

“Introduction and Narrative”

How to Study the Bible

Various Scriptures

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Don Maurer: Jeff?

Jeff: Yes?

Don: This is “How to Study the Bible,” right?

Jeff: Yes.

Don: Isn’t that a song from “Camelot?”

Ted Wood: Okay. What is that?

Don: Oh, that’s “How to Handle a Woman.” Sorry. *(Groans and laughter)*

Jeff: Oh, that’s rough, that’s rough!

Ted: *(singing):* How to handle the Bible. *(Laughter)*

Don Maurer: That’s right; that was good, Ted. Yea! All right; okay.

Jeff: I think you better play. *(Laughter) (Music)*

Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank You; we certainly praise You. We bow before You this morning and thank You that You are God and there is no other, that You’ve revealed Yourself in the way that You have. And Father, we’re thankful that Your Son who dwelt in Your bosom from all eternity, came to us to exegete You to us to a watching world. And Father, we’re thankful that He made known the way of salvation, and that it is in Himself. And we just pause before you to acknowledge the greatness of Your work on our behalf, and ask that You will deepen our understanding of it. And we’re also thankful for Your word—that You revealed it, that You inscripturated it. And You gave it to Your people for their sure comfort and Lord, for the preservation of the truth.

Father, we ask now that You’ll bless us and strengthen us by grace. We pray that Your hand would be upon us for good. And Father, we certainly give You thanks for the report we heard about Gregg and Karen and pray for their continued recovery and health.

Lord, we also pray for Ted and Sig as they will say a few words tomorrow about our departed brother. And we’re thankful for his life and for their willingness to speak about him publicly. And Father, we just pray that You’ll bless them and give them emotional resolve and the ability to speak before the people about one they loved. And Lord, as we remember Dick even now we’re thankful for his life.

Father, we pray for Daniel and his family in their loss. And we pray that You would continue to comfort them and be with them. Father, we ask now that You’ll be with us as we study Your word, and ask that Your hand would be upon us for good, and that Your Spirit would be among us leading us. And we ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Well, this morning we are going to look at how to study the Bible. I’ll tell you a little bit of background about this study. Not too long ago I mentioned to my congregation that I was going to have a study on how to study the Bible. And I was going to talk to some of the youth in the congregation in particular. And it struck me how many adults came out for the Bible study.

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And it was interesting to me because after a lesson or two the youth were hanging in there. And this is funny; the adults came up and said to me, “This is not a study for young people,” as if to say to me, “This is way beyond them.” And the youth were saying to me, “Oh yeah; we get this.” And I think they did get it; they were tracking with it.

So anyway I decided to foist it upon you, (*laughter*), and to see how you hang in there. And so I do think that a study like this is important.

And I’ll tell you why I think it’s important. It’s because when we think about a variety of different things—when we think about, for instance, the Protestant position on the Scriptures,—we think about private interpretation. We think about how we have the Bible in our hands, and we are to read it and understand it and study it.

But when you migrate into more Reformed circles, what you find is that there’s an emphasis on the nature of the Bible—that it’s infallible; it’s an inerrant book, and so it’s authoritative, and all those things; we’ll talk about those things. But when you think about those kinds of things, one of the things that you realize is that if you kind of step back and take a look around, you realize that the Reformed camp teaches a lot about the nature of Scripture, but not a lot about how to study the Bible itself.

It’s almost as if we say that this is a very important book, and this is why. Here you go; start reading it. And we don’t give a lot of thought or instruction in how to study it.

And in fact, when you look at the evangelical church in general, some of you are looking at me like you’re a little perplexed. But the reason for that is, you’re saying to me, at least in some of your faces (I see Ted looking at me), (*Laughter*), he’s frowning. And that’s because if you do go into the Christian bookstore one of the things that you can find quite a bit of are books on studying the Bible. And so the evangelical church has oftentimes been ahead of the game in terms of teaching how to study the Scriptures. And so you may or may not have experience with this. In fact, I’m kind of curious, Ted. Was your frown in agreement or disagreement, or where are you at? Not that you—

Ted: It’s just that I wince at the idea of private interpretation.

Jeff: Ah, yes; of course you do. (*Laughter*)

Ted: If it weren’t so, we wouldn’t have 20- to 30,000 denominations.

Jeff: Well, you know what Luther said to that when he was criticized for that. He said, “I’d rather have 20,000 different denominations rather than one church that’s wrong so often.” (*Laughter*) Anyway,—

Sig Tragard: Were there really 30,000 denominations?

Ted: 20- to 30,000.

Sig: I mean in Luther’s day.

Jeff: No. That was a joke. All right. So what I want us to do is look at this topic. And I want us to start by acknowledging that what we have here is a big book—66 books altogether. And one of the things that we need to take on board is the fact that this is a big book. And oftentimes when you’re honest about it—and people are honest about it,—they look at this particular book and they don’t know where to begin. They oftentimes read it as if it were a novel. You open it up and you begin reading through it. And by the time you get to Numbers you’re so tired of Numbers that you end up being exasperated and stop reading it. Or if you persevere through the first five books and then eventually get into the history then you’re a little excited about what’s happening. But then oftentimes

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people run into the Prophets and they’re not so excited anymore. So oftentimes there’s a bit of—

Sig: Go ahead. My battery died.

Jeff: Oh, okay. (*Laughter*) There’s a bit of wear and wane to this whole idea of reading the Scriptures. But oftentimes people will say to me once they get into the Old Testament, “I don’t know where to begin, because it doesn’t seem to be going in any chronological direction.”

And they’re right; it doesn’t seem to be going in a chronological direction. So what do you have? You have chronological study Bibles that try and give you the chronological flow of the story. So we need to begin by acknowledging—and I don’t think this is a hard acknowledgment—we need to begin by acknowledging that this is a big book.

Calvin and Hobbes. I don’t know if you can read this or not; I’ll read it to you. Calvin’s mom says, “Here, Calvin. You got a letter in the mail.”

“I did?” he says. “Gosh, I never get mail. I wonder who sent this. There’s no return address. In its place there’s a crude human skull of xs for eyes, and its tongue hanging out. Maybe it’s the IRS.” (*Laughter*)

So what is Calvin doing at this point? What’s Calvin doing? Well Calvin at this point is asking a basic question. He’s asking the question that we all ask when we look at the mail or when we look at the books of Scripture. He’s asking what kind of letter is it? What kind of document is it? What kind of letter was Calvin looking at? What kind of book are we looking at when we open up to Genesis? What kind of book are we looking at when we open up to the Prophets? Are you okay?

Ted: No; I just sneezed.

Jeff: Okay.

Ted: I don’t do it very well.

Jeff: I know. (*Laughter*) You came forward though, and I was concerned about that.

Ted: I’m just supporting the work.

Jeff: Okay. So if you were to look at that stack of mail for a minute, my guess is that you would be able to identify different types of mail without even knowing what those kinds of mail were. For instance, you could look at some of that mail—for instance, the very top letter with the yellow on the inside that was trimmed with the red. And you’d look at that, and if you’re like me you would say, “That’s junk mail.”

You could identify the junk mail. You could also identify cards. You could identify cards that are birthday cards, Christmas cards, those kinds of things. You could identify bills easily. When you go down to the mailbox you don’t even have to think about it. You know what you’re holding in your hand; you know what is what. And what you’re doing when you do that is that you are basically looking at what we call genres.

A genre is a kind of literature. It’s the sort of thing that you determine, for instance, every time you’re at a mailbox. You hold your mail in your hand, and you see that you’ve got a magazine there. I’ve got a bill there. I’ve got junk mail there; you go on. You know it immediately.

And the point is that when you hold the Bible in your hand, not everyone automatically knows what it is they’re holding in their hands. They think they’re holding

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one big book in their hands that they can read from beginning to end. And then they start, and they realize that that’s not the way it is.

But we can do this not just with mail, but I want you to think about your favorite books.

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff shows different books on the screen.

Jeff: What kind of genre is that?

Sig: A murder mystery.

Jeff: Yeah, a mystery. What about that? What kind of genre?

Ted: A murder mystery. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: A murder mystery, absolutely. *(Laughter)* Anybody else? C’mon, just by the book company?

Brave Man: A fantasy.

Jeff: Yeah, fantasy. *Sword and Sorcery.* How about that?

Sig and Ted: A Western.

Jeff: You better believe it! *(Laughter)* It’s a Western! *Hondo.* Who can forget that? I put that there because you get both John Wayne and Louis L’Amour.

Anyway, now each of those genres describes a way of reading, right? You’re not going to pick up a fantasy novel and read it the way you would read a Western. You’re going to have different expectations. Or you’re not going to pick up a Harry Potter book and read it the same way you would pick up a John Grisham book. For instance you’re not going to expect somebody to pull out a wand and cast a spell in a John Grisham book the way you would in a Harry Potter book. There are different expectations about the genre.

And that’s just basic, and I think we take that for granted. For instance, when you think about rules of the game, that’s another way to think about this. That basketball player is obviously not doing something right. According to the rules of the game we know, just by looking at him, as we see him on a basketball court in a basketball uniform, as soon as we see him kick the ball we say to ourselves, “Wait a minute; something’s wrong here. He’s not playing according to the rules of the game.”

So again, what are we doing? We’re working with a genre of a game. The rules of the game for that particular game require that guy not to touch the ball with his feet. We all know this particular game, and we’re all going to judge by the rules whether that guy is out of bounds when he releases the ball. You know, it’s that sort of thing that we’re engaged in. There are rules to interpreting the game, just like there are certain rules to reading literature, whether it’s Western and so on.

And the Bible has rules; it has genres and it has rules. And when we read it we’re supposed to be playing by the rules. And in fact we try and play by the rules when we read the Bible because that’s what the Bible expects of us.

Let me give you an example of how we oftentimes don’t play by the rules when we come to the Scriptures. For instance, we’ll take a prophet, okay? And we’ll lift something out of the Prophets. Or better yet we’ll lift something out of one of the historical books. And we’ll take whatever it is—a prayer or a promise to that particular king or that particular group of people—and we’ll lift that out and we’ll say, “This belongs to me,” when in fact it may not belong to you at all. It may belong to a particular group of people back then. It may belong to an individual back then. It may be spoken directly to a small

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group of people. But it certainly doesn't belong to you, except to inform you of what happened in the past.

For instance I want to give you an example of this. I'll never forget that I was over at a house one day, and there was a lady whose husband had dementia. Now she had this idea that the Bible was a talisman. And so she had Scriptures hanging up all over the house. And she would make her husband read these Bible verses. And she believed that in reading these Bible verses that he would retain his mind, or at least get some of it back, and so on.

And so while I was over there I asked her. I said, “Tell me why you believe in the practice that you're having your husband engage in.” And she opened up to that place where Jesus sent out the seventy-two all over Judea and gave them power to heal, and so on. And she said, “Right there is why I believe what I believe and why I'm doing what I'm doing.”

And I said to her, “Do you realize that is not to you? That is to the seventy-two that Jesus sent out. This is a story about the seventy-two. This is a story. This is not a didactic portion of Scripture that's instructing *you* what to do. It's telling you about what they, the seventy-two, did, and how that fits into the redemptive/historical situation.”

And she just looked at me like I had two heads. She couldn't believe that what I was saying was true. And yet that's oftentimes the way many people read the Bible. They open it up and they believe that's for me. That's a promise of God for me.

Now the whole book of the Bible is to us, and it's authoritative and all of that. But not every part of that book is to us in the way that we have a tendency to think it is, okay? And that's why we need to learn how to study the Scriptures.

For instance, remember *The Prayer of Jabez*? Everybody made a big deal about *The Prayer of Jabez*. Do you know what I'm saying? Somebody made a lot of money on *The Prayer of Jabez*. But the prayer of Jabez was in a historical book written to a very specific person and group of people. And oftentimes we just totally miss out on that. Somebody makes a lot of money on us because we so long to have a magic talisman like a prayer that we can pray, and get our land and get our wealth and get everything we want, and it will all be great. And that's not the way the Bible is meant to be read. And so many people are disappointed as a result of that kind of reading. Yes?

Jim Hamilton: Well, you can take these things out of context when you read them. And I'm not sure where you go to be sure to know what the context is.

Jeff: And that's my point. You do get it out of the context, right? But this is the thing about it. With the Bible it's easy to get it out of context. And this is a good assumption; this is a good place to begin. You immediately think to yourself that this is God's whole-book letter written to me.

And there is a sense in which that's very true. This is God's word written to me for my comfort and for the church's comfort. And as I am part of the church it's for my comfort, and so on. And it's written to preserve the truth.

And yet, you know, when we read about Jesus healing Jairus's daughter, a lot of people will take that as a promise that God will heal my daughter, right? You see, that's the point. Jesus will heal my daughter in the same way He healed Jairus's daughter.

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Well, if your daughter is in Christ she will be healed on the great and final day. And I don't want to take anything away from what God can do in the present moment; He certainly can heal. But that story is not a promise that He will heal your daughter in the same way that He healed Jairus's daughter, right? That's the idea. And so we need to be careful with that.

Ted: I love this because these are three great examples of private interpretation—the woman and her understanding of that Scripture, the Jabez prayer, and the healing of Jairus's daughter. There are whole denominations founded upon the Jairus's daughter story. That's why I balk against private interpretation.

Jeff: Yeah, but anything is private interpretation, right? I mean, even the magisterium's interpretation is a private interpretation of the Pope; it's just now codified for the whole church.

Ted: We'll talk about the Pope and what he has to say, and the magisterium. I'm just saying that the church has determined over time how to read these rules. These rules don't come out from somebody privately. We need people to agree with these rules.

Jeff: Well, I mean, people have agreed to language rules, right? Grammar is descriptive, right?

Ted: Yes, but it's a community thing rather than a private thing; that's what I'm trying to say.

Jeff: But there are ways of reading that are communal, right?

Ted: Oh, absolutely.

Jeff: Yeah. Oh, I see what you're saying. These are three examples of private interpretation.

Ted: Yes, and what makes them wrong? Maybe one of them is right with those things on the wall. And we would have to say no; this is not the way the Christian community has understood this through the centuries.

Jeff: I think that in the church in the main, the evangelical church, it is viewed as right. For instance there wouldn't have been so many sales of *The Prayer of Jabez*.

Ted: I agree. I don't want to get sidetracked on this.

Jeff: No, no.

Ted: I felt like you hurt me pretty bad initially, so I'm trying to get back into your good graces. (*Uproarious laughter*)

Jeff: I actually think this is really good because I think you're right. And I think it's highlighting the need for something like this. Go ahead.

Ted: You know, it's funny; this is a total sidebar. In my work for non-profits I work almost exclusively with women administrators. As with all non-profits who come to me, they are overly laid with women. Women would not have this exchange.

Jim: What do you mean by that?

Ted: I mean that we're torching each other. Women don't torch each other openly. (*Laughter*)

Jeff: Oh openly; yeah, right. (*Laughter*)

Ted: It's all under the surface. So they wouldn't say, “You're an idiot!” “No, you're an idiot!” (*Laughter*) Women are more cognitive. This is an absolute pleasure.

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Jeff: Just for the public record, Ted Wood is not an idiot. *(Laughter)* I highly esteem Ted Wood.

Sig: See, I didn't think you were torching him.

Jeff: I didn't think so either. But I just started to hear some very sensitive conversation. *(Laughter)* That's why I'm trying to—

Sig: Use your outside voices because our other mike isn't working.

Jeff: Go ahead.

Don Maurer: You see with Ted's point before about all the denominations, you see the denominational disagreement when you start interpreting Scripture the way that you said. For example, how many times have you heard about the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Ted: Right.

Don: And with Pentecostal denominations, well, it happened that way in Acts 2 and 3. So that's normative for the rest of the church.

Jeff: Right.

Ted: Amen.

Jeff: And you know, Don, what you raise, that's an even bigger issue. How do you fit the book of Acts into the experience of the church? And again, that's—

Don: It's using didactic or doctrinal teaching with narratives; that can be very dangerous.

Jeff: Right.

Don: *“Judas went and hanged himself.” “Go and do likewise.” (Laughter)*

Jeff: Yeah. You know, we say those kinds of things. But that really raises the question. What is normative when it comes to a historical portion? What's normative and what's occasional, right? How do we understand that this particular narrative is a narrative that not only describes and is applied to the ancient church, but is also applied to us today, and in the same way, versus it being occasional and describing something that was particular in the ancient church, and so helps us to be informed about what happened in the past, rather than helping us to be informed about how to live in the present? There are questions like this that are really important. And they can't be taken for granted because it's like our brother Don just said. Too often we just find ourselves gravitating toward what we think to be right. And it may not actually be right when we think about how to interpret something.

Jim: I'm afraid you're going to move along without us understanding what the rules are. Are we going to discuss that?

Jeff: We've already talked about the rules. No; I'm just kidding. *(Laughter)* Yeah, go ahead.

Sig: The Scripture doesn't really lay out the rules like you are. Is that more of a tradition within the community? I mean, the apostles didn't go to the next generation of believers and say, “Okay, this is how you read the Old Testament.” They didn't even have the New Testament. I think what you're saying is important. But how did we come to that?

Jeff: I think that before we get to the rules we need to think about basic concepts. So for instance, let's ask this. You know, this is one of those things where I'm whetting your appetite, Sig. *(Laughter)*

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Sig: You did, you did!

Jeff: Are you salivating yet?

Sig: Yes!

Jeff: Yes! (*Laughter*) All right. So what we need to do as we approach the rules—and I think that there are rules!—what we need to do is, we need to basically ask this. What does an interpreter do? What are we doing when we engage in interpretation?

And the first thing that we need to do is realize that we have content in front of us. This book has a lot of content—66 books full of content. And there is a lot of stuff packed into this book.

I want you to think about it like this. That’s not content in the Bible.

Transcriber’s Note: A picture of Lego instructions.

Don Maurer: (*Laughter*)

Ted: It works good.

Jeff: So there’s a biology book, Don. And there’s a theology book, a book on knowing God. And so all of those books have their own content, right? So the one tells how to put together a pile of Legos. The other one tells you how to understand God’s general revelation around you. And then another one talks to you about how to understand God—who He is and what He has done on our behalf—that kind of thing. Each of them has a different content.

And when you look at each one of them you would be surprised, for instance, if you found an appendix or even a chapter in J. I. Packer’s book with Lego instructions in it. (*Laughter*) You would think that this is a problem with the printer, and so on.

But the fact of the matter is, when we come to the Bible—66 different books—there are different genres in this book, and again that’s what I’ve been saying. So, for instance, you’re going to find historical narrative here. You’re going to find didactic portions—teaching portions—letters as it were, epistles. You’re going to find prophecies. You’re going to find apocalyptic writings. You’re going to find those kinds of different genres in this one book. And so in that sense it makes it a little different from a book we might pick up and read.

We typically pick up one book of one type of genre expecting that genre. But the Bible is not that. And so we have to realize that this is a book with a variety of different content in it. So that’s first. Oh, I forgot *Pilgrim’s Progress*! Who could forget *Pilgrim’s Progress*? (*Laughter*)

All right; so that’s first; we have content. The second thing is—Wow, those are nice shoes! (*Laughter*) Those are nice; my eye just caught them. (*Laughter*)

Mike Kulmoski: I took them off. (*Laughter*)

Jeff: Meaning is the second thing. So we’ve got content, but now we’ve got meaning. And what is meaning? To put it simply, the meaning is what the author intended to say.

Now I think that’s really important, because today we have what’s called “reader response.” And we’ve kind of migrated away from what the author intended to say. And literary critics are now engaging in what do I think this text says? Meaning is no longer in possession of the original author. It is no longer, as it were, his text. Meaning now resides in the reader, so it’s the reader’s response.

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And oftentimes, for instance, we would look at a document that’s being read that way. And we would be really offended that it’s read that way. For instance if some Jane Austin buff found some feminist reading Jane Austin and reinterpreting it with feminist tendencies, somebody who has a deeper appreciation for conservative values in Jane Austin might really be upset with that. And yet we need to face the fact that that’s often the way the church reads the Bible, as if it were a reader response.

So we don’t ask the question: What did the original author intend to say? We ask the question: What does this text mean to me? And that would be a way of doing exactly the thing that we might criticize liberals for doing in other contexts.

Ted: Sure.

Jeff: And we need to realize that that’s what we do. For instance I’ll tell you this. This is what happens oftentimes in the Reformed church. When we talk about the Constitution, one of the things that we talk about is going back to the original intent of the founders of the Constitution; what did they mean? And we know that in our present day the Constitution is reinterpreted in light of European law, or sometimes it’s disregarded altogether. When it is interpreted it’s reinterpreted in light of present values. And we get all up in arms.

But for instance, when you take *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, or any other Confession that’s 500 years old, oftentimes that Confession gets used. In other words it gets disconnected from the past. And it gets reinterpreted and so used by the church.

And that’s why today, for instance, John van Dixhorn is trying to get us back and to tie us back (with regard to the Westminster Confession anyway), to tie us back to the historical meaning of the Westminster Confession. So for us in the church that’s good. Why? Well, because at least we understand that this is what this original document meant by its original authors. Now we may have reason to disagree with that. I’ll give you a for instance. For instance the Westminster divines talked about what they called “*the laws of consanguinity*.” In other words, say my wife dies. Then I’m not allowed to marry her sister if she’s available. Why? Well, I wouldn’t be allowed to marry my own sister. And so the laws of familial proximity apply to my wife’s side as well. That’s the law of consanguinity. It was believed back in that time by the Reformers.

Not so much today, right? There are some who still believe that the laws of consanguinity ought to hold, but very, very, very few people. John Murray from Westminster Seminary back in its heyday believe that and wrote an article on that very topic. But my point is that today we would say, okay, that’s the original meaning, the original intent of that, but we don’t believe that today. Okay, that’s an example of something having an original meaning, and yet—That’s an easy one, really, of us not believing it today.

Ted: Just following up on that, the way that you find out about what the Founding Fathers meant in the Constitution, or in Westminster, or particularly what Thomas Cranmer was thinking about when he was writing *The Book of Common Prayer* and *The Articles of Religion*, you go back and you read other things that they were writing.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: So what did he mean by this word? Well, let’s see what else he said.

Jeff: Yeah.

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Ted: So I mean, that’s what you always have to do.

Ted: Always. Yes, Don?

Don Maurer: So I don’t want to get ahead of you. But for example, would that apply if you’re reading something in the Old Testament. Does that apply to us today? Well, not necessarily. Would that be that same kind of thinking, what you were talking about with the original intent?

Jeff: Yeah. When you think, for instance, about the Old Testament prophets, speaking maybe to Judah in the South or Israel in the North, his intent as he is a prophet of God is to speak to them, right? And if we read it and say, “What does that mean to me?”, then we’ve divorced it from its historical context. And having severed it from its historical context, we completely apply it to us.

Don: Yeah. I was thinking more in terms of, for example, the Old Testament dietary laws or something like that.

Jeff: Yeah. Well, those do apply to us, Don. No; I’m just kidding. *(Laughter)* See the look on his face!

Don: Okay. Or different kinds of fabric.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: Because you hear people today who say, “Well, how can you condemn homosexuality when the Bible says that if you have two different kinds of fabric, that’s an abomination?” That kind of goes to what you were talking about.

Jeff: Right; yes.

Ted: Or David’s relationship with Jonathan. I mean, it’s crazy!

Jeff: Yeah; that’s right.

Don Rimbey: This is the part where it gets difficult, right?, because you said that fancy word about marrying your sister.

Ted: Consanguinity.

Don: Yeah, that one. *(Laughter)*

Ted: Sanguine; that’s where we get “consanguinity.”

Don: We look at that like “Oh, that’s not important.” But then you have the dispensationalists, and that’s where all of this comes around. “Oh, you’re just picking and choosing.” So this isn’t quite as easy as we would think.

Jeff: Yeah. And I think this is where, for instance, one of the things that we need to do at the outset is to understand these basics. So regardless of whether you are a dispensationalist or a covenant theologian or a person sitting in the pew, what our objective is is to realize that there’s content. And this content has authorial intent or authorial meaning. And so we’re trying to get back to that meaning of the author.

Now that leaves us yet to talk about the rules as how to interpret that kind of literature, to get us back to the authorial intent. But it seems to me that one of the foundational building blocks of any study of the Bible is that authorial intent becomes super important. Go ahead.

Bryan Whittington: Do the dispensationalists believe in authorial intent?

Jeff: Well,--

Bryan: I haven’t seen anything.

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Jeff: Well, the question is, when you begin to put these building blocks in place, sometimes our rules will actually show themselves to be problematic. But until you put the building blocks in place, then the rules look like hey, this is great!, you know? I’m just applying the rules. But then when you ask yourself, “Well, wait a minute; what about these building blocks?”, sometimes the rules shatter on the blocks.

And that’s what I’m saying. Sometimes just putting the building blocks in place helps us to sort of cut or wade through some of the weeds to begin with. That’s not to say that there won’t be difficulties in the end, because there will. But as soon as we start applying and sort of building the building, we’ll realize that you know how it is. You can sort things out pretty quickly and easily in the beginning, and then you get to the real problems.

Bryan: Those might be the areas in which we allow grace.

Jeff: Well, we should allow grace in some of those areas. Yeah, right.

Sig: Even with your point there about what the author intended to say, how do we determine that? That could be complicated too, right?

Jeff: Well, what we have to do first is to agree on the fact that the author had an intent.

Sig: Okay.

Jeff: So for instance, if we don’t believe that the objective is to get back to the author’s intent, then you’ve cut the text off from history and you can make it say whatever you want.

Sig: Okay.

Jeff: Okay. So I think that’s self-explanatory. You know, think about it like this. If I left my wife Lego instructions and flowers, she would think I was quite a romantic. *(Laughter)* So when you think of meaning, think of intention; what did the author mean? So that’s first.

How about understanding? Understanding is a correct grasp of the author’s meaning. If I understand then I have a correct grasp of the author’s meaning. So I’ve got content, I’ve got meaning, and now I’ve got understanding. And understanding is a correct grasp.

Now as soon as we get into understanding, this is where I think things begin, and we start to realize how difficult this is. Let me give you a couple of illustrations.

There are implications when we begin to understand. So implications are inferences deduced from the text, which the author may or may not have intended. So for instance, remember Mikey? This is a picture of Mike Davis when he was young. *(Laughter)*

Transcriber’s Note: Mikey from the ‘70s cereal commercial.

Jeff: You know, Mike didn’t like anything, right? Mikey didn’t like anything. Then they pushed this bowl of Life cereal in front of him, and he likes it. “Mikey likes it!” Do you still like it, Mike? *(Laughter)* So my point is that the boys made an inference on the basis of evidence.

Now their inference—their conclusion on the basis of what evidence there was—was wrong. But our inferences may be right. They may be wrong, but they may be right as well.

I’ll give you an example of this: Ephesians 5:18.

Transcriber’s Note: Ephesians 5:18: NKJV. “*Do not be drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery.*”

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Jeff: It’s a principle that has to do with wine. But it involves later types of alcohol. For instance, if somebody came to me and said,--

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff talks like he is drunk.

Jeff: “I am intoxicated! But I am not breaking Ephesians 5:18 because I’ve got Jim Bean in me!” (*Laughter*) Right? And he says, “I’m not breakin’ it because Paul didn’t know about Jim Bean.” (*Laughter*) “You know, he was talkin’ about wine. So I’m not breaking the commandment.”

Well, in fact you are. You know, you can make an inference to say that Paul is not just talking about first-century wine. But he’s talking about malt whiskey and talking about drugs, and whatever other thing intoxicates a person.

And then there is *significance*. Significance is how the reader responds to the meaning of the text. Now we’re getting into how I respond. How do I respond to this text?

This is where it becomes appropriate, right? I’ve studied the content, the meaning; I understand it. I’ve made some inferences, and so on. And now I’m getting into the significance of it. And it’s at this point that I interpret it. And interpretation is simply the expression—the verbal expression or the written expression—of my understanding of the author’s meaning of the text.

My interpretation is not my meaning of the text—what the text means to me. The text does have significance to me. But the text has significance to me as I’ve been able to understand authorial intent. In other words, for instance, it’s significance to me may not necessarily be that this promise is for me. Its significance to me is that my God made this promise to His people at this point in time which led to my salvation, right? But that promise is a promise to those people in the past, which has implications for me by way of that promise coming to fruition, which led to the next, and so on. That’s the idea. So that’s interpretation.

And what’s the point of every interpretation? Sig was totally forecasting me on this. The goal of the process is Luke 24:27 and 44. And that is that all Scripture speaks of Christ, right? Why? Because Christ is pre-eminent in the Scriptures. He is the One who came to reveal the Godhead to us. He’s the One who came to accomplish our salvation; it’s in Him that we have life. And so He is pre-eminently full in the Scriptures. Does somebody have Luke 24:27 and 44? Do you have that?

Bryan: “*And beginning with Moses and all the prophets He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*” And verse 44: “*Then he said to them: ‘These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’*”

Jeff: Okay. So I think I’ll end there. Do you have any questions? Yes?

Ted: I was just thinking of the interpretation of a., b., c., d., e. Someone will say, “Oh, it’s just a matter of different interpretations.” But it’s a bigger issue than that, because it starts off with content, meaning, understanding, implication and significance. And then you get to interpretation.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: So it’s not just a matter of two people having different interpretations. You may have different content, a different meaning, a different understanding. I mean, this is just a more complex question.

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Jeff: Yeah; absolutely right. And so by the time you get to interpretation you're not even explaining what the text means to me, right? You've already learned what its significance is for you. What you're now explaining is the author's intent. Yes?

Don Maurer: Two things. #1, what you think about the Bible going in is going to affect your interpretation.

Jeff: That's right.

Don: If you believe that it's just a book written by some men, you're going to interpret it one way. Dispensationalists with their view, or covenant theologians with their view, are going to interpret it another way. So that's important.

And the second thing I would say is that I highly recommend a book by R. C. Sproul called *Knowing Scripture*. He's the exception; he is a Reformed man who talks about how to study the Bible. I think it's a very user-friendly book for anyone who wants to be introduced to that whole thing. It's written in a way that anybody can understand it.

Jeff: That's a terrible book! Just kidding. *(Laughter)* No, you're right; that's an excellent book. I'm glad you said that because I would recommend that you read that book if you want a book to read along with this over the next four weeks. If you're interested in something to supplement what we're doing here, that's a great book to read. I actually had my seminarians read that book. It's a lower-level book. But when you're trying to communicate things in a popular way, you can't beat it; it's a great book. And I don't mean lower-level in the sense that it's not valuable and it doesn't have academic value, or anything; it does. It's just put in a *Sproulesque* kind of way--a very popular expression of technical concepts, and so forth.

Jim: What's the name of that book again?

Don Maurer: *Knowing Scripture*.

Jeff: Yeah, *Knowing Scripture*.

Jim: By Sproul.

Jeff: Sproul, yeah. So grab that book if you'd like to read something. Let's pray and we'll close out.

Father, thank You for this day, for the time You've given us. Thank You for Your word which is Your inscripturated Word to us. Thank You that You both preserve Your truth in it and that You propagate Your truth through it. Thank You also that You use that book to comfort us, Your church. We ask that You'll bless and keep us. We pray that You'll give us minds to understand. And we ask, Lord, that You'll do this not only for our good, though we need it. We pray as well that You'll do it for Your own glory. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*