

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

How to Study the Bible

Various Scriptures

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Jeff: Our gracious God in heaven, we thank You and we bow before You knowing that You are the Ruler and Sovereign of the universe. Father, thank You for being the Creator of all things. And yet, Lord, thank You for redeeming. And as we bow before You in Jesus Christ we're mindful that we are fallen in the first Adam. And yet You sent Your Son, the second Adam, that we might have life and have it abundantly, even in the land of the living. And so Father, we rejoice in that and are thankful.

And as we bow before You this morning we pray that You will help us as we consider what it means to study Your word. Father, we pray that You'll open our eyes not only to the truth of the content of Your word, but we pray that You'll help us to come to embrace a method of study that would not only be fruitful for us but also edifying for others. And Father, we ask that You'll do this for Your glory.

We pray also for those about whom we heard today. We pray for Kevin, and we ask that You will minister to him greatly, especially in spirit. We pray, Father, for his physical well-being. And we commit him to you and ask that You will heal him if it be Your will. And yet, Lord, we know that all things are according to Your plan and purpose. And You call us to pray, and we do, and we pray for his healing. And yet we also know that You are in control—sovereign, knowing what is best in Your own wisdom, and will give what is good. And so we ask that You will give Kevin what is good and give what is good for him for the well-being of His family.

And Lord, we certainly give You thanks that Gregg is mending, that he's doing better. And we rejoice in that and pray that would continue. Father, we ask for our brother Bruce and are thankful for him. And we pray for his continued care. Lord, we ask that You would uphold his wife Becky as she must be under a great deal of stress, especially in these days. And Lord, we pray that You'll bless him, especially as he doesn't have the strength and the stamina, and as he seems to be in some ways winding down in his physical activity. We ask that You'll give him not only courage but contentment. And we pray that You'll give him that contentment which is grounded on the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, that's what we pray for all of us, that our eyes might be set steadfastly on the Lord. And we pray these things in Jesus' blessed name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. So we are continuing to think about how to study the Scriptures. And I think we have some grounding in what we've been doing so far. We at least have some vocabulary under our belts. We know where it is we're going and what our method is in terms of the words I put on the board here. Just for review we're after the content of the passage whatever that may happen to be, whether it's narrative, whether it's a parable within a narrative, whether it's a prophecy, whether it's a Psalm, whether it's a proverb, we're thinking content; what is the content?

Now it remains for us to actually get into the different content that's out there, for instance that which I've already mentioned. And once we get into that we'll realize that there are different ways of reading different types of genres, different types of material.

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

But for now we’re after the content. And then not just the content, not just what it is, but we’re after what it means. And not what I think it means, not what it means to me, but we’re after what it meant to the author. In other words, what did this Psalm of David mean to David? What did this letter of Paul mean to Paul?

And then we’re thinking about understanding. And that’s one that flows right out of what we think of when we think of content and meaning. After we understand the author’s meaning then we gain understanding. And then what are the implications of what it is that I’ve just learned?

And what’s the significance? The significance now rests within me. How is it significant to me? In other words, do I love it more? Do I love something more as a result of it? Do I do something differently than I did in the past because of it?—that sort of significance.

And then interpretation is how would I explain this? Being faithful to the author’s meaning, how would I explain this to others? How would I interpret this? How would I either write it down so that someone else could understand it, or how would I speak it so that someone could understand it?

And then what’s the goal of all of this? The goal of all of this is what Christ says. When we’re interpreting the Scriptures we’re trying to get ourselves to Christ—not in an artificial way, but in a way that’s really meaningful to the text.

Why do I say that? I say that because if you know anything about Charles Haddon Spurgeon you know that he was a great preacher, and he ought to be read. I love Charles Haddon Spurgeon. But one of the things that was said about Spurgeon was that he would get to Christ any way that he could with any text that was in front of him—sometimes not always legitimately so. In other words, he would find Christ in the text in ways that Christ might not be there. In other words, if you were studying the text and exegeting the text you might not get to Christ in the way that Spurgeon gets you to Christ. So what we want to do is, we want to be faithful to these kinds of things, and we’ll find ourselves getting to Christ.

Now I’m going to pause at this point and just say a word or two about this because this may be important to us. How is it for instance that if we start back here in the book of Genesis and go to the book of Revelation, how is it for instance that somebody in Genesis may get to Jesus? Well, let me give you a for instance in the book of Genesis itself. In Genesis chapter 3 we have the promise of the gospel. So go to Genesis chapter 3 for a minute. This is during the curse, and this is what God says to the serpent: He says:

*“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and her Offspring;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.”*

And I’ll stop there. Now that is what’s called the *proto-euangelion*—the first gospel proclamation. Now when we read, for instance, references to this text later in the Scriptures, one of the things that we can see pretty clearly is that we can see references to this text coming out in different places—sometimes places that we may not expect. But we see it. And when we see it we say, oh, that’s the first gospel. And in the New Testament when we read it we immediately apply it to the gospel.

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

But the question is, how would someone living in the time of Genesis, how would they have applied this first gospel proclamation? In other words, they don't yet have Jesus to see back through the Old Testament to find Him in this proclamation. So how would they have viewed it?

Well, I'll tell you how they would have viewed it because we have an instance of how they would have viewed it. And that instance comes soon after Genesis chapter 3. Now let me show you what I mean.

In Genesis chapter 4 what we find is, we find the story of Cain and Abel. And after that story we find Adam having descendants. Now when we look in chapter 5 we find this. In verse 28 we find Lamech. Now this isn't the bad Lamech we read about in chapter 4; this is another Lamech. We find that Lamech had lived 182 years and he fathered a son, and called his name Noah.

Now there's an interesting little explanatory note right here that gives us insight into the discussion we're having. This is why he named him Noah. *“Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work, and from the painful toil of our hands.”*

Now Noah means “rest.” And so here is this man who understands that the ground is under a curse, and so too is man. And perhaps this son is the son who will provide them with the rest promised in the One who would come and crush the head of the serpent, even though the serpent would bruise His heel.

So what do we know about how somebody in Genesis would receive the first gospel? Well, you tell me. How might we look at Lamech and say, “This is what he understood by the first gospel proclamation?” What are some very simple things that we might conclude from this?

David Miller: People from that time may have seen in the birth of their child a possible fulfillment of the promise.

Jeff: Yeah. They would have understood Genesis 3 to be a prophecy. And here is a possible fulfillment of that prophecy. Very good; what else? I'm going very simple on this and saying this. Here's a guy that thinks that a man, a person, will fulfill this prophecy. In other words, the Representative who will come is going to be a Person.

And what else? Well, here's a guy that understands that someone is going to in some way deal with the curse, and so give rest, right? So here are some very basic things that you begin to see emerging as you stumble on chapter 5. These people actually believed in a personal Messiah—that someone, some man would come and redeem.

So when you think about how it is that for instance they would have viewed the gospel, that's how they would have viewed it. Now we would go back and say that this Man is Jesus.

Now I'll give you a for instance in how you might see this through the lens of Christ. Let's go all the way up to Luke's Gospel. Now in Luke's Gospel you find something interesting.

Before we get to Luke's Gospel let me show you this. What do you find when you look at these first chapters in Genesis? First of all you find this. I want to start with Adam and the Fall. And then I want to look at genealogy, and then I want to look at the Flood and Noah.

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

Now what do we find here? We find Genesis 3, we find Genesis 4 and 5, and we find Genesis 6-9. Okay:?

Now look with me in Luke’s Gospel just for a minute—Luke’s Gospel. I want to show you a way that Luke comes at this same narrative, how he sees what we just saw, and does it through a Biblical/theological lens. When you get to Luke 24 remember that his understanding is that Jesus teaches that passages in the Old Testament lead to Him.

How so? Well for instance, let me just start in Luke chapter 3 and in verse 21. In Luke 3:21 it says this: *“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a Voice came from heaven: ‘You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.’”*

Then what do you have? You have a genealogy. And then what do you have? After the genealogy which goes in reverse and leads you backward to *“the Son of Adam, the Son of God,”* you find the temptation in the wilderness, where the evil one, the tempter, comes to Him and says, *“If You are the Son of God.”*

Now what do we have here? If we make the comparison in Luke chapter 4 we have what? We have the second Adam. In Luke chapter 3:23 to the end of the chapter we have a genealogy. And then what do we have? In 1 Peter 3:21-22 we have Flood imagery.

Now let me explain some of this. What we have in vv. 21 and 22, when I say we have Flood imagery, is that we have various things happening. First of all we have Baptism. Now I’m just going to give you a reference because I want you to see this. If you were to look in 1 Peter and in chapter 3 one of the things that you would realize is that the waters of the Flood are equated to or used symbolically in place of baptism. I’m just going to read a portion of this. *“Because they formerly did not obey when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared, in which a few—that is, eight persons—were brought safely through the water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* In other words, here we find Peter using the Flood waters as a symbol for Baptism. So one of the things that we find here is Flood imagery in Baptism.

What else? Well, for instance in Luke we find that *“the heavens were opened.”* And if you were to go back and use the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, and look in the Flood account, when it says that the heavens were opened, this is the exact phrase. So you would find this phrase being used in the Greek rendering of the Old Testament in the Flood narrative.

How about this? The heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descends like a what? Like a dove! All of a sudden you’re beginning to collect around you imagery that reminds you of the Flood narrative.

Now we see this kind of thing happening elsewhere in the New Testament. For instance, if I were to say these things to you—and you’ve heard me do this before—*“altar, brother, anger, murder,”* what story would you think of? You would think of Cain and Abel. But Jesus doesn’t mention Cain and Abel in the section of the Sermon on the Mount on murder; He just mentions those four things. And your mind immediately goes back to the first murder.

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

And so oftentimes we just find these phrases, these words, these things that carry us back to another story. So here we have the waters of Baptism which are used in other places in the Bible to speak about flood waters. We find that the heavens were opened.

But what else do we find? We find this Voice from heaven saying, *“You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.”* In other words, if we could go back to chapter 5 of Genesis, it’s interesting when you compare it like this. It says in chapter 5, *“When Lamech had lived 182 years he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work, and from the painful toil of our hands.’”* In other words, maybe this son is the son that will bring us relief. And when you look in Luke God says, “No, it is this Son that will bring us relief from our toil. It’s My Son that will bring that relief.” So there’s this awesome parallel when you think about some of the imagery in the words that are used to conjure up the Flood.

But then it’s striking because then what you do is that you go to the genealogy. Notice how this runs forward in Genesis: Genesis 3, Fall; Genesis 5, genealogy; Genesis 6, Flood.

And this turns backwards. We find 1 Peter 3:21-22, Flood. We find the genealogy and then we’re taken backward to the second Adam in the garden. And we’re made forcefully aware that Luke is creating a comparison between Adam the son of God and the second Adam, Jesus Christ. And the temptation is the same. *“If You are the Son of God,”* then what? And so on.

So here is Luke in the New Testament who is not in the position of Lamech. And he’s expanding for us, in Biblical/theological ways, how we ought to think about the One who would come and relieve us from the toil of the curse. And so it depends on where you are in the progressive unfolding of God’s revelation as to how much knowledge and what your level of knowledge will be. In Genesis chapter 5 it was slight but it was still wonderful. They were looking for a man who was going to come and somehow relieve them from the worry of the curse. But by the time you get to Luke you get a really full-orbed theology. This is not going to be Noah. But interestingly this is going to be One who is going to be the actual second Adam who will stand in our stead, who will stand in our room and defeat the evil one and provide us with rest from the curse. Yes, Don?

Don Maurer: Do we find that same kind of thing later when Peter at Pentecost says that David is both dead and buried. He refers to Psalm 16.

Jeff: Yep.

Don: David says, “You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” He says that *“David is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.”* But he’s referring to Christ. Is it that same kind of principle?

Jeff: Yes, it’s the same kind of thing, right? So in Psalm 16 you have to ask yourself, what would I think if I were David?, because we’re told that this Psalm—Psalm 16—speaks of the Resurrection. So in what way or how would David have understood that? And then how would somebody like Peter understand that at a point later in revelation? And so yes, very much so. Does that make sense? Okay.

And we shouldn’t be surprised by this kind of thing, because the book of Genesis isn’t just written by Moses, but God is the primary Author. In the same way the book of Luke the book of Luke is not just written by Luke, but God is the primary Author. So God is

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

the primary Author over the 66 books. But you have these human authors. And these human authors write the exact words that God wants them to write. He communicates the things that God wants them to communicate. Okay, any kind of preliminary stuff that you want to wrestle with before we get to what we’re going to do today? No? Okay.

All right. So let’s look at what we’re going to do today. We’re going to do some narrative stuff. But I want you to be aware of something, something that’s fairly important. And that is that what you find in the narrative stuff you will actually find in other genres, in other types of literature. For instance I’m going to say that you’ll find inclusions. We’ll talk about what those are in just a minute. We’ll find inclusions in narratives.

But you will also find inclusions in other parts of literature, different types of genres. For instance you’ll find them in the Psalms; you’ll find them in Proverbs; you’ll find them in different places. So there is overlap in some of these literary devices, such that when we read a narrative we shouldn’t think, I’m only going to find these in the narrative. You might find these in other parts of Scripture.

First of all, what are narratives? Narratives are stories about the past. But when we think about a narrative we think about a story about the past that’s related to our faith. In some way or other, when we read the Bible we understand that this story or that reading, whether it’s a story that’s told in Numbers, whether it’s a story told in Chronicles, whether it’s a story told in Esther or in Luke, in some way it forms my developing understanding of what the faith is. It tells me how God brought things to pass in such a way that the promise culminates in Jesus Christ.

So that’s a simple way to put it. But I think it’s a handy way to put it. They are stories about the past that tell us about or are related to our faith.

Now when you look at a story the most basic thing that you can think when you look at a story is: what’s the context of the story? Now when you think about that, that seems almost too easy to think about. But I’m just going to say this. If I were to pick a story—any story at all—if I were to pick a story and read a sentence out of it, and just say, “*And Judah said, ‘What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak?’*” If I were to just read that to you and say, “What does that mean?”, you should look at me and say, “I have no idea. How am I supposed to know? I don’t have any context for understanding that statement.”

For instance, think about a statement like this. “I don’t need you.” Just that statement alone—“I don’t need you.” Now how would you understand that statement? I’ll bet you that if I went around the room and asked you how you would understand that statement, some of you would say that you would relate it to something emotional. It’s somebody expressing their isolation or their independence or their departure from someone else; I don’t need you.

But that would depend upon the inflection of how I said it, right? If I said, “I don’t need you!”, (*shouting*), then you might have justification for that. But if I wrote on the board, “I don’t need you,” and I said it in the calmest possible way I could say it, and said to you, “What does that mean?”, you should say to me, “I have no idea what that means. I know what the words mean; I know what I mean. I know what those things mean, but I don’t have any way to piece that together for you to provide for you an interpretation of what that sentence means that you just wrote on the board.”

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

For instance I'd have to build a story around it. I might say to you, "Here's the story that's built around that sentence, 'I don't need you.'" Maybe it's a story about a father who teaches his son how to do something. And the father looks at the son and says, "Now son, do you need me to show you again?" And the son looks at the father with some level of humble self-assurance and says, "I don't need you. You've taught me so well and I have confidence in what you've shown to me. I don't need you."

Now that's not an emotional "I don't need you!", right? That's a much different "I don't need you." So we need a context. And we need to understand what a context is. A context is the words around the statements or the stories that are woven together.

Now it's not just a sentence that needs a context, but it's a story that needs a context. In other words, how do we understand stories? Oftentimes we think to ourselves that the Gospels are just kind of one isolated story put together with another story, and so on. And we sometimes actually think that they have no relationship whatsoever to one another. And yet that would not be the case when we look at the stories in the Gospels. For instance, one of the things that we say is that they are related to one another. There's a certain level of structure that goes with how the gospel writer is telling us the story about Jesus.

That's easy when it comes to the didactic portions, when it comes to the Epistles. Why? Because you know this as well as I do. Every time the guy says, "Therefore," we know that there's an argument I just missed. I have to go back and understand what the argument was, and so on.

So there's context. And when you look at a story I want to encourage you to look not just at the story itself but at the context in which the story sits. And we can talk more about that as we go. But that's an important basic thing.

This would be another example. *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* This is in a more didactic portion of the Scriptures. It's actually in the letter to the Philippians. But oftentimes you hear this one. *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* And we think of that as the Super Man text. I can leap tall buildings with a single bound, right? Why? Because I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, or through Him who strengthens me.

But that's out of context. In other words, the context is going to tell us what the all things are that I can do. So what are all the things that I can do? Well, I can leap tall buildings with a single bound. No. *(Laughter)* Listen to the context of Philippians 4:10-13, and you tell me what the "all things" are.

"I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am in to be content. I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

What is the "all things?"

Brave Man: Live in any circumstance.

Jeff: I can live in any circumstance, whether in plenty or in want, that God places me in. And I can be content in it.

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

Don: I’m so glad you brought this up because I’ve heard so many Scriptures taken out of context in that way. For example, Isaiah, where he says, *“And a little child shall lead them.”* And so many people think that’s Isaiah’s version of “Kids Say the Darndest Things.” *(Laughter)* No. The context of that is the new heavens and the new earth that Isaiah is talking about, when Christ will come and renew all things in Isaiah chapter 11. That whole chapter, or most of that chapter, is a promise about the renewal of the new heavens and the new earth.

Or another one: *“I know the plans I have for you, ’says the LORD.”*

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: *“Plans for prosperity and not destruction,”* and a good future and everything. Again you’ve got to realize the context. It’s not just a blanked promise that your life is going to go really well from here on in.

Jeff: Yes, that’s actually an excellent one. When you think about Jeremiah 29, that’s a letter written to exiles. That’s a letter written to people who had been carried out to the land of promise into exile. And it’s not a general promise to God’s people, although we can infer a lot from that promise to those exiles about God Himself. But the point of that is that you can read that letter and derive a lot from it. But you have to remember that letter is not to you.

For instance it would be like this. It would be like you finding a love letter that I wrote to my wife. And Mike, if you took it and you showed it to Rich and you said, “Look, I found this letter that Jeff wrote to his wife. Look at how he thinks about me!” *(Laughter)* Yeah, Rich; your heart is pounding already! *(Laughter)* Mike is going to say, “Me think you understand differently than I do.” *(Laughter)* I picked the wrong guy to do it! *(Laughter)*

But my point is—and now I’m going to switch to Caleb here,—*(Laughter)*, Caleb finds that letter. And Caleb says, “hey, , you know, this is really helpful to me. This is a helpful way for a man to treat a woman, and so I’ve got a helpful letter here.” But he understands it differently.

And in the same way we can understand Jeremiah 29 in that way. We can say that this is a helpful letter for us to understand the redemptive process—how God saves, how He even treats people who sin, and so on—and learn a lot from it without saying, “This is to me.” And that’s the problem we sometimes face. Did you have a question?

Brave Man: So is there anything you can talk about to help us understand context? I’ve heard things like someone in this group saying, “what, where, why?”, that type of thing. That’s something I struggle with. I mean, I kind of know about context; I just need help.

Jeff: Yes. And that’s a very good way to do it, to write down some of the journalistic questions—who, what, where, when, why, how? And that’s a good stepping stone to introduce you to the context.

If you ask the question “who?”, I just told my congregation not too long ago—actually I think it was this past Sunday,—about a story from Luke’s Gospel, chapter 9. An elderly lady asked me to come over. Her husband had dementia. She had these cards up all over the house. She would make her husband read these cards every time he came into contact with one, believing that the Scriptures were functioning like a talisman. If you read those Scriptures it will be well; that sort of thing, right?

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

And I said to her, “Where do you get justification for thinking that way and doing that sort of thing?” And she read to me Luke chapter 9. *“And He called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases.”* And she said to me, “Right there; we have the power to cure diseases.”

Now I would take her back and I would say, “Okay, let’s ask the who question. Who said this?”

Jesus. To whom did He say it? The twelve disciples. That kind of thing goes a long way to building context, and to situate in your thinking who said it and to whom he said it. Then, once you get to implications, you can ask what the implications of this are. But first of all you have to ask, what’s the context? And what’s the context of the context? And then ask the question of meaning

You can eventually get to applications. What are the implications of this? Does this have any implications for me? And you can and should also get to the significance of it. In other words, how does this affect me? What should I love more? What should I do as a result?, and so on. But you have to take it in order. Okay, does that help? Okay, good. But those questions are good questions to begin.

.Let me also say this to you. You do not need to know Greek and Hebrew to study the Bible, okay? Now I’m going to show you how to use helps later on that will help you to use Greek and Hebrew, and give you sort of a little bit of an in into the use of the languages. But I want to tell you something. The Westminster Confession talks about how everybody should have the Scriptures in their own language.

Now it does go on to say that controversies of religion ought to be settled by Scripture in its original languages. And you can understand why that’s the case. If you’re dealing with a controversy you want to be as precise as you can possibly be. So that’s where the original languages are very important.

But the fact of the matter is that living in today’s world we have the beautiful opportunity of many translations. And many translations give us windows into how the Scriptures are to be viewed, how they are to be thought of, how they are to be understood.

So for instance, this text. I’ll just give you a smattering. ESV: *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”* I think this is the CEB; I can never remember what the CEB is. *“I can endure all these things through the power of the One who gives me strength.”* Philips’ translation: *“I’m ready for anything through the strength of the One who lives within me.”* NIV: *“I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.”*

Now you can see that there’s a general overlap. But you can also see where the translators are trying to work with nuances in the text and communicate those to you.

Now here’s how you use a translation. You use a translation, and you grab a number of translations. But one of the things that you keep in mind is that you use a translation. And how do you use a translation? Well, for instance, you understand that some translations are dynamic in their equivalence to the text. In other words, how does this translation relate to the original text? Well, it’s dynamic, and I’ll tell you what that is in just a minute.

And then there are those that are formal. Their form is formal in relation to the texts that they translate.

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

Now what does that mean? It means this. It means that if I have a J. B. Philips translation which is more of a paraphrase of the original, it's going to be dynamic. So Philips is going to be dynamic.

Now there's a place for the Philips translation. There's a place for a more dynamic translation. Why do I say that? Because sometimes I go to the Philips translation if I'm struggling and I say, "How do I put this into everyday common lingo?"

So for instance in Romans 12:1 do you know what he says? He has this beautiful phrase. Remember what it says? It says, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed.*" He translates it, "*Do not be squeezed into the world's mold.*" Ah, I like that; that's helpful, right? That way of expression opens up understanding for me. Okay; I got it.

Now you have to understand that it is dynamic. How does this translation relate to the text it translates? It's dynamic. In other words, it's not keeping word for word, and so on.

What about the formal? Well, a formal translation would be something like the New American Standard Bible. Formal equivalence would be like the New American Standard. Do you ever read the New American Standard Bible in public? It's not all that easy to read; it's kind of clunky. Why is it clunky? Because it's trying to be word for word; that's what it's attempting to be.

For instance, if you read the introduction to the New American Standard Bible, it's going to tell you all the different sorts of things about how they're translating it. How are they translating what they call "historical presence?" How does that look in the New American Standard Bible? So there is lots of detail about how they're translating the text. How does this text relate to the text it's translating? Formally. In other words, it's trying to replicate the form of the original text, okay?

Now there's everything in between. For instance, if this is the middle, I'd say that the ESV is here. There's a formal aspect to it. But it's trying to go not so much word for word, but idea for idea in some cases. And what I would do if I were you is that I would choose one from here, (dynamic), one from here, (formal), and a few from in the middle. And don't over-burden yourself, but four different translations would be very helpful. It would be very helpful to do that.

Brave Man: The CEB is the Common English Bible.

Jeff: The Common English Bible; thank you very much. Okay, so what is all this? Contentment in every situation. Any questions on that? Yes, Don?

Don: Just a comment. Sometimes it is crucial to know what the original Greek says.

Jeff: Sure.

Don: For example, in some of the old Latin translations Jesus is supposed to have said, "Do penance." But then whenever the Greek texts were discovered He said, "*Repent.*"

Jeff: Right.

Don: And there's a world of difference there.

Jeff: A world of difference. But I would say this to you, Don. If you don't know Greek I would say to you that what you have to remember is, that is not off limits to you, right? In other words, you can get to "repent" by looking at a variety of translations.

Don: It's great that we have our modern English translations.

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

Jeff: Yeah. I mean, it would be better if we all knew the original languages. One day somebody said to me, “I’m thinking about learning Greek.”

And I said, “The question I would have for you is what is your purpose in it?” Because a lot of time and effort is going to go into studying a dead language—for us, anyway—that you’re probably never going to speak. So what’s your purpose in it, especially when you can study the Scriptures and be faithful in study and also get a faithful return on your study? What’s your purpose in it? Yes?

David: What’s your take on “The Message?”

Jeff: So “The Message” would be way over here. (*Laughter*) But you know, I would say to you that whereas J. B. Philips is trying to give you a dynamic, kind of common understanding of it in the vernacular, I would say that Eugene Peterson is trying to take that one step further and sort of give it to us in our own particular day. So for instance, let’s say that a hundred years from now we watched “The Message.” Somebody rediscovered it a hundred years from now. And they would say, “What is Eugene Peterson doing?” Well, he would be giving us an understanding of the use of language at this particular moment. So he would be interpreting the Bible very specifically for this generation. I’m not sure a hundred years from now that that translation is going to be worth anything; do you know what I mean?

It would almost be like using the King James today. People read the King James and they need a dictionary just to understand the way the words are used in the 16th and 17th century in order to understand it. It’s almost two interpretations; I’ve got to interpret the English before I interpret the actual Scriptures.

David: It seems like it’s kind of supplying the Scriptures with commentary.

Jeff: Well, I think that any sort of movement to the dynamic is doing that. With any sort of movement toward the dynamic you are moving from a translation to a translation and an interpretation.

So for instance, remember how people used to hate the NIV because it would translate the Greek word for “propitiation” not as “propitiation,” but as “atoning sacrifice.” And everybody would say, oh, the NIV is unfaithful! Well no, the NIV wasn’t unfaithful. The NIV was trying to take and move at this point away from a formal translation to help people to understand in a more dynamic way what a propitiation is, understanding that not everybody uses the word “propitiation” in their daily speech, right? So in any dynamic attempt, as soon as you move away from the formal, there’s a bit of interpretation, which is why, for instance, Philips is helpful. “Don’t be squeezed into the world’s mold.” There’s a little interpretation going into that translation. Go ahead, Don.

Don: In some dynamic translations you have to be careful because they’ll translate Romans 8:29—“*Whom He foreknew He also predestined*”—they’ll translate “*whom He foreknew*” as “*those He knew would come to Him.*”

Jeff: Oh, is that right? Wow; I didn’t know that. And you know, again, as soon as you compare translations you get the sense that this translator has just added a bunch of extra words, right? And you get that. Oftentimes there is the addition of a single word or a couple words here and there that will help to translate if you’re moving into a dynamic style.

Don: Well, even in more formal ones like the New King James, a lot of times there will be words in italics.

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

Jeff: And that’s the case in the New American Standard as well. It will show you that this italicized word does not belong in the text.

Don is raising an issue that I’m not going to stay with unless you guys want me to stay with it, but I will say it. And that is this. A formal translation is often just not possible, and I’ll tell you why that’s the case. A formal equivalent translation, a word-for-word translation, is not going to be possible because the word order in the Greek does not match the word order in the English. So in our typical sentence we have a noun, a verb and an object. And that’s not the way of it in the Greek. In the Greek it’s typically a verb, a noun and an object. And so oftentimes it doesn’t make sense to translate it word for word in the Greek because it doesn’t match our English way of speaking. It comes out a little bit jumbled.

So there is a sense in which an actual hard-and-fast translation, word for word, is impossible. However, one of the things that you have to realize is, there are endings which tell you what the noun is. There are endings that tell you what the verb is. So for instance, even though the word order is not like it is in the English—noun, verb, object—when you translate you look for the endings. Where is my noun?

And I tell my students. I say that the best thing to do is to look for a comma. Look for a word that indicates a break in the sentence, like “*kaphi*” or “*hinna*”, or some kind of word that indicates some kind of separation. Look, segment, and then look for a noun ending. Where is my noun ending?

Or another way to do it is that a noun is often accompanied by the article, and the article matches the noun ending in a mirror-like way. So look for an article. And I tell them that if you look for an article or look for a noun ending, you’ll find the noun. Now put that down first, right?

So there’s a sense in which there is a literalness to it, a formalness to it—not in actual word order, but in the sense that this is a noun. Okay, the noun appears in the middle of the sentence. But I’ll put it here first so that people in an English-speaking context can understand it. Here’s my verb. Oh, it comes first in the sentence. I need to bring it down and put it after my noun, and so on. Does that make sense?

Don: Jeff, I’m sorry to keep going on about this topic. But I’ve heard that the original Greek does not have punctuation.

Jeff: That’s correct; it did not have punctuation.

Don: How do we trust the translators at that point?

Jeff: Yeah. So one of the things that we realize is, not only did Greek not have punctuation, but the words are not divided like they are in our text. So they all run together. If you look at a Greek text all of the words have no spacing; they’re just bunched together.

Don: Wow!

Jeff: However, one of the things that you realize, as you read you begin to realize for instance that there are words that are clues. For instance, that’s a *de*, and it’s often called a post-positive conjunction. In other words, it’s the second word at the beginning of a sentence. So it can be used as “and” or “but.” But oftentimes it’s a post-positive conjunction, which means that this may be the beginning of a new sentence.

“Introduction & Narrative” Pt 3

Or there’s a word that looks like this, and it’s *hinna*. And *hinna* can mean “that, since or because.” But oftentimes it indicates the beginning of a quotation. And so when you see *hinna* a quotation may be coming.

So it’s sort of like any grammar. You begin to realize that when patterns are repeated, there’s a grammatical rule. And so you put it in the Greek grammar, you know? Or you begin to realize that when I see the article used, that means this is a noun. Now there are 24 forms of the article, so you have to memorize all 24 forms of the article. And you have to recognize that the article can be used in different ways. But you look for your article to find your noun, and so on.

So grammar in Greek is like grammar is in English; it’s descriptive. You know, when your grammar teacher tells you, “Don’t put the comma there!”, and somebody else tells you, “No, you can put the comma there,” what you find is, there’s a difference in how one sees the language being used. We have books that say no, this is how we’re going to understand the comma and its use.

But that’s conventional, right? There’s no Bible that came down from on high and said, “This is how you use the comma.” But we have a conventional use for the comma. And Greek grammar is the same way. There’s a conventionality to the use of the way the language is used.

Don: And Hebrew is even more complicated.

Jeff: Oh, I don’t even want to talk about Hebrew. (*Laughter*) Listen to me; I want to tell you something. You read Hebrew backwards. Who wants to do that? (*Laughter*) I don’t know, but I’ll tell you this. I always tell the Hebrew professor at seminary, “Do you know that there is a theological reason why God chose Hebrew for the Old Testament and why He chose Greek for the New? He chose Hebrew for the Old Testament because it’s backward-looking. But He chose Greek because it’s forward-looking; it’s eschatological.” (*Laughter*) He hates that. (*Laughter*) I love it.

But anyway, we can pick up here the next time. I’m detecting an interest in this. Are we okay with this? Okay, so we’ll pick up here next time.

Let’s pray. Father, we thank You and praise You for the time You’ve given to us and for the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts. We ask that You’ll continue to bless us as we think about the study of Scripture. Lord, we pray that You’ll continue to cultivate in our hearts a love for Your word, and we ask it in Christ’s name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.