than a shepherd treats his sheep.
5. Some books have itemized over a hundred different types of figures of speech. While the Bible uses many types, most of them fall into one of six categories. So we'll look at these six. Learn their definitions and an example of each from the Bible. Write these on your worksheet to help you remember them.
  - a. Metaphor. A direct comparison of two unlike objects. If I compare a man with a man, that is not a metaphor, but if I compare a man with bread, that comparison is of two unlike objects and so qualifies as a metaphor. Q: Does the Bible compare a man to bread? A: Yes. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." Just as bread is an essential to our physical diet, so Jesus is essential to our spiritual lives. This is a metaphor because it makes the comparison directly: Jesus is bread. Another example of a metaphor is Jesus' statement that Christians "are the light of the world" or "the salt of the earth." Christians are neither literal light nor literal salt, but there is a sense in which we are "light" for those in the darkness of sin and "salt" for those who need a "preservative" for their lives. So in the metaphor, one object is said to be another directly. You are leaven, you are a vine that bears fruit, you are a shepherd to the flock. So the Bible makes heavy use of metaphors.

- b. Simile. An indirect comparison of two unlike objects. Simile is much like a metaphor but uses the word “like” or “as” in the formula. This makes the comparison more indirectly. Q: Look at Psalm 1 and find an example of a simile. A: “Like a tree.” “Like the chaff.” Read James 1:6. Q: What is the simile? A: “Like a wave of the sea.” So the metaphor and simile both compare things essentially unlike but the metaphor makes the statement directly while the simile uses “like” or “as.”
- c. Parable. The parable is an expanded simile. It uses the word “like” or “as” but makes a comparison that normally extends over several points or in a story form. So, Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed or like a sower going out to sow. Often the parable is based on some common event in life such as farming or caring for the household. Its comparison allows the reader to picture some spiritual truth through a well-known experience of life. Q: Name some other parables that compare spiritual truths to some common thing of life. A: Treasure, pearl, a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, an unjust judge, etc. A parable makes one key point and in interpreting it, we should look for the essential lesson its author wants us to see. Q: What is the essential lesson in the parable of the sower? A: That people can respond to the seed of the word in different ways. Q: What is the essential lesson of the parable of the 10 virgins? A: Be ready, for we do not know when the Lord will come.
- d. Metonymy. Substitution of one word for another with which it has some association. This is a very frequent figure in our speech. Q: Have you ever read Shakespeare? A: Yes. Q: Did you read his eyes, or his hands, or his hair? A: No. We often put the name of the author for what he wrote and so instead of saying, “Have you read what Shakespeare wrote,” we say, “Have you read Shakespeare.” On the news today you may hear, “Washington said today . . . .” Q: Is that George Washington? A: No. We commonly use the place where something is said (Washington), for the one who said it. So, “Washington said.” These are cases of putting one word for another word with which it is associated.

Some Bible examples of metonymy are:

1. Look at Proverbs 12:19. Q: What words here are used in a metonymy? A: “Lips” stands for what lips do—the message they speak. And the “tongue,” likewise, stands for what the tongue says.
  2. Look at 1 Corinthians 11:27. Q: What word is used as a metonymy? A: “Cup.” Q: Do we actually drink the cup? A: No, “cup” is used here in the sense that the container stands for the contents. We don’t drink the container, but we drink what the container holds. So container for the contents. The emphasis in the Lord’s Supper should be on the contents, the fruit of the vine which represents Christ’s blood, and not on the container.
  3. We often sing songs about the cross. “I love the old, rugged cross.” But we really don’t love the cross; rather, we love what the cross stands for. “Cross,” then, becomes a metonymy, standing for the forgiveness that was made possible through the crucifixion.
- e. Hyperbole. Exaggeration to emphasize not to deceive. One of the most common figures in our ordinary language is hyperbole. “I’ve told you a million times not to do that.” “He drives like a maniac.” “I wouldn’t touch that with a ten foot pole.” And a million more. We’ll that’s probably a hyperbole. The Bible makes frequent use of this figure. Q: Can you think of an example in the Bible of hyperbole? A: (See what the class comes up with. Here are some you might mention.) God told Abraham that his descendent would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the sand on the seashore. “All Judea” went out to hear John—but surely someone

was sick or at work that day. Jesus statements about “cut off your hand” or “pluck out your eye” are samples of hyperbole. Also He used hyperbole in speaking of the beam that was in your eye or the camel going through the eye of the needle. What the speaker says is not literally true, but it is stated in such a way and in such a context that we know the exaggeration is not meant to deceive but to emphasize the point. So in the Scriptures as in life, we get a heightened sense of the meaning through this use of figurative language.

- f. Personification. Giving human characteristics to something that is not living. Read Psalm 19:1. Q: What, in this verse, is given human qualities? A: The heavens and skies are said to speak. Read Ezekiel 36:1. Q: To whom does God speak as if they had ears? A: The mountains of Israel.
6. We have discussed six of the most common figures of speech in the Bible and shown cases from Scripture where they were used. You should now have a list of these on your worksheet for reference and for study.

#### Application: (3 minutes)

1. Interpreting figures of speech is very important to understanding Scripture. Of course books like Daniel and Revelation are filled with figurative language and take some special effort to understand. But even in the simplest narrative, figurative language can occur. As Jesus and His apostles, for example, are having their last meal together before His death, Jesus takes the unleavened bread that was on the Passover table and says to them, “This is my body.” Great controversy has raged over this simple statement. Did Jesus mean that they were to eat of His actual body? Did He mean that the bread was transformed into His flesh and that we were eating, then, of His actual body? Is His body somehow just “with” the bread in a kind of mystical presence? Or was Jesus using just a simple figure of speech, a metaphor, to say that the bread represented His body and when we eat it we are to remember the death of His body on our behalf? The answer to this question lies, as interpretations so often do, in asking the question, “What would those who first received this message have thought it meant?” It is highly doubtful that His apostles, mostly simple fishermen not trained in deep theological thought, would have understood anything but the simple metaphor that the bread could remind them of His body and the fruit of the vine could remind them of His blood. When Paul told the story in 1 Corinthians 11:24, he simply quoted Jesus as saying, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”
2. Let this lesson on figures of speech make us all more alert to the use of figures in the Bible. And we can also note figures of speech in the songs we sing. Grasping the figures in our songs will give us a deeper appreciation of their meaning.

#### Assignment: (2 minutes)

1. Study your worksheet and be ready for the written review next week.
2. Study 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 which provides a lengthy discussion built on a metaphor. Write down the metaphor and then write down all the points of comparison between the two items being compared.



1. We can tell when to consider a word or expression as figurative when we recognize that, if taken literally, it would be an \_\_\_\_\_.

2. A Bible example of such an impossibility is:

3. Six categories of figures of speech common in the Bible are:

a. Metaphor—a \_\_\_\_\_ comparison of two \_\_\_\_\_ objects.

Examples:

b. Simile—a \_\_\_\_\_ comparison of two \_\_\_\_\_ objects.

Examples:

c. Parable—an \_\_\_\_\_ simile, usually based on some \_\_\_\_\_ event in life, to picture some \_\_\_\_\_ truth.

Examples:

d. Metonymy—a \_\_\_\_\_ of one word for another with which it has some \_\_\_\_\_.

Examples:

e. Hyperbole—an \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ not to deceive.

Examples:

f. Personification—giving \_\_\_\_\_ characteristics to something that is not \_\_\_\_\_.

Examples:

STUDY 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27. WRITE DOWN THE METAPHOR ON WHICH THIS SECTION IS BASED AND THEN WRITE DOWN ALL THE POINTS OF COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO ITEMS BEING COMPARED.



Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 7  
Author: Stafford North



## Principles for Understanding Scripture (6)

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can explain the principle of "theology" in understanding Scripture.
2. The student can demonstrate the use of "other passages" in interpreting Scripture.

#### Preparation:

1. Have ready to distribute Written Review No. 6.
2. Have ready to distribute Worksheet No. 7. (Fill out one for yourself.)
3. Have sufficient Bibles and pens.
4. Have access to a chalkboard or overhead projector.

Theme: When studying a passage, we must look at how that passage fits into the big picture of what the Bible says on the content of that passage and we must look at other verses that may be related. We call these two principles using "theology" and "other passages."

### Lesson Plan for the Teacher

#### Introduction: (10 minutes)

1. Call the role and plan contact with those who are absent.
2. Make necessary announcements.
3. Songs and prayer as desired.
4. Give answers to Written Review No. 5. No. 1—impossibility. No. 2—direct, unlike; indirect, unlike; extended; substitution, association; human, living. No. 3—metaphor, metonymy, parable, simile.
5. Discuss 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. The metaphor is that the church is a body. Verse 27 says "You (the church) are the body of Christ." Some of the points of comparison are: body and church should be one, united; just as the body enjoys the same nourishment so we all, having been baptized into the church, enjoy the Holy Spirit; all parts of the body and church are

needed and important; when one member of the body or the church rejoice or suffer, all the others are affected.

### Learning Experiences: (about 30 minutes)

1. The eighth of our ten principles of understanding the Bible is “theology.” We are using this word here to mean that the interpretation of any passage must be in harmony with the “big picture” of Scripture. Making one verse mean something that is not in harmony with the broader teaching of Scripture is to give it a meaning that is incorrect. Q: Over how long a period of time were the Scriptures being revealed? A: About 1500 years, from about 1400 BC to about 100 AD. Q: How many different people were involved in writing the 66 books of the Bible? A: About 40. Yet, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, these different writers have produced a book of amazing harmony. So, we should check any possible interpretation of a passage with the overall theme of Scripture and with the teaching of Scripture on the point of the passage we are studying.
2. Here are some guidelines that will help us to look at the “theology” or “big picture” as we are studying a passage.
  - a. Determine the covenant under which the statement applies.
    1. Q: What are the two major covenants under which God’s people have lived? A: Mosaic and Christian. Q: Did God intend for people to live under both of those at the same time? A: No. Read Romans 7:1-4. Q: To what does Paul compare a person’s relationship to God’s covenants? A: To a woman being married to two husbands? Q: What is the first husband in Paul’s comparison? A: The Law of Moses. Q: What is the second husband? A: The law of Christ. Q: What had to happen to the first husband before the woman is free to marry another husband? A: He had to die. Q: What had to happen to the first covenant before those in it (Jews) could be joined to the covenant of Christ? A: It had to die. Read verse 7. Q: How do we know from this verse what law it was that Paul said had to die? A: The one that said, “Do not covet.” And that would be the Law of Moses.
    2. In Hebrews 10:9, the writer says “He sets aside the first to establish the second.” Q: What act marked the end of the covenant through Moses and established the covenant through Christ? A: The death of Christ. Read Hebrews 9:15-17.
    3. So, Jews, who were under the Law of Moses have been released from it to be under the Law of Christ and Gentiles, who were not required to be under the provisions of Moses, are also subject to the Law of Christ.
    4. Two important truths need to be drawn from this information: (a) Since those living after the death of Christ are not under the provisions of the Law of Moses, we should not look to the provisions of that law as those we should follow today.



(b) There are still great benefits that come from studying passages in the Old Testament. Q: What are some of the values we get today from studying the Old Testament? A: Learn about God, creation, the nature of man, the early development of God's plan, principles by which God deals with His people, examples of moral character—both good and bad, much background information by which we understand what the New Testament says. Q: What should we not use the Old Testament for? A: To learn about such matters as what to eat or wear, what to do to worship God, how to be forgiven of sins, etc.

6. Q: Do the four gospels belong with the Old Testament or the New? A: (Let the class discuss this some.) They describe a time when people were living under the Old Covenant—as Jesus did. But while Jesus was living under the Old Covenant, He was delivering the teaching that would later be taught as part of the New Covenant. So many of the things Jesus did, and a few of the things He taught, fit under the Old Covenant. In His commission to the apostles, however, He told them to go teach what He had taught them while He was alive. (Matthew 28:18-20). So what He taught is part of the New Covenant even though He lived under the Old.

b. Connect the content of the passage to the larger teaching on the Bible doctrine considered in the passage. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Q: What is the fundamental teaching of this passage about salvation? A: That it is by the principle of grace we are saved as opposed to our being able to earn salvation by the principle of works. Q: How does this passage say we can connect with grace? A: By faith. But this passage does not tell us all we need to know about that faith. Certainly we would need to look at the broad picture throughout Scripture on salvation and what God has asked us to do to connect with His grace. Read Matthew 25:34-36? Q: Should we conclude from this passage that the only basis of judgment will be how we treated the needy? A: No. We must take into account all that other passages about the basis of judgment say.

We need to see all of what God has said on a particular topic before drawing our final conclusion about it. This is what we mean by "theology." Get the full picture.

c. Relate the teaching of the passage you are studying to other Bible themes. Often we will get important insights into a theme we are studying by seeing how it connects with other great "currents" that run through Scripture. Ephesians 1:4 speaks of election but we must connect our understanding of this verse with what the Bible says about the theme of free will. When we discuss the question of why there is pain and suffering in the world, we must connect that question with the nature of God and the fact that He gave man the power of making choices.



3. The ninth principle to consider in studying how to understand Scripture is “other passages.” This is a rather obvious one and is related to some of the principles we have already studied. It is such an important one, however, that it needs our special attention here.
- a. First, check to see if there are other passages with parallel content that tell of the same event or treat the subject in a very similar fashion. Some turn to 2 Kings 18-19, some to Isaiah 36-37, and some to 2 Chronicles 32. Q: What event is described in the passage to which you have turned? A: The invasion of Sennacherib against Judah when Hezekiah was king. Think how useful it will be when we study any one of these passages to look at the others. Q: Is the story of Jesus’ birth in more than one gospel? A: Yes—Matthew and Luke. Q: Is the story of Jesus’ resurrection in more than one gospel? A: Yes—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Q: How many different times is Paul’s conversion recorded? A: Three—Acts 9, 22, 26. Sometimes in Paul’s epistles, particularly those written at a similar time, there are parallel passages that need to be studied together. One very helpful instance of parallel passages occurs in the reports of Christ’s discourse on the Mount of Olives about the coming fall of Jerusalem and of the end of the world. Some turn to Matthew 24:15 and some to Luke 21:20. Jesus is here giving a sign by which the disciples will know that the fall of Jerusalem is immediately upon them and that they should, therefore, leave the city quickly. Someone read Matthew 24:15. Q: Would that tell you very much about when to leave the city? A: No. It is a good connection to the prophecy of Daniel about the fall of Jerusalem. But it does not tell anyone specifically about when to leave. Now read Luke 21:20. This verse falls at exactly the same point in the discourse as reported by Matthew and Luke. Q: When does Luke’s account say one should leave the city? A: When you see an army coming. This is more specific. Since this army was the “abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel the prophet,” looking at the two passages together helps greatly in understanding the Matthew passage.
  - b. Look for passages with similar content. Matthew 5:33-37, for example, says not to take an oath, yet in Hebrews 6:17, God took an oath. Looking at these together will give us a fuller picture of this issue. Q: If one is studying the question of conversion to Christ and what one does to be forgiven of sins, what are some stories of conversion that could be studied together? A: Pentecost, Samaritans, Simon, Ethiopian, Saul, Cornelius, Lydia, Philippian Jailor, the Corinthians. And there are other passages not in conversion stories that would help illuminate this topic.
4. Q: How can you find these other passages? A: References in your Bible. Concordance. Nave’s Topical Bible. Commentaries. Bible dictionary or encyclopedia. Bible software.

Application: (3 minutes)

1. Let's list on the board the nine principles we have studied so far: Conditions, Genre, Context, Speaker/Audience, Word Meaning, Syntax, Figures, Theology, Other Passages. We will have one more. We have studied how each of these can be used with particular passages. It is important to use all of these and not just the principles we happen to be most familiar with. When we have studied all ten, then we will have some class meetings in which we practice applying these ten principles to some passages of Scripture.

Assignment: (2 minutes)

1. Be seeking to memorize the nine principles we have learned so far.
2. Prepare for the written review over this week's lesson.
3. Ephesians 5:19 is a useful verse to study. Think about the nine principles we have studied so far and see if you can come up with something that the use of each of these principles would contribute to our study of that verse.

1. We understand a word or expression to be used figuratively if taking it literally appears like an \_\_\_\_\_.
  
2. Definitions of different figures of speech:
  - a. Metaphor--\_\_\_\_\_ comparison of two \_\_\_\_\_ objects.
  - b. Simile--\_\_\_\_\_ comparison of two \_\_\_\_\_ objects.
  - c. Parable--\_\_\_\_\_ simile.
  - d. Metonymy--\_\_\_\_\_ of one word for another with which it has some \_\_\_\_\_.
  - e. Hyperbole--\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ not to deceive.
  - f. Personification—Giving \_\_\_\_\_ characteristics to something not \_\_\_\_\_.
  
3. Look at the figures of speech given below and identify in the blank provided the type of figure being used.
  - a. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. "Drink this cup." \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. The kingdom of heaven is like a net put into the sea. It catches fish of all kinds. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. "He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water." \_\_\_\_\_

Principle No. 8 for understanding the Bible is \_\_\_\_\_.

1. To use the principle of "theology," determine the \_\_\_\_\_ to which the statement applies.
  - a. There are two major covenants in Scripture: the Law of \_\_\_\_\_ and the Law of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Romans 7:1-4 teaches that the Law of Moses had to \_\_\_\_\_ so those under it could "marry" the Law of \_\_\_\_\_. The law passing away was the one that said, "Do not covet."
  - c. Although we no longer live under the provisions of the Law of Moses, we can benefit much from studying the Old Testament. Some of these benefits are:
    - d. While Christ lived under the Law of \_\_\_\_\_, He was delivering His message which would become in effect when He \_\_\_\_\_.
2. To use the principle of "theology," connect the content of the passage to the larger teaching of the Bible.
  - a. Example: Ephesians 2:8-9. We are saved by \_\_\_\_\_. But this passage must be connected with other passages about salvation.
  - b. Example: Matthew 24:34-36. We will be judged on how we have helped others but other passages on \_\_\_\_\_ will also be consulted.
3. A list of the nine principles covered so far:
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.
  - 6.
  - 7.
  - 8.
  - 9.

STUDY EPHESIANS 5:19 AND SEE IF YOU CAN CONNECT IT WITH EACH OF THE NINE PRINCIPLES STUDIED SO FAR.

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 8  
Author: Stafford North



## Principles for Understanding Scripture (7)

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can explain the principle of “application” in the use of Scriptures as the final step following the first nine.
2. The student can explain using a command and give an instance of this.
3. The student can explain using an example and give an instance of this.

#### Preparation:

1. Have ready to distribute Written Review No. 7.
2. Have ready to distribute Worksheet No. 8. Fill out one for yourself.
3. Have sufficient Bibles and pens.
4. Have access to a chalkboard or overhead projector.

**Theme:** Having learned through the previous nine principles what a passage would likely have meant to those who first received it, we now ask how God meant for us to apply that passage to ourselves. The first two questions we ask are whether there is a command in the passage God meant for us to obey and whether there is an example in the passage which God meant for us to follow.

### Lesson Plan for the Teacher

#### Introduction: (15 minutes)

1. Call the roll and plan contact with those who are absent.
2. Make necessary announcements.
3. Songs and prayer as desired.
4. Give answers to Written Review No. 7. 1—theology and other passages. 2—woman, husbands, die, marry. 3—death of Jesus. 4—nature of God, examples, background, etc. 5—False. 6—references in a Bible, Bible dictionary, concordance, topical Bible, etc.
5. Discuss Ephesians 5:19. (This is not intended to be a full discussion of the verse. Just raise each of the nine points and ask what something learned from this principle could mean in exploring the verse. Don't try to run down all these conclusions or you won't get to the main lesson.) Conditions—Paul is in prison writing to the church in Ephesus. He had spent three years in Ephesus building up the church so he knew the church well. Archaeology has disclosed that Ephesus was a very large, major city in the eastern Roman Empire. Genre—



an epistle, although not directed toward some particular problem. The general thrust of the epistle is to help the Ephesians understand the plan of God and how their lives should be Christ-like. Context—in verses 15 through 19, Paul writes about how to live as a Christian--not to be drunk but be filled with the Spirit. We can help each other in Christian living as we share with each other through song. Speaker/Audience. Paul writes to Ephesian Christians who lived in the midst of a very pagan city which strongly supported Diana of the Ephesians. Her temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was a dominating force in the area. Paul, who had spent some three years in Ephesus with them, writes to help Christians in this particular place to stay free of such wicked influences. Words—psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs refers to different styles of songs but we do not have any information that would allow us to draw hard lines between these. The word “singing,” here, suggests just that—to sing. The term “make melody” is from the Greek word psallo which, many years earlier, had meant singing with a musical instrument. By Paul’s day, however, the word had come to mean just to sing without the use of an instrument. It is still the Greek word for sing. The Greek Orthodox Church still does not use instruments in its services. So the expression more literally is “singing and singing with your hearts to the Lord.” Syntax—the prepositional phrase “in your heart” is a very important indicator that we are to sing with deep internal expression and feelings. Figures—the use of the word “heart” is a figure because it does not mean the literal heart but stands for our “inner being,” much as we say— “with all my heart,” not meaning the blood pumping organ. Theology—we must connect this verse about singing to God with the broader picture of worship expressed in the New Testament. Other passages—Colossians 3:16 is almost a parallel passage. We also learn about singing from such other passages 1 Corinthians 14:15, Hebrews 2:12, and James 5:13.

Learning Experiences: (about 25 minutes)

1. The first nine principles have been primarily about discovering what the passage would have meant to those who first received it, looking at the passage “through their eyes.” What would the words and sentence structure have meant to them? How would they have interpreted the figures? What conditions would they have been aware of that can help us in our understanding? When we come to the tenth principle, we move to a different question. Knowing what the passage would have meant to them, then what message should we get for ourselves? This principle is called “application.” How shall we get from this passage, written more directly to those who lived a long time ago, the message God intended for succeeding generations to learn?
2. Of course, some of the principles we have studied have already moved us in this direction. We have asked, for example, with which covenant is the statement connected. We have looked at the way this passage and its content fit with the overall theology or “big picture” of the Scriptures and we have asked what other passages will help us in deciphering its message. Such principles begin to show us how the passage might apply to ourselves. We must come more specifically to the issue, however, of just what God wants us to learn from a passage.
3. Three questions we can ask will help us discover whether there are lessons in the passage we need to apply to ourselves. These three questions are not all there is to understanding Scripture and they have not been considered the only factors for interpreting the meaning of a text among those in churches of Christ. But, as we shall see, they are important questions which the Scriptures expect us to ask as we seek to make use of a passage. Our study of these questions will show (1) that these are questions the Scriptures expect us to ask and (2) how these questions reveal important information for us.
4. The first question to ask is this: Are there commands in this passage God intended for me to obey? Certainly there are commands in the Bible to obey. Read Hebrews 5:8. Q: Who learned obedience through suffering? A: Christ. Q: Those who want eternal salvation through Him must do what? A: Obey Christ. In view of this, I must ask, “Are there commands of Christ in the passage which I am to obey?” Jesus emphasized this point of

obedience in many ways while He was on earth. Read Matthew 7:21. Q: From this passage, who will enter the kingdom of heaven? A: "He who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." So what is the "will of the Father?" That's what we must learn from our study of Scripture. In John 14:15, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." So there are certainly commands to be obeyed and we must be about finding them in Scripture.

5. Since the New Testament Scriptures, from the gospels through Revelation, are our covenant, we should read these passages and from them learn the commands Christ wants us to obey. Read Matthew 28:18-20. Q: What were the apostles to teach others to do? A: They were to teach others to observe what Christ had commanded them. As we read the New Testament, then, we should be asking, "Where are commands I am to obey?" Commands under a different covenant would apply to us only to the extent they are incorporated into the new covenant.
6. Let's look at a couple of passages to illustrate how we study passages looking for commands to obey. Have someone read Matthew 5:14-16. Q: Do you find a command here for us? A: Yes. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Q: What does it mean to "let your light shine?" A: To set an example before others of living the good life God calls us to live. Q: Is this a command for Christians? A: It is a command by Christ for His followers and would have been included in those things He told the apostles to teach others. Have someone read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Q: How important does Paul say it is for them to follow his instructions? A: If they reject it, they are rejecting God (v. 8). Q: What is the specific instruction which he has given them? A: Avoid sexual immorality. Q: Is that teaching for us? A: Yes. Q: How would we reach that conclusion? A: This was the teaching of an apostle to Christians. Since we are also Christians and subject to the teaching of the apostles, we should follow that instruction.
7. Open your Bibles now to Acts 2:36. Q: How does this verse connect with the preceding context? A: It is the climax of Peter's sermon. Q: Based on verse 37, what is the response of the people to this sermon about Jesus? A: They believe Peter's sermon about Jesus and that they crucified Him; and they ask what shall we do? Q: What does Peter tell them to do? A: "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Q: Is this a command for us today? A: Yes. We, like they, live in the time when we are to follow Jesus and His commandments and those of His apostles.
8. Now read Romans 13:1-7. Q: What command is found here? A: Submit to governing authorities. Q: Is that a command for us? A: Yes, for we also are Christians living under a governmental authority. Q: Why might this be easier for us than for those to whom Paul wrote? A: They had no say in their government and their government was sometimes anti-Christian. Now have someone read Acts 4:19. Q: Did Peter and John violate what Paul had commanded Christians to do? A: No. We must take the two passages together. We are to obey the government, but that must be limited to those things that do not put us in conflict with God's commands. If the two conflict, we must obey God rather than man.
9. Let's summarize some things we have learned about obeying commands.
  - a. Christ and the apostles gave Christians commands to be obeyed.
  - b. When looking at a command, we must ask if God intended it for us today.
  - c. We must also ask if a command has been limited by or modified by any other commands or teaching. (As in the case of obeying the government.)
  - d. We must be willing to obey commands from Scripture for us.

10. Now let's turn to another way we are to learn from Scripture. We certainly look for command's God wants us to obey. But God has taught us in other ways, too. God shows His will to us by giving us examples to follow. Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-12. Q: What Old Testament events has Paul just mentioned? A: Events from the 40 years in the wilderness. Q: How do we learn from this example? A: They violated God's moral teachings and suffered for it. We should not do that. Q: Are we under similar moral principles? A: Yes. Q: What are some specific lessons we should learn from their example? A: Don't set our hearts on evil things. Don't be idolaters. Don't commit sexual immorality. Don't grumble. Don't think you can't fall. Paul wants them to learn from examples.
11. Read Philippians 4:9. Q: What does Paul say here about learning by example? A: Learn from what I taught and what I did. Now let's take another case. The rule about the Sabbath day was that the Israelites were to do no work. Read Matthew 12:5. Q: What group does Jesus cite who worked on the Sabbath day? A: The priests who worked to offer the sacrifices. His point is that the command about not working had some exceptions that must be recognized. Q: What method does He use to establish His point? A: He gives an example.
12. Read 1 Corinthians 4:17. Q: Why did Paul send Timothy to the church in Corinth? A: So he could remind them of Paul's way of life in Christ which agreed with what he taught in every church. So the Corinthians needed to know the approved practices of other churches so they could follow them. Read 1 Corinthians 14:33b. Q: When discussing how women should conduct themselves in the services of the church, what is one way Paul makes his point? A: To refer them to the practice of other churches. Paul, then, under divine guidance, indicates that one church is to take the practice of other churches who were under apostolic guidance, to be the model for what they do. We, likewise, should look to these early churches as such a model.
13. Let's establish a few guidelines for the use of examples.
- God has used examples as a way to teach us His will. He gave us the early church as a model from which to learn.
  - The example must be an approved practice. We certainly are not to follow the example of the Corinthians in dividing the church, a practice which Paul condemned. We can, however, also learn from negative examples what we should not do.
  - The example must be of something that was intended to be followed generally. The church in Jerusalem, for example, had all things common to meet a particular emergency. Other congregations, however, did not follow this practice. Thus, while this was a practice of the early church, it was not intended to be followed generally. Should an emergency similar to this one arise, we could do the same thing but are not bound to follow this example which was not intended to be the norm.
  - The example must be of something that has spiritual significance. Paul wore a cloak but that is not something we have to follow. It has no spiritual significance. The way Christians traveled, the style of houses they stayed in, or the food they ate has no spiritual significance. So we are not bound to follow their example in these things. Some Christians met in homes (Romans 16:5), while other meetings were in temple courts (Acts 2:46), in an upstairs room (Acts 20:8), in public places (Acts 20:20), and in a lecture hall (Acts 19:9). Clearly Christians met in a wide range of different places and so the particular place they met did not have any spiritual significance. The day on which Christians met, however, is a different matter. Acts 20:7 tells us of the typical practice of Christians—"On the first day of the week we came together." And 1 Corinthians 16:1 mentions that first day meetings were the norm. Since, then, meeting on the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection, appears to have had spiritual significance for the early Christians when they were under apostolic guidance, we make that same day our day to meet for worship.

14. Now let's look at some instances of things God choose to teach us by example rather than by command.
- a. Q: Is there a command regarding the day on which we are to meet for the Lord's Supper? A: No. Read Acts 20:7. Q: On what day did the early Christians take the Lord's Supper? A: First day of the week. Q: Do we have any cases of their taking it on any other day? A: No. So if we want to use the early church as our model, we will learn from their example to participate in this important event on the same day they did.
  - b. Q: Is there a command about how congregations of the church should be organized? A: No. Q: Do we have examples of how they were organized? A: Yes. The early churches had elders and Acts 14:23 says Paul appointed elders in each church and in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 Paul gave Titus and Timothy instructions for appointing elders in still other congregations. So a congregation could begin without elders but as soon thereafter as they had qualified men, they were to appoint elders. Q: What do these examples tell us about how many elders to have? A: They were always mentioned in the plural so in our model there was always more than one. Since elders with stated qualifications are the norm for churches under apostolic guidance, we should follow their example.
  - c. Q: Is there a command about what activities congregations are to engage in? A: No. Q: What do we learn by example that congregations did? A: They cared for the needy, they preached the gospel, they met for worship, they supported missionaries, they edified their members. Q: Is there a command about how they raised the funds to do this work? A: No. Q: Is there an example? A: Yes. Through free will offerings. 1 Corinthians 16:1 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

Application: (3 minutes)

1. We know God gave us the Scriptures to lead us in our efforts to serve Him. We have learned today that we are to obey God's commands that were given to us. We, then, should have a submissive spirit about the commands God has given. Let's look for the commandments and be willing to do them.
2. We know God has also chosen to reveal some elements of His will through the example process. Just as we look in Scripture for those commands God wants us to observe, we also look there for examples He wants us to follow.
3. Let's commit ourselves to using these methods of learning God's will for our lives.

Assignment: (2 minutes)

1. Be prepared for our weekly written review over this lesson. Use the worksheet to prepare for the quiz.
2. Study 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 to answer these two questions: (1) What commandments are there in this passage which we should obey? and (2) What do we learn from the example of the Corinthian church and Paul's comments to them that could help us in taking of the Lord's Supper?

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Written Review No. 7  
Author: Stafford North



1. The two principles for understanding the Bible studied in the last lesson were:
2. In Romans 7:1-4, Paul compares living under God's covenants to a \_\_\_\_\_ with two \_\_\_\_\_. The first one must \_\_\_\_\_ before she is free to \_\_\_\_\_ the second one.
3. What event marked the end of the first covenant, the one through Moses?
4. Name a benefit to us today from studying the Old Testament.
5. True or False. The four gospels are not part of the New Covenant because they describe events which happened before the death of Christ.
6. A source for finding other passages with which to compare a passage you are studying is:

1. The first question to ask is: Are there \_\_\_\_\_ in this passage God intended for me to \_\_\_\_\_?
2. Passages which indicate we are to obey are found in the following places:
  3. Since our covenant is in the books from the \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_, we look there for the commands we should obey.
  2. In Matthew 28: 18-20, Christ says His apostles are to teach others to \_\_\_\_\_ what He had \_\_\_\_\_ them.
  5. In Matthew 5: 14-16, we learn what command to obey?
  6. In 1 Thessalonians 4: 1-8, we learn that we are to obey what command?
  7. What happens if we do not obey this command?
  8. From Acts 2: 36-38, what command do we learn is for people of our day?
  9. From Romans 13: 1-7, what command do we learn is for people of our day?
  10. From Acts 4: 19 we learn that the command in Romans 13 means that we should:
  11. A summary of what we have learned about commands:
    - a. Christ and the apostles gave \_\_\_\_\_ commands to be \_\_\_\_\_.
    - b. When looking at a command, we must ask if God \_\_\_\_\_ it for us \_\_\_\_\_.
    - c. We must also ask if a command has been \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ by any other commands or teaching.
    - d. We must be willing to \_\_\_\_\_ commands from Scripture for \_\_\_\_\_.

12. God reveals His will to us by giving us \_\_\_\_\_ to follow. Some passages where this principle is taught are in the following places:
13. Here are some guidelines for the use of examples:
- God has used \_\_\_\_\_ as a way to teach His will. The early church is a \_\_\_\_\_ from which we are to learn.
  - The example must be of an \_\_\_\_\_. Of course we can also learn from a \_\_\_\_\_ case when something has been \_\_\_\_\_.
  - The example must be of something that was \_\_\_\_\_ to be followed \_\_\_\_\_.
  - The example must be of something that has \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Here are some cases of things we learn by example.
- From Acts 20:7 we learn by example on what day to take the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - From Acts 14:23 and other places we learn how congregations were to have \_\_\_\_\_.
  - From many scriptures we learn that congregations are to be engaged in what kind of activities:
- d. From 1 Corinthians 16:1 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 we learn that churches are to raise their money by \_\_\_\_\_ offerings.

STUDY 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-34 FOR THE NEXT CLASS PERIOD AND BE PREPARED TO ANSWER THESE TWO QUESTIONS: (1) WHAT COMMANDMENTS ARE THERE IN THIS PASSAGE WE SHOULD OBEY AND (2) WHT DO WE LEARN FROM THE EXAMPLE OF THE CORINTHIANS CURCH AND PAUL'S COMMENTS TO THEM THAT COULD HELP US IN TAKING THE LORD'S SUPPER.



Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 9  
Author: Stafford North



## Principles for Understanding Scripture (8)

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can explain "necessary inference."
2. The student can list the ten principles for understanding scripture.

#### Preparation:

1. Have ready to distribute Written Review No. 8.
2. Have ready to distribute Worksheet No. 9. (Fill in one for yourself.)
3. Have sufficient Bibles and pens.
4. Have access to a chalkboard or overhead projector.

### Lesson Plan for the Teacher

#### Introduction: (10 minutes)

1. Call the roll and plan contact with those who are absent.
2. Make necessary announcements.
3. Songs and prayer as desired.
4. Give answers to Written Review No. 8. 1—application. 2—commands. 3—a. commands, obeyed; b. for us; c. limited or modified; d. obey, us. 4—example. 5—a. teach, will; b. approved practice; c. intended, generally; d. spiritually significant. 6—what day to meet, have elders, what congregations do.
5. Discuss 1 Corinthians 11:23-34. (1) What commands are included that we should obey? Take the bread and the cup in memory of Jesus. (2) What do we learn about how to take the Lord's Supper? Make the supper a proclamation of Christ's death until He returns. Take the Supper in a worthy manner—suitable for the significance it holds. We should examine ourselves as we eat and drink. We should recognize the body of the Lord. Do not confuse this Supper with a regular meal.

#### Learning Experiences: (about 30 minutes)

(Note to teacher: If there are more examples given on a point that you think you will have time for, select in advance those you think will be best for your class and be sure those are used. If you have the option of more time, you can use them all and even explore some of the passages more thoroughly.)



1. We began last week studying about the tenth of our ten principles of understanding Scripture: application. Q: The first nine principles are primarily to help us do what? A: Understand the Scriptures as those did who first received them. Q: The tenth principle, application, is primarily, then, to do what? A: To help us understand how we should apply the passage to ourselves. Q: What two aspects of "application" did we study in the last class session? A: Commands and examples. So if the passage has a command that is for us in the Christian age, we should apply that to ourselves. If that passage has an example about something that shows a general practice of with spiritual significance from the early church, we should take that example as a model for ourselves.
2. Today we look at a third way we may make application of Scripture. Sometimes we use this method to learn (1) what a passage means, but it is also a method of (2) making an application to ourselves. That method is called "necessary inference." Q: What is an inference? A: It is a conclusion drawn by reasoning or implication. A common example of inference often used in logic classes is this. Q: If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, what is the necessary inference? A: Socrates is mortal. This conclusion is implied by the two statements. If they are correct, then the conclusion must follow. There is no exception. In daily life, we often use the method of inference. Sometimes it will be without exception and sometimes may have some exceptions. If, for example, I put on pants I have worn for some time and they are hard to button, I will conclude I am gaining weight. A little more formally, it might go like this. If my pants are getting tight, then my waist is getting larger. My pants are getting tight (and there seems to be no other explanation). So, I am gaining weight. Here is another common example. Q: If I come home and find my wife's car in the garage, what do I conclude? A: That my wife is home.
3. A "necessary" inference is one that is required by the information we have. If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates mortality is a necessary inference. Actually, an inference may be very strong, if the premises on which it is based are clear and allow no exception, or it may be very weak, if the information allows many exceptions. If I spend more every month than I make, for example, I can certainly conclude that I will be in financial trouble. We might state this more formally as: All who spend more than they make (unless they have other resources) will be in financial trouble. I am spending more than I make (and have no other resources). I will be in financial trouble.

Here is a little weaker inference. I am hiring a student worker from Oklahoma Christian University so I know she will do well. Based on past experience, the employer concludes: All students from Oklahoma Christian are good workers. This worker is a student from Oklahoma Christian. This student will be a good worker. While this is nearly always the case, there are a few exceptions. The point is that we draw inferences often. Doctors do it when they make a diagnosis; detectives do it when they seek to solve a case (Sherlock Holmes is a master of this); lawyers do it when they study the law for a case; firemen do it when they decide how to attack a fire; young people do it in choosing whom to date.

4. Now we look at this method in Bible study. Read John 3:2. Q: What inference has Nicodemus drawn? A: That Jesus is a teacher who has come from God. Q: What led him to this inference? A: The miracles Jesus did. So Nicodemus reasoned like this: One who has power to do miracles must be a teacher from God. Jesus has the power to do miracles. So, Jesus is a teacher from God. Q: Did God intend for people to make this inference from the miracles Jesus did? A: Yes. Q: Did God intend for us to use this method in understanding Scripture? A: Yes. Read John 20:31-31. Q: What does John ask us to do from what he wrote? A: Infer from Jesus' miracles that He is the Son of God.
5. Here's another Bible case. Read Matthew 22:29-31. We have looked at this verse before but it can help us here. Q: What inference does Jesus draw from Exodus 3:6? A: That there is life after death and therefore a resurrection from the dead. Q: How does He reach this conclusion? A: If God speaks of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as alive long after they died, then all are alive in some fashion after their deaths. Exodus 3:6 is not even about the resurrection or life after death. But Jesus can see in it an implication and He draws on



that. He infers that if God speaks of those who have died as still living, then there must be life after death. God does speak of these men as still living after they died. So there must be life after death.

6. Another case of inference in the Bible is one Jesus makes. Read Matthew 7:11. Q: What conclusion does Jesus draw? A: God will give good things to His children. Q: How does He reach this conclusion? A: If we, being lesser than God, are good to our children, how much more will God, who is greater than we are, will be good to His children. To understand this passage, we must understand something about the method of using inference.
7. Look at Luke 5:22-26. Q: What inference do the scribes and Pharisees draw when they hear Jesus say the paralytic's sins are forgiven? A: That He is making Himself equal with God. Q: Was that a valid conclusion? A: Yes. Q: What conclusion do they then make from their first inference? A: That Jesus is blaspheming. Q: Is this a correct conclusion? A: Yes, if He is not equal with God; no, if He is equal with God. Jesus says, "That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and then heals the man. From the miracle, He expects them to infer that He has divine power and thus has authority to forgive sins.
8. Look at Hebrews 7:7. Q: Who does the writer say is greater, Abraham or Melchizedek? A: Melchizedek. Q: On what does he base this conclusion? A: That the greater blesses the lesser. Since Melchizedek blessed Abraham, he infers, he must have been the greater.
9. Now that we have a feel for how inference works and how understanding it will help us in interpreting some Bible texts, let's turn to some passages where we should make applications by inference.
  - a. Q: Is there a passage that directly says we should no longer to keep the Sabbath Day? A: No. Q: So how have we come to that conclusion? A: Because of the Scriptures which say the Law of Moses has been taken away. See Colossians 2:14 where the "bond written in ordinances" has been taken away and that would include the ordinance of the Sabbath Day. Without drawing such an inference, we could not conclude that the Sabbath ordinance has been taken away. 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, likewise, calls the covenant engraved in letters on stone the one that is fading away.
  - b. Read 1 Timothy 3:2. Q: What may we infer from this passage about women serving as elders? A: That since a woman cannot be the husband of one wife, she would not qualify. The reasoning is like this: only husbands may serve as elders; a woman is not a husband; so a woman may not serve as an elder.
  - c. Read Acts 8:34-39. Let's see what necessary inferences may be made from this passage. Q: What does Philip preach to the Ethiopian? A: The good news about Jesus? Q: From what Philip says, what may we infer about the fulfillment of the passage in Isaiah? A: That Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy. Q: From the Ethiopian's question, what may we infer was included in preaching the good news about Jesus? A: Baptism. Q: What may we infer about the method of baptism from the description of the actions? A: Immersion.
  - d. Read Mark 16:16. Q: What is a necessary prerequisite to baptism? A: Belief. Q: What inference may we draw from this about infant baptism? A: Only believers may be properly baptized; babies are not believers; babies cannot be properly baptized.
  - e. Q: Since all accounts of New Testament conversions in the book of Acts tell that the person was baptized soon after he/she heard the message about Jesus, what inference should we make? A: That since all early preachers of the gospel taught baptism and that those responding were baptized immediately, we should do the same today.

- f. Read Galatians 3:27. Q: What is said to happen at baptism? A: We are baptized into Christ and so are clothed with him. Q: May we infer that those who have not been so baptized are not yet in Christ? A: Only those who are baptized into Christ are promised that they are in Him. Those not baptized are not included in this promise. Those not properly baptized are not in Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13 speaks of being baptized into one body.
10. We can, of course, draw incorrect inferences from Scripture. Here are two examples. Read Acts 13:14 and Acts 16:13. Q: May we conclude from these and similar verses that the Sabbath day was the standard time of meeting for the early Christians? A: No. Because these passages were not telling about the day for the Christian assembly but of the time when Paul and others were going to the meetings of Jews for their regular Sabbath assembly. For another example of poor inferences, read Acts 16:31. Q: Since only "belief" is mentioned here as what Paul said to do to be saved, may we infer that baptism is not necessary for salvation? A: That would not be a fair inference for the next verse tells of more Paul said to them. Also, such an inference would be inconsistent with many other passages about baptism.
11. Our first obligation, then, in studying Scripture is to ask what it meant to those who first received it (the first nine principles). Then we ask, "How should we apply this Scripture to ourselves?" Is there a command directed to us? Is there an example intended for us to follow? Is there an implication in the passage from which we should draw a conclusion?

#### Application:

1. Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-11. Q: In what letter had Paul written the Corinthians not to associate with the sexually immoral? A: An earlier letter which is not preserved. Q: What conclusion had the Corinthians drawn from this statement? A: That they were not to associate with the sexually immoral who were in the world as well as those in the church. Q: Was this Paul's intent? A: No. Q: How did Paul expect them to know this? A: Then they would have to leave the world. That is, since the interpretation you gave this passage is one that would have been impossible for Christian people to follow, you should have known that the inference you had drawn was incorrect. Q: What command does Paul now give to clarify the situation? A: Do not associate with the immoral who are brothers. Do not even eat with those in the church who are immoral, greedy, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards, or swindlers.
2. Q: Had the Corinthians followed this teaching even about associating with the immoral persons in the church? A: No. 1 Corinthians 5:1.
3. Q: Is this a command for us? A: Yes.

#### Assignment:

1. Use the worksheet to prepare for the written review next week.
2. For next class meeting, study Acts 20:6-12. Make a list of anything we can learn by way of command, example, or inference. Not all of these may be present.

1. The tenth principle of interpretation we have studied is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. One question we ask is whether there are \_\_\_\_\_ we are to obey.
3. Four principles about commands are:
  - a. Christ and the apostles gave Christians \_\_\_\_\_ to be \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. When looking at a command, we must ask if God intended it \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. We must also ask if a command has been \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ by other commands or teaching.
  - d. We must be willing to \_\_\_\_\_ commands from Scripture for \_\_\_\_\_.
4. A second question to ask as we seek to apply a passage to us is whether there is an \_\_\_\_\_ for us to follow.
5. Guidelines for the use of examples are:
  - a. God has used examples as a way to \_\_\_\_\_ us His \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. The example must be an \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. The example must be something that was \_\_\_\_\_ to be followed \_\_\_\_\_.
  - d. The example must be something of \_\_\_\_\_.
6. One thing we can learn from Scripture by example is:

1. The tenth principle for understanding Scripture is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The first nine principles are primarily for helping us to understand Scripture as those did who \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The first two ways we apply Scripture are through studying \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The third way we study application is by looking at \_\_\_\_\_.
5. An inference is a conclusion drawn by \_\_\_\_\_.
6. A "necessary" inference is \_\_\_\_\_ by the information available.
7. In John 3:2, what inference has Nicodemus drawn?

What led him to make this inference?

8. What inference does Jesus draw from Exodus 3:6 as recorded in Matthew 22:29-31?

From what did He draw this inference?

9. Here are some examples of inferences we may draw from Scripture. Fill in the blanks about these.
  - a. We infer that we should not keep the Sabbath Day because the "bond written in ordinances" has been \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. We infer that women should not be elders because 1 Timothy 3:2 says they should be \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. We infer from Acts 8:34-39 that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - d. We infer from Mark 16:16 that that \_\_\_\_\_ should precede baptism. If this is true, then we infer that \_\_\_\_\_ could not be baptized properly since they cannot believe.
  - e. Since all accounts of conversions in Acts tell that the person was baptized soon after hearing the message, we infer that people today who hear the message will \_\_\_\_\_.

f. Since Galatians 3:27 says we are “baptized into Christ,” it would follow that those who have not been baptized are \_\_\_\_\_.

10. Two samples of incorrect inference from Scripture would be:

a. That the \_\_\_\_\_ Day was the time for Christian meeting.

b. That one is saved as soon as he/she \_\_\_\_\_.

STUDY ACTS 20:6-12 FOR THE NEXT CLASS MEETING. MAKE A LIST OF ANYTHING WE CAN LEARN BY WAY OF COMMAND, EXAMPLE, AND INFERENCE. NOT ALL OF THESE MAY BE PRESENT IN THE PASSAGE.

ALSO TRY TO MEMORIZE THE 10 PRINCIPLES FOR NEXT CLASS PERIOD.

Conditions  
Genre  
Context  
Speaker/Audience  
Words  
Syntax  
Figures  
Theology  
Other Passages  
Application

Will the first letters help? CGCSW SFTOA



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Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Lesson 10  
Author: Stafford North



## Principles for Understanding Scripture (9)

### Background Information for the Teacher

#### Objectives:

1. The student can list the ten principles for understanding scripture.
2. The student can use the ten principles for understanding selected passages.

#### Preparation:

1. Have ready to distribute Written Review No. 9.
2. Have ready to distribute Worksheet No. 10. (Fill in one for yourself.)
3. Have sufficient Bibles and pens.
4. Have access to a chalkboard or overhead projector.

### Lesson Plan for the Teacher

#### Introduction: (15 minutes)

1. Call the roll and plan contact with those who are absent.
2. Make necessary announcements.
3. Songs and prayer as desired.
4. Give answers to Written Review No. 9. 1—Read the list of ten principles so students can check to see how many they got. 2—reasoning. 3—Sabbath Day, not women elders, baptism by immersion, belief should precede baptism, infants cannot be baptized since they cannot believe, since baptism is “into Christ,” those not baptized have no promise of being “in Christ.”
5. Discuss Acts 20:6-12. No commands in the passage but they were following the command Jesus gave to take the Lord’s Supper. Example--Meet on the first day of the week. Meet to take the Lord’s Supper. Hear from the inspired word when they meet. Inference—they met each Lord’s Day. If Paul waited 7 days so he could meet with the brethren to have the Supper with them, they must have met each first day. The use of the expression “first day” suggests which day of a period and the term “week” indicates what period. Had they met the first Sunday of the month, the wording would have been “on the first Sunday of the month.” Exactly the same expression occurs in 1 Corinthians 16:1 about the contribution which all take to be weekly.

#### Learning Experiences: (about 25 minutes)



For more information contact the Church Relations Office at 405.425.5141 or email at [churchrelations@oc.edu](mailto:churchrelations@oc.edu)

(Note to teacher: As a way to practice the ten principles, study Acts 2:1-13. You can do this in several ways. The approach should be to ask what each of the ten principles can contribute to understanding this passage. (1) You may assign in advance each of the principles to someone to report to the class about. (2) You may divide the class into ten groups of two or three (depending on size of the class) and ask each to work on one principle for a few minutes and then report to the class. Other groupings may work better for you: five groups with each having two principles, two groups with each group getting half the principles, or some other plan. Since "conditions" has several sub-headings, it could be assigned to among more than one person or group. If you use the group approach, you can have some study tools available in the room for the groups to use—concordance, Bible dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias, reference Bibles, topical Bible, computer with software up, commentaries, etc. (3) Or, you may wish to use the question/answer method of the previous lessons in which you lead the study and let the entire class participate and suggest ways each principle could help with the study.

The material that follows shows how each of the ten principles can yield something to the study of these verses, and, thus, will provide helpful information for whichever method you choose. If, for example, the report of some group does not mention something shown below under one of the headings, you could add that following their report. Since some of the ten principles have a greater value in the interpretation of this passage than others, you may wish to select only the ones with stronger value here to pursue for reports and discussion. Be sure to involve students as much as possible in the learning process. Expect some overlap from the use of the various principles. Show this to be a good thing, not a bad one.

A worksheet is provided to give students a place to write down something learned from each principle as you, and the class, talk about it, or as there are reports from individuals and/or groups.)

#### 1. Conditions—

- a. Situation—The apostles have been waiting in Jerusalem as Christ had told them (Acts 1:4-5). The Day of Pentecost was a Jewish feast day fifty days after the Passover. It always fell on Sunday. On this feast day of the Jews, the city would have been filled with many Jews from all over the world because male Jews were supposed to attend the feast.
- b. History—The Feast of Pentecost, instituted in Leviticus 23:16, was also called the Feast of Weeks because it was seven weeks after Passover. It was to celebrate the beginning of the harvest. Special offerings were given. This date was probably April 6, 30 AD, based on what we know of when Pentecost would have fallen in that year.
- c. Geography—The story takes place in Jerusalem where the apostles have stayed after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection in that same place.
- d. Archaeology—We cannot know for certain where the events described in Acts 2 take place. The apostles may have started in a home and have moved to the temple courts or the entire event may have been in the courts. In verse 2, a word is usually translated "house," but it does not necessarily mean the home of an individual. It can mean "building." (Lapping over into Word Study.) Since a large number of people gather, it is a fair assumption that by the time they were speaking in tongues, they were in the temple courts. If that is the case, archaeology has revealed several important things about the temple and its courts. Herod had built a magnificent complex with the temple building surrounded on all sides by porticos. These "porches" would have afforded plenty of space for a large crowd. Archaeologists have determined where the temple stood and the outline of the area of the courtyards. They have also discovered 48 ritual baths at the south end of the temple area where Jewish people could perform their rite of purification before they came on the temple grounds. While we have no way of knowing for sure, this is the likely place for baptism of the 3,000 who responded to Peter's call.



- e. Culture—The Jewish customs of that feast day and of their culture generally would have prevailed. The people would have been off work because no work was to be done that day. They would have been gathering in the area of the temple for the sacrificial events. Peter, in his sermon, makes reference to its being 9 a.m., third hour of the day as they counted time, and, according to their culture, no one would be drinking early in the morning.

## 2. Genre—

- a. The book of Acts is primarily narrative, although sermons are sprinkled through it. The passage being studied is the account of an event on Pentecost. It is an inspired account of a very important event. It gives a number of important details such as the nationalities of those present and something of what was said. It even reports on the reactions of people to various events. Since there is little use of any figurative language, and since the passage speaks of people by name, of a specific feast day of the Jews, and of actual events taking place, there is no reason to take this as anything other than a historical account of a real event.
- b. This event is the fulfillment of a prophecy given in the previous chapter where Jesus says, “in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). It is important to link this prophecy with the events of Acts 2.
- c. The passage is a narrative which has no commands given to the people of that time or to use today, but it is very useful in our understanding that the apostles were given the baptism of the Holy Spirit that allowed them to speak in tongues.

3. Context—Acts 2:1-13 comes at the first of chapter 2. Chapter 1 told how the apostles and others gathered in Jerusalem. They chose Matthias to replace Judas, indicating they were expecting to move forward to carry out the commission the Lord had given. Because of what Jesus said in Acts 1:4-5, 7-8, they were in a mode of anticipation. The first 13 verses of chapter two are the first segment of that chapter. Following that segment is Peter’s sermon and the results from it. This portion of the chapter tells about the occasion of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which Jesus had promised to the apostles. Following their receiving the Holy Spirit, they were empowered to speak in tongues and were guided by Him in what they said. A study of these verses must be within the context of the time of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the utterances made possible by that gift.

Another question with which context helps is in the nature of the tongue-speaking. Some look at the words “each of us hears them in his own native language” and conclude that the miracle was one of hearing. Thus, they say, the apostles spoke in their own language and a translation occurred in the air (UN like) and then people heard the message in their native language. Prior to that, however, the context says, they “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” This statement makes it very clear that the miracle was in the speaking not in the hearing and the statement about hearing must be taken in harmony with the earlier statement. Thus, the apostles actually spoke in the other languages and people who knew that language heard them.

4. Speaker/Audience. The writer of the passage is Luke. He writes Acts as a follow-up to his gospel of the life of Christ, the book of Luke. His audience is Theophilus, a man who seems to be a well-placed individual, but we don’t know more about him. Theophilus seems not to be a Jew, and so Luke writes in a style that takes into account that the receiver would not know all about Jewish customs and laws. There also is a speaker/audience situation in the narrative. The apostles speak in tongues to those assembled. The assembled group were all Jews by religion who had come for the described feast from a wide variety of nations. They all knew the language of their home countries, which were quite diverse, and they would, for the most part at least, have known the Jewish tongue of that time—probably Aramaic. It is useful to note that although fifteen different places are mentioned, some of these spoke the

same language so that the actual number of different languages spoken was actually only six: Persian, Syriac, Greek, Coptic, Latin, and Arabic.

5. **Words.** Several words are due close study. "House." This word may mean a person's home or it may mean a public building. When Jesus, for example, spoke of the "house of God" which He was cleansing, He used this word (Matthew 21:13). "Speak in other tongues." The word tongue, of course, literally means the part of the body used to shape sound into recognizable words. It is used here in the common usage of "language," much as we speak of a "mother tongue" to mean one's original language. For a person to speak in "other tongues," then, means to speak in languages beyond the languages one has learned growing up or by study. The context supports this definition of "tongues." "Galileans." All of the apostles were men whom Jesus had met and called when He was in Galilee. The expression here means that those speaking in tongues were all from the province of Galilee, the northernmost of the three provinces of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. Those from this area were thought of as the "rural" people and usually not as well educated as those from Judea. Thus, the people say, these men are all Galileans meaning they would not expect them to be able to speak in this wide range of languages.
6. **Syntax.** An interesting question arises as to the antecedent of the word "they" in verse 1. Does "they" mean the entire one hundred twenty of 1:15 or just the apostles? The general rule for finding antecedents is to look for the closest preceding noun. In this case it is "apostles" in 1:26. This would mean "the apostles" only were endowed by the Holy Spirit. This would also seem to fit with the fact that the apostles had special powers to bestow the Holy Spirit on others (Acts 8:17-18; Acts 19:6; Romans 1:11. Also, it was only to the apostles that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised (Acts 1:2-5; John 14:16).
7. **Figures.** As discussed under the heading of "words," the term "tongue" is used here in a figurative sense. It is a metonymy—one word in place of another. Here the "tongue" as an instrument of creating various sounds is put for the language it creates. So "tongue" means "language." We speak of the "mother tongue" or "my native tongue." These mean, of course, the language we learned growing up. Understanding the meaning of tongues here is very important because this is the only passage in the Scriptures which actually describes an event where tongue speaking took place. Other passages say it happened but this is the only description of what happens when people "speak in other tongues." The text says they "began to speak in other tongues." So the miracle was one of speaking in real languages they had not learned.
8. **Theology.** This event needs to be put in the larger picture of the story of the Bible. James Bales wrote a book about Acts 2 entitled The Hub of the Bible because all before that time points to this event and all after it points back to it. Jesus had promised the apostles the Holy Spirit would come to guide and comfort them after He left (John 14:16; 16:13). He had commissioned them to take the message about salvation through Christ to all the world (Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:18-20). But he had told them not to start on this mission until they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5, 7-8). Peter, in his sermon, even points to the events of that day as being the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17-21). Some ten years later, Peter referred to this day when the Holy Spirit came on them as "the beginning" (Acts 11:15-16). The events of Acts 2:1-13, then, mark the beginning of the new era. Prior to this, God's plan was to use the Jewish nation as a people through whom to bring a Messiah and through whom to teach the world about Him and about sin and about the need for salvation. Now the moment has come to move to a new stage. The Messiah has come, has died for the sins of the world, and now Christ sends the Holy Spirit upon the apostles (Acts 2:33) to allow them to begin carrying out the mission He gave them. Now the message of salvation through Jesus Christ can be proclaimed by inspired men empowered to deliver the message. In the later sections of this chapter, the proclamation of that message begins.
9. **Other Passages.** In the preceding discussions, many other passages have been mentioned. And this demonstrates an important point. There will always be some overlap between our ten principles as we study. Some other key passages that have been mentioned are Acts 11:15-16;

Joel 2:28-32; Acts 1:4-5; 7-8. Other related passages would deal with tongue-speaking at other times: Acts 10:46; Acts 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians 14. Even though these occasions of tongue-speaking took place in other locations, Caesarea, Ephesus and Corinth, it was the same type of event—people speaking in real languages they had never studied. That is what happened in Jerusalem, and there is no reason to believe that tongue-speaking was different in different places. Other passages could also involve those dealing with the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit such as John 14:16 and John 16:13. Since Peter links this event with the coming of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius, a study of Acts 10:44-48 and 11:15-16 could be helpful. In 1 Peter 1:1, Peter addresses Christians scattered throughout many regions, some of which are listed in Acts 2:9-10—Pontus, Cappadocia, and Asia.

10. Application. What application can we make of this passage? There are no commands in the passage for us. The example of these men, however, is that they indeed followed the command of Christ and stayed in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit baptism. Notice there is never a command for us to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Only two occasions in the New Testament are called “Holy Spirit baptism” and these are in Acts 2 and Acts 10 (explained in Acts 11:15-16). So we should not expect, as some do today, a baptism of the Holy Spirit. (We can have the indwelling mentioned in Acts 2:38, however.) We also see in this passage another instance of inference. When the people of many nations heard the apostles speaking in the language of their own home country and knew they had not learned the language, they were amazed and wanted to know what this meant. This miracle opened an opportunity for preaching just as Jesus’ miracles opened opportunities for His, as with Nicodemus (John 3:2). We also learn that there will always be skeptics such as those who said they were drunk. The apostles did not escape critics, Jesus didn’t, and we won’t either. We may also learn from this event that Jesus keeps His promises. He had told them to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit and within ten days, He sent the Spirit to them.

#### Application: (3 minutes)

1. The day of Pentecost marks the beginning of the Christian era, the first gospel sermon. Q: When did God start planning for this event? A: Before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Q: What was God’s first statement to human beings about this plan? A: To Adam and Eve and the serpent in Genesis 3:15 where He speaks of the offspring of woman bruising the head of the serpent. Q: How long did God take to work out this plan to the point that it could begin to be preached? A: We don’t know but it was certainly several thousands of years. God sometimes takes a long time to “work His gracious will,” but He will do all He promises.
2. If the plan of God was worth such a special effort from God, we should certainly study it and respond to it.

#### Assignment: (2 minutes)

1. For next class period, again be prepared to write out from memory the ten principles.
2. For class next time, be prepared to discuss how some of the principles can help us as we study Acts 17:22-34. Read all of Acts 17.

Series: Understanding Scripture  
Lesson: Written Review No. 9  
Author: Stafford North



1. Write as many of the ten principles for understanding Scripture as you can remember.

2. An inference is a conclusion drawn through \_\_\_\_\_.

3. An example of some conclusion from Scripture drawn through inference is:

Below are listed the ten principles we have studied. Note beside each of them something in class that is suggested as useful in studying Acts 2:1-13.

1. Conditions
  - a. Situation
  - b. History
  - c. Geography
  - d. Archaeology
  - e. Culture
2. Genre
3. Context
4. Speaker/Audience
5. Words

6. Syntax

7. Figures

8. Theology

9. Other Passages

10. Applications

FOR THE NEXT CLASS SESSION, STUDY ACTS 17:22-34. LOOK UP INFORMATION ON SOME OF THE TEN PRINCIPLES SO YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE CLASS DISCUSSION. READ ALL OF ACTS 17.