



JOURNEYING INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Gospels

Difficulties in reading the Gospels...

The Gospels. We have difficulties, and we are not going to be able to look at all these different verses that I have in here. There are unexplained differences. What you have here are three instances of Jesus standing before the High Priest, and each one of them uses a little bit of different words, a little bit of different accounts of this story here, and so, how are they different if it was the same instance? Unexplained differences.

Apparent discrepancies. When you look at Jesus' conversation with the disciples about the fig tree in Mark 11 and Matthew 21, there are some differences there, some discrepancies that seem to maybe even contradict. So how do we deal with that?

General guidelines for reading the Gospels...

General guidelines for reading the Gospels. Here is what we have to realize about the Gospels. Number one: the Gospels are all written about the same person. The gospels are written about the same person. They are pictures of Jesus, but not just, none of the gospel writers just said, "I am going to write a biography of Jesus." Instead, it is a purposeful biography. It is a biography for a reason. So, it is a picture of Jesus that is written to a specific audience for a specific purpose.

That leads us to two components at work in the Gospels. You have the teachings of Jesus and the stories about Jesus. The teachings of Jesus and the stories about Jesus.

The Gospels are written about the same person, but they are written by different authors. Why do we have four Gospels? Well, because these four men, God inspired to write these books about Jesus, but to four different communities. Mark, most likely, we talked about this some at Secret Church New Testament, most likely, Mark was written first. Then, it was almost rewritten in some senses by Matthew and Luke, and there are a lot of parallels between those. Then, John is kind of its own little bird over here. So, you have got these four Gospels, each of them written by different people with different purposes.

So, what you have is two settings that work in the Gospels. You have the historical setting of Jesus in the first century, but then you also have the historical setting that the authors take into account. Why is Mark writing this way? Why is Matthew writing this way? Why is Luke writing this way?

That leads us to the third truth. The Gospels are written for different audiences. There are three main principles at work in the Gospels. Number one is selectivity. By that, I mean each of these Gospel writers didn't include everything they know about Jesus. John even said, "If everything that I know about Jesus was included, the whole world wouldn't have enough to contain the book that I am writing." So, they selected certain things.

Not only selectivity, but, second, arrangement. They arranged their things differently. That is part of the picture with the fig tree that we looked at. They are arranged differently, and so, part of the Gospels may be chronological. Part of this Gospel over here may not be chronological. They are arranged differently.

Then, adaptations. Now, each Gospel writer didn't adapt the truthfulness of these stories, but, basically, adapted this story to relate to this picture or that picture which were different. So, you have those principles at work: selectivity, adaptation and arrangement.

A practical process for reading the Gospels...

So, a practical process, these four steps. First, observe their home: What do you see? I want to encourage you, when you read through the Gospels, remember, we thought, "think paragraph" in the letters; in the Gospels think stories or discourses. When you read those different stories or discourses, ask those questions. So, it might not be paragraph by paragraph, but it is more story-by-story or discourse-by-discourse. Then, you bring those collective stories and discourses together, and you look for connections. You look at the end of Luke, "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," Luke 10. You have "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," then you have Jesus' conversation with Mary sitting at His feet while Martha is working, and then Luke 11 is His teaching on prayer, and what you see is these connect together. They are all about relationships with people who are in need, but also relationship with just listening to Christ that is culminating in a relationship with the Father through prayer. So, you see the connections there.

Look for special literary forms. Oftentimes, he just uses exaggeration. "*If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.*" (Matthew 5:29) Okay. That is exaggeration. Let me encourage you with that. "*If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.*" (Matthew 5:29) Okay? That is exaggeration. "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother...*" (Luke 14:26) Okay? This is exaggeration.

For emphasis, how hard is it to enter into the kingdom of God? "*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*" (Mark 10:24-25) Now, some people have taken that interpretation, and maybe you have heard before, there was something back in the first century called the "Needle's Eye" that was really tough for a camel to walk through. If you have heard that, forget that, it is just not true. So, the whole point is not, "So, it is tough to get through." The whole point is the camel can't go through the eye of a needle. It is impossible. What Jesus is saying is it is impossible for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. You have to trust in Christ apart from stuff. So, look for exaggeration.

Look for irony. Irony. When something happens, but what it actually kind of communicates contrasts with what actually happens. So, you have a story of that in Luke 12. You think about it. What is the supreme example of irony recorded in the New Testament Gospels? A picture of the sinless one taking on the sins of the world. This is a picture of irony.

Rhetorical questions. Questions designed to make a point rather than achieve an answer. "*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*" (Matthew 6:27) "*Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No...but division.*" (Luke 12:51) Jesus used rhetorical questions.

Parallelism. You see lines, and we are going to talk about this more in depth in poetry, but lines that are kind of structured, that kind of say the same thing but in parallel fashion. "Ask

and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be open to you.”
(Matthew 7:7)

Contrastive. That is when they are synonymous. They all go together, but sometimes they contrast. *“Whoever has, will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”* (Mark 4:25)

Then, developmental. Sometimes, you have these phrases that parallel one another, and they kind of build on each other. The second line repeats part of the first line and advances the thought of the first line to a climax. *“He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.”* (Matthew 10:40). So, that is the picture that kind of develops.

That is observation. Just a couple of things to look for in addition to what we have already talked about.

Second, understand their home. Two challenges for interpretation when it comes to the Gospels. One: think vertically. In other words, how does the Gospel picture Jesus, and so, we think about the historical setting of Jesus’ life. Second, think horizontally. I want to encourage you to compare how different Gospels tell different stories, not for the sake of trying to find out if they have messed up and didn’t get their story straight, but for the sake of what is Mark doing that is different here, and why he would not write it the same way over here as Matthew does over here, or why did Luke change this part of what he saw in Mark? That kind of deal that you want to look for.

For each story/discourse, remember, that is how we think in series of stories/discourses, write down in one or two sentences to answer that overall question, “What is the point?” That is what you want to write down at the bottom of a sheet like this. What is the point of this story? What is the point of this overall teaching?

Then, bring it back home: How does it relate? Biblical and compatible? Notice how Jesus relates to the Old Testament law, how He fulfills the Old Testament law. This is going to help us with understanding how to interpret the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament.

Next, look for the eternal and cross-cultural. See how Jesus teaches and demonstrates the kingdom of God. That is why, when you go back and look at your Old Testament or New Testament Secret Church notes, that second half, the theological overview of the Bible, gave you a picture of the kingdom of God as it develops. That is really important there.

Finally, look for the applicable. See the larger context of these stories in order to identify timeless truths. I am going to give you an example of that in just a second. Well, I will go ahead and give you an example of that. Mark 4:35-41. Remember when Jesus and the disciples are in a boat, a big storm comes up, and Jesus is conked out asleep on the boat. So, they go and wake him up, and Jesus yawns, and He lifts his hands and the storm stops, and all the disciples are really scared and afraid, and Jesus says, “Why are you afraid?” Then, they said, *“Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him.”*

Now, that story, if we take that story right there, and we miss it in its overall context, we will miss the point. You see, you look at that story, and you look at the story that follows that, and Jesus delivers someone from demon possession. What you see next is Jesus’ power over disease. Then, you see Jesus’ power over death. So, what you have is Jesus

power demonstrated in four ways: over disaster, over demons, over disease and over death. It works out good that it even illiterates. He did it with the "D's" all in a row. So, He does that. It is little preacher trick. So, He does that, and it is showing us a picture of Jesus' authority over all of these things. Now the danger is, if we take that story of Jesus calming the wind and the waves, we take that story, and we say, "No matter how tough it gets, Jesus will calm the storms in your life. You are going through this thing in your life, but Jesus will calm the storm." The problem is you can't guarantee that this storm is going to be calmed anytime soon. You can't tell Christian brothers and sisters in many of these countries that we have talked about that the persecution is going to end very soon, and everything is going to be "Okay." You can't tell them that, but here is the point of the story.

If you think about that story as it was written, and when you do this observation and understanding, you get into what the problem was in that story. The problem was not that there was a big storm. These guys have been on the water before. It is not like they haven't seen a storm before. What is the problem? Jesus is asleep in the middle of the storm. It looks like He doesn't care about the disciples. He is snoozing through the storm. So, they wake Him up and say, "Don't you care?"

Now, think about how that relates. How tempting it is to get into difficult times where you are being overwhelmed and to wonder in confusion, does Christ even care about what I am going through? Jesus stands up, and He calms the winds and the waves, and those guys look at Him and say, "Even the wind and the waves obey him." You see, at that point, the man standing in front of them has the power to do what only God can do in the Old Testament. These are good Jewish men. They know that only the wind and the waves obey God. They realize that right in front of them on that boat is God in the flesh. They realize that, when they are in the middle of a storm, it is not that He didn't care, but that they actually had the God of the universe with them. You take that to the suffering of our brothers and sisters around the world. You may not be able to say to them, "This storm is going to end anytime soon," but you can say to them, "In the middle of your suffering, the God of the universe is right there with you, and He cares deeply about you." Now, that is an incredible truth that we don't get to if we don't walk through this process.

Apply it in your home: What do I do? We walked through those steps. All right. Here we go. That was the Gospels. You know how to read the Gospels now?

JOURNEYING INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Parables

Difficulties in reading parables...

The parables. Okay? Now, the parables are kind of their own unique breed over here. We have some difficulties here. The distance between the original audience and us. We are going to see why this is really important. Then second, the depth of meaning intended by Jesus in the parable. The biggest danger with parables is to dive into the parable and try to find meaning in every single little thing that is there. There is a guy named, church leader from the past, named Augustine, who took "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," and he did this. He took apart every single thing. He said, "When it says 'Jericho' in 'The Parable of the Good Samaritan' that means the moon. 'Oil' means comfort and good hope. 'Wine' is exhortation to work with a subservient spirit. The donkey in the parable that is used to carry means Christ's flesh. The inn is the church. The innkeeper is the apostle Paul." Okay. Now

that is taking it a little far, Augustine, maybe we shouldn't go that far, but the question is "How far do you go?" Where do you stop? That is difficulty.

General guidelines for reading parables...

General guidelines for reading parables. Number one: the main point of the parable is crucial. A lot of Bible scholars believe that every parable only has one main point and to try to dissect it beyond that is going too far. One main point. Now, I don't know about saying only one, but usually one, two, maybe three at the most, main points that are going with the parable. The main point of the parable is crucial then.

The main purpose of the parable is for the hearers to respond in a certain way. The message is the parable, and they are intended to invoke a certain response.

A practical process for reading parables...

So, when we take this sheet and we walk through the parables, observe their home: What do I see? Read it over and over again, and you have to get into the hearer's perspective. You have to get into the hearer's perspective.

Identify the key points of reference that are familiar to Jesus and his hearers. There are things that are going on here. It is almost like telling a joke. Did you ever hear somebody tell, two people talking, and one person tells a joke? You see this every time you go into another country. They said, "Hey, I have a joke for you," and they tell you the joke, and it is like, "I don't get it. That is not funny at all." It is because there is something that is going on in that culture that makes that funny that just doesn't make that funny here. So, what we have in the parables is there is something that is clicking in this picture that may not click immediately with us. So, we have to get in their perspective and determine how the original hearers would have responded to that parable. What would have stuck out to them?

I was in a home, a Muslim home not too long ago. I was in the Middle East and sharing "The Parable of the Prodigal Son," and when I said, "the son came back and the father ran out to meet his son," he sat up immediately, this Muslim man, and he said, "The father ran?" I said "Yeah." He was struck by that. The father doesn't run to meet his son. That is the picture that was faux pas in a sense in that day. So, what you have are that things come alive. "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" is a great example. When you read "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," you have to get into the shoes of this person, this teacher of the law, that is listening to this. When they hear different characters that come along, and this man has fallen, and he is sick on the side of the road, and two priestly types come by, two religious orders that represent those who were against the rabbis, the Pharisees that Jesus is talking to, the experts in the law. So, what happens is, when this person who is listening to this, the teacher of the law is listening to this being told by Jesus, it is almost like a parable being told today to us. Maybe to a good, solid Baptist Christian.

Well, think about this. Imagine this man on the side of the road and along comes the local bishop from the town, and he has to get to a meeting. So, he goes really fast by him. Then along comes somebody from the local Kiwanis Club, and he has to get to a meeting as well. So, he passes by him. You are almost thinking, "Of course they would go by. They are not good Baptist Christians." That is exactly what the teacher of the law is thinking. He is not surprised that the priest and the Levite have gone by. They, actually, were different than the teachers of the law. The teachers of the law were known for caring for the poor. They were known for alms giving. So, another person comes along, and the teacher of the law is thinking, "Okay, now we are getting to the right person." Instead of saying the teacher of

the law comes by, He says a Samaritan, and at that moment tension erupts on the scene. He is expecting somebody like him to come along, and it would be like this good Baptist Christian hearing, "Along came a local, outspoken atheist, practicing a homosexual life style, and he stopped, and he reached down, and though he had never been inside a church in his entire life, he helps this man out. He dressed his wounds. He took care of him." He asked the question, "Who then is your neighbor?" The guy didn't even say. The teacher of the law can't even say "Samaritan" out loud, but he said, "The one who helped him."

What you find is "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" is not just intended to tell us that we are supposed to help people on the side of the road. What it did was the parable, actually, reversed the question completely and put it back on the man, and the teacher of the law realized that who he hated was the Samaritan. Who he did not love was the Samaritan. He hated them, and he needed to learn that it wasn't just about helping the poor; it was about reaching out to the people that you despise in a sense. It comes alive when you put yourself in his shoes. Okay. So that is observing.

Understand their home: What does it mean? When parables originally were spoken, they really didn't need much interpretation because they had these understandings. At most, look for one main point. This is the way that I would encourage you. Look for one main point for each main character or group of characters in the story. In "The Parable of the Prodigal Son," you have, obviously, a point with the rebellious son who is coming back. You have a point with his forgiving father, and you have a point with the resentful son, but if we try to dissect it too much, we may miss the point of the parable. Every single word is not intended to be read like every single word in Galatians or Ephesians, exhaustive word studies on all those things.

Then, bring it back home. In one or two sentences, write down that main point. What is the point or what are the main points? Bring it back home. Look for the biblical and compatible. In our efforts to tie the parable into over all truths in Scripture, avoid looking too deeply into the parable. Don't get too carried away that you miss the overall point that Jesus is intending there. Okay. Now, we know how to study the parables. Okay?

JOURNEYING INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT

Acts

Difficulties in reading Acts...

Next, the book of Acts, which is kind of in its own group in the New Testament. Here is the difficulty with Acts. Is it precedent or is it principle? Here is what I mean by that. When we see the story of the church and what is going on in the book of Acts, is it mandating certain precedents: "This is the way the church is supposed to do things for all times," or is it giving us a picture of principles that apply to all times but not necessarily exactly this way. When people receive the Spirit at different times, then they come to faith in Christ, and they speak in tongues when they are baptized by the Spirit, does that mean that everybody who has the Spirit in them speaks in tongues? These are very real issues that are across the church today. When you look at Acts 2:4, "*All them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*" Is that a precedent? When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, do you speak in tongues or is there some kind of principle at work here? There are other examples as you go down there. Is it precedent or principles? I believe the answer is "Yes." Consider a both-and approach. Consider a both-and approach.

General guidelines for reading Acts...

Think about these guidelines for reading through the book of Acts. First, the book of Acts is a sequel. Remember, who wrote the book of Acts? Luke. Luke also wrote the book of Luke. Very good. The book of Acts is a sequel. It is a story with a specific purpose. He tells his story for the purpose of advancing the gospel and to show the advancement of the gospel. He is not trying to answer every question that we might have about Paul or every question that we might have about the church. He is showing the advancement of the gospel through the church.

You have these central themes: the gospel, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the world. The overall theme: the Holy Spirit empowers the Church to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

Many of you know that it is geographic and thematic in its structure. Geographic: Acts 1-7, the gospel in Jerusalem. Acts 8-9 into 10, the gospel in Judea and Samaria, and 10-28 the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The book of Acts is a model. It is a model for how God intends the church to take the gospel to the world under the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a model for how God intends the church to take the gospel. That doesn't mean that every specific is a precedent. It does mean that there is a precedent upon the church. The Church of Jesus Christ is intended to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, and that is what Acts is showing us.

A practical process for reading Acts...

Practical process for using this sheet to read through Acts. Observe their home: What do I see? When I am talking about these things, this is all in addition to what we have already talked about. These are just some specific things for the book of Acts. Ask questions about characters. There are negative characters and positive characters in the book of Acts. Ask questions about speeches. Speeches make up about a fourth to a third of the book of Acts, and they are not all verbatim accounts. Okay? It is not Luke sitting there with a tape recorder listening, and then able to write it down exactly as it was said. Luke wasn't even present at some of these speeches, and quite honestly, some of them last like 60 seconds, and a preacher can't preach for 60 seconds. It is just not possible. So, we know that these speeches are important, but they are not verbatim accounts. Then, ask questions about commentary from Luke. When Luke said, "This is intended to show this," we are going to talk about that next.

Understand their home. Look for what Luke intended in each episode in the book of Acts. Not just what he is saying, but why is he saying it? Okay? For example, look for repeated patterns and themes throughout Acts. I mentioned earlier that eight times he talks about the filling of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the Word, how they are united together. The spread of the gospel throughout the world, these are patterns that he gives. You can go back and look at those in the book of Acts.

Look at every episode and every story and summarize it by saying, "What is the main point of this?" For example, you go to Acts 6:1-7. It is when there was division in the church because people were, some of the widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, and people weren't getting food, and they weren't happy. So, they bring in some other people like Stephen to help out so the apostles can give themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word. However, the whole picture is not to give us a story that tells us exactly how

the church should be organized. The picture is to begin to set the stage for how the gospel is going to go to the ends of the earth through the church in Acts 6 and 7 and, eventually, Acts 8. We have to look at what the main point is. What is Luke's point in giving us this picture? Is he trying to give us a theology of how the church is organized, or is he showing how the gospel advanced with the church working together. Write down the main point of the episode in one or two sentences, making sure that your interpretation falls in line with the whole picture of Acts. Okay?

Bring it back home and relate it to our lives. When you look for the eternal and cross-cultural, this goes back to what we were just talking about, filter all implications from the book of Acts from the lens of Luke's intent, intent. When you get to Acts 8, you have all kinds of questions. You have Philip taking the eunuch, the Ethiopian eunuch, and baptizing him down at the river, and some people started to ask, "Okay, how did he baptize? Did he dunk him completely or did he just go down there and sprinkle him, go get a cup and bring it back up? How did this happen?" So, we start to debate that. Or how much water do we need for the Holy Spirit. Then, you see the Gospels, and it is going...I don't know what I just said, but anyway. We are trying. Okay.

Then, you have some people that are receiving the Holy Spirit that had already believed in Christ, but they hadn't gotten the Spirit. Luke's purpose is not to give us a whole theological treatise on how much water you need for baptism, and when this happens or that. He is showing us clearly in Acts 8 that the gospel is going to Samaritans and eunuchs. Two groups that were despised, unclean by Jewish laws. The gospel is going to a whole new group of people, and the whole point of Acts 8 is saying, "Take the gospel to people who are not like you. Take the gospel to the people that it is hard to reach, that nobody else is reaching." That is what Acts 8 is saying. We get caught up with all these other discussions, not that some of these things don't help us, but it is not the main point. Look for the applicable and apply it in your home. Okay. Now, we know how to study the book of Acts.

JOURNEYING INTO THE OLD TESTAMENT Narratives

Difficulties in reading Old Testament narratives...

Next are the narratives in the Old Testament. Now, we are going back to the Old Testament. Now, we have been, at this point, we have traveled down to South America. Now, we are going across the ocean, and we are going to go over to Asia. We are just going to go into just a whole other realm that separates us a lot farther and, especially, a realm before Christ came. Old Testament narratives. There are a variety of stories here. Forty percent of the Old Testament is narrative, and I have listed some of the books that are there. This is the most common type of literature in the Bible. There are a variety of stories.

Second, a variety of characters. We have all kinds of characters. All kinds of people, and we have a variety of challenges. We have Abraham arguing with God about how many righteous people it is going to take to spare a city. We have Balaam's talking donkey. Okay, and Balaam is talking back to the donkey. That is weird, and we have some stories that are just plain bazaar in the Old Testament. So, we have some challenges.

General guidelines for reading Old Testament narratives...

Here are some general guidelines. On the whole, Old Testament narratives are not, they are not, allegories filled with hidden meanings. Okay? Abraham getting a wife for Isaac is not about Christ getting a bride, the church, through the Holy Spirit. Okay? Let's read the Old Testament narrative, not as all these allegories with all these hidden meanings behind it. Unless they say, unless there is a tie with the New Testament, let's guard ourselves there.

Second, they are not intended to teach moral lessons. Most often you will hear people say, after they read a story in the Old Testament, "What can we learn from this story that we are to do this or not to do this?" That is not the primary purpose of narratives. We are going to dive into that a little deeper, but unless the biblical author says this is what you need to learn from this, then back up there.

Third, they are not intended to teach doctrine. They are not intended to teach doctrine. They illustrate doctrine. The story of David and Bathsheba is not intended to teach doctrine about sexual purity. Instead, it is an illustration; no question, of an illustration of the dangers of sexual immorality and the effects of sexual immorality, but let's leave the doctrine teaching to other types of Scripture and illustration to these stories.

Finally, Old Testament narratives are not man-centered. We have to remember that God is the hero of this book. You get to Genesis 39, and you the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, and we walk away saying what we learned from this story is to be like Joseph and to flee temptation. It is not that it is not good to flee temptation, but when you look at Genesis 39, four times, four times, one phrase is mentioned, twice in the beginning of the chapter and twice at the end of the chapter. "*The Lord was with Joseph.*" "*The Lord was with Joseph.*" At the beginning of the chapter and the very end, "*The Lord was with Joseph.*" "*The Lord was with Joseph.*" God is the hero of Genesis 39, and the story is showing us what happens when God is with us and how God's presence with us effects everything in our lives. God-centered book that we have here. God-centered stories that we are reading. We have to be careful because our ideas about God are going to be challenged when we read the Old Testament stories. We can't keep God in our nice, little, neat theological box over here when we see some of the things that are going on in the Old Testament. We have to open ourselves up to the picture of God that we see throughout Scripture. Okay.

On a whole, Old Testament narratives are stories with a specific purpose. Remember, they were written to a specific people, this specific audience. They are accounts of what happened, not what should have happened or ought to happen every time. This goes back to that moral part. Not every narrative is a good example for us. Often, it is just the opposite. The Old Testament is very clear with some of the warts and all of some of the characters that are there. So, they are not just intended to be examples, they are not what should have happened or ought to happen every time. They are what happened. Finally, they are selective and incomplete. Just like we talked about in the Gospels, not all the details are always given in these stories.

A practical process for reading Old Testament narratives...

So how do you walk through these four main questions with narratives? First of all, observe their home. Read the passage carefully. Don't take short cuts. Read every detail of the story, and look for five basic parts. You have the plot. These are the questions you are asking: "What?" "How?" sequence of events. Usually, in every plot in the Old Testament, there is going to be some kind of conflict. There is going to be the development is going to lead to some kind of conflict and there is going to be a resolution. So, look for those facets of the plot.

Second, the scene. When and where is this happening? Focus on time and place. Third, characters. Who? The characters in Old Testament narrative are central. They are very important. Character development was very important in these stories. Look for comparison and contrast. If you look in the Old Testament at the comparison and contrast between David and Saul, David and Saul, they are shown, the stories about David and Saul, are described to contrast one another. You have comparison and contrast. Then, you have dialogue. Oftentimes, the narrator, the biblical author, will be telling the story and then have some part of dialogue, and the dialogue is intended to help us understand what just happened. So pay attention to dialogue. Fifth, the narrator. The narrator is the guy that is omniscient in the whole thing. He is everywhere. He knows all the details. He sometimes gives summary statements or judgment statements, and here is where I want to encourage you to look for irony. Just because an event may look good, the narrator may be, actually, communicating something opposite.

One example. You look in 1 Kings 10-11, and you see how the author is describing Solomon. Talking about all the Solomon did, all the Solomon had. It looks like man Solomon is being exalted here. Then, you get to 1 Kings 11:6, and the narrator says, *"Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He did not follow the Lord completely as David his father had done. The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away."*

Then, you get to 1 Kings 6:38, for example, and the narrator says that it took Solomon seven years to complete the Temple. It almost seems like that is a good thing, but the very next verse, 1 Kings 7:1, the narrator tells us that it took Solomon thirteen years to complete his own house. Seven years on God's temple and thirteen years on Solomon's house. Is that a good thing? Look for how the author is actually communicating the story here. That is observing.

Understand their home: What does it mean? Interpret each Old Testament narrative on three levels. This is huge. Every story in the Old Testament is on three levels. Level one, bottom level, is individual history. This is exactly what is going on in that story at that time with those individuals. Level number two is national history, because that story fits into what God is doing to the people of Israel, the nation of Israel, the people of Israel. What God is doing overall. Then, level number three is redemptive history, which means the whole picture. Remember, we talked about this with our notes from Old Testament, New Testament Secret Church, the whole picture of what God is doing.

You take a story like Abraham and Isaac that we mentioned earlier from Genesis 22. On an individual history level, this is a man taking his son up to a mountain, God interacting with him, providing a ram. That is individual history. Now, national history. This is the promised heir for Abraham that is being sacrificed here, and it is God providing for the preservation of His people of the nation of Israel. That is national history. Redemptive history. We have a picture of God's provision of a ram to provide salvation for His people. That is overall redemptive history. You see those three different levels. You can look at David and Goliath in the same way, but anyway: individual history, national history and redemptive history.

Pay close attention to literary context. If you are studying Abraham, something happened to Abraham. You need to read Genesis 12-25 as a whole, at some point, in order to understand how this fits into that whole deal. At a minimum, read the chapter before that chapter and the chapter after.

Avoid these common errors in interpreting Old Testament narrative. One: allegorizing. We talked about that. Trying to find this hidden meaning in the text. Two: decontextualizing, which is, basically, just a fancy word that means ignoring the historical-cultural context. You have to make sure to understand as much of the context as we can. Three: selectivity. Picking and choosing the parts of the story that you like. I like it when Abraham does this, or I like it when David does this, and kind of put that together, and that is the main point. Well, don't pick and choose. Look at it all.

Fourth, moralizing. Asking, "What is the moral of this story at the end of each individual narrative?" It is not that some things don't teach us or show us, illustrate for us moral lessons, but that is not their primary intent. Fifth, personalizing. By that, I mean thinking these narratives are all about you. This is just a self-centered reading of the Bible. These narratives are not all about you. You don't walk away and say, "The story of Balaam's talking donkey reminds me that I talk too much," or "The story of the building of the Temple is God's Word that we need to construct a church." That is abuse of Old Testament narrative, and it misses the whole point of the New Testament. Sixth, false appropriation. Misapplying the narrative in contemporary culture is what I mean by that. This is the classic example: here is Gideon's fleece. "I am going to put out a fleece, Gideon did." The only problem is that showed his lack of faith, not his faith. So, it is not a good thing to do that as a way of finding God's will.

Seventh, false combination. Taking different points of a story and trying to put them together that are not directly connected by the narrator. Redefinition. This is redefining the story to accommodate what you wish it had said. What you wish it had said. If it doesn't leave you feeling what you were looking for, then we have to be okay with that and adjust what we feel based on that. Finally, imitation. Looking at narratives for permission, and/or obligation to act a certain way. This is my challenge for you: not to read Old Testament story with a "monkey see, monkey do" kind of approach. "If he did it, it makes it alright for me to do it." That is not the picture of Old Testament narrative that is intended there.

For each story, think story. We have thought paragraph. We have thought discourses, teachings, each story or series of stories in the Old Testament narrative. Write down in one or two sentences, the answer to that main question: What does the story mean?

Then, bring it back home. Here is the key. We have to catch this. It is very, very important. Look for the biblical and compatible. We have to interpret Old Testament narratives through the grid of New Testament teaching. So, here is how you do this. First, you identify that timeless, that theological principle in its Old Testament context. Okay? In that context there in the original situation. Second, filter that principle through the New Testament. We don't read the Old Testament as Old Testament Hebrews. We read the Old Testament through the lens of Christ. So, is there anything in the New Testament that changes this thing?

Ask two questions: Does the New Testament add to that principle? Does the New Testament add something to that principle, or does the New Testament modify that principle? This is what Jesus was doing. "*You have heard that it was said, but I say to you...*" He is changing how we understand some of these pictures that we have seen in the Old Testament. So, look at it through the lens of the New Testament. That means, when you get to that point on the back of this sheet, you are reading the Old Testament, studying an Old Testament text, you have an extra step here. You have to take an Old Testament theological principle, in order to get to the timeless truth, you have to filter it through the New Testament. Okay. Now, we know how to study forty percent of the Old Testament.

JOURNEYING INTO THE OLD TESTAMENT Law

Difficulties in reading Old Testament law...

Next, journeying the Old Testament: the Law. Now, here is where it gets really fun.

Difficulties in reading Old Testament law. We wonder about some laws. "Bring the best of your firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk." (Exodus 34:26) Hmm. All right. "Keep my decrees. 'Do not mate different kinds of animals.' 'Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.' 'Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.'" Anybody not wearing 100% cotton tonight? You have broken Leviticus 19:19. Leviticus 13. "When a man has lost his hair and is bald, he is clean." Okay. All right. Anybody encouraged? Okay? "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord God detests anyone who does this." (Deuteronomy 22:5) Okay. There are some of these things that make sense. All right.

So, we wonder about some. We violate some others. "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for your elder and revere your God." (Leviticus 19:32) Whenever somebody that is aged walks up to you, rise. "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves." (Leviticus 19:28) Does anybody have a tattoo? How about Deuteronomy 14? "The pig is also unclean; although it has a split hoof, it does not chew the cud. You are not to eat their meat or touch their carcasses." Therefore, many restaurants are out of business. Okay? So, all right.

So, we violate some of these, and then we obey some of them. "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:13-14) Okay. So, how do you know when you are suppose to just wonder in confusion, when you are supposed to violate the law, and when you are supposed to obey the law?

General guidelines for reading Old Testament law...

That creates some difficulties, so here are some guidelines. Old Testament law in the Bible. When you see the law mentioned, sometimes it refers to the main, general, same thing, but sometimes it is more specific. There are over 600 specific commandments that are included in the Old Testament law. Sometimes, it refers to all these laws put together. Sometimes, it is referring to the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, the Book of the Law. Sometimes, it is the whole entire Old Testament religious system, and sometimes, it is the rabbi's interpretation of the Old Testament law. You see that in the New Testament.

So, what is the law? The Old Testament law is a gift from God to His people. This is important. The law was not setup to give stipulations and boundaries that were going to make their lives hard. This is a picture of God's love for them. Okay? God's gift.

Second, the Old Testament law is a covenant. God introduces this law and He says, "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations, you will be my treasured possessions," and they received the law in covenant with God. This covenant, this relationship with Him, this promise that they would follow the laws, and He would bless them. This whole picture of covenant.

Third, this Old Testament law is not our testament law. This is key. Anybody know what another word for testament is? Covenant. Testament is another word for covenant. The Old Testament represents the old covenant, God's covenant with His people, Israel, made on Mount Sinai. However, when you get to the New Testament, we get a new covenant, a covenant that the Spirit writes on our hearts now. It is through Christ. It is a whole other picture.

So, here is the general rule. Unless an Old Testament law is somehow restated or reinforced in the New Testament, it is not longer directly binding on God's people. This is where it is going to help us understand Leviticus and other parts of the Old Testament law in Scripture. Old covenant; new covenant. When the Old Testament is not restated or reinforced somehow in the New Testament, it is no longer directly binding on God's people. It is a new covenant picture.

Some laws that are not reinforced. The Israelites civil laws, and what to do with this various crime, or it may be a major crime or minor crime, when someone should be arrested, and the Israelite ritual laws. A lot of these have to do with practices in worship. What does the priest do? What sort of animal is supposed to be sacrificed? How should they be sacrificed? So, those laws are not reinforced in the New Testament.

Laws that are reinforced, though, that relate to the new covenant, I have given some examples there. Matthew 22:40. "*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments,*" which he had just quoted, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Those are Old Testament laws that are reinforced, restated in the New Testament. Deuteronomy 6:5 is where they come from. We know that was restated in the New Testament. Leviticus 19:18 means that, "*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.*" The Ten Commandments, other parts of the law.

You look at the Sermon on the Mount, the picture of what Jesus does with the Old Testament law. What we need to do is we need to think through when we read the law in the Old Testament, what is restated or reinforced in the New Testament. That is going to help us understand how the law applies to us, whether it is binding or not.

However, here is the deal: all the Old Testament law is still the Word of God for us even though it is not the command of God to us. Does this make sense? This doesn't mean that the Old Testament law doesn't matter. It is still very valuable. It doesn't mean that the law is not a valuable part of the Bible. Galatians 3:24 says, "*The law functions to lead us to Christ,*" and then, even reading a verse like Deuteronomy 22:8, "*When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof.*" Okay. That is not binding on us. We don't have to do that when we build a house, however, I think it is good for us to realize that God cared enough about house guests that might come, this whole picture of hospitality, to make a way for someone who comes to your house to be able to live and not fall off the roof. You get to Deuteronomy 15, and it talks about, basically - we won't read through this just for the sake of time - a picture of slavery and redemption, and it gives us a picture of the love of God and this picture of redemption. Also, the Old Testament picture of slavery is not near what we often think of when we think of slavery. All that to say, it is still God's Word for us even though it is not His commands to us.

A practical process for reading Old Testament law...

A practical process, this observing and interpreting. Observe their homes. Look at the laws collectively. You will feel like you are drowning if you try to get every single one, every single one together. Look at the laws collectively.

Look at the laws carefully. According to two basic forms, when you look at the laws, particularly in the book of Leviticus, there are general guidelines, general guidelines where it might be an example given, but it is not intended to give exhaustive - here is every single instance where this would be applied. Then, you do have some specific cases, case-by-case laws. This is probably the majority of those 600 plus laws that are in the Old Testament. I have listed some kinds there. Food laws that deal about the pig. Laws about the shedding of blood. Some unusual prohibitions. Laws giving blessing to those who keep them. Those of some of the specific case by case type deals.

Finally, when comes to observing, look at the laws in their context. Look at the laws in their context. What you have to realize, what you saw not cooking, "*Don't cook a young goat in its mother's milk,*" Deuteronomy 14:21. You have to understand that this was a Canaanite, this was related to a Canaanite practice where pagans would do this and relate it to their worship of many different gods. So, when He says that, it helps to understand why that would not be a good thing, because He doesn't want them to participating in that thing that associated with idol worship. So, look at the laws in their context.

Understand their home: What does it mean? Just a few principles to think through. Understand the law as God's inspired Word for you, not God's direct command to you. We have talked about it.

Understand the character of God and the law. You see God's justice and His holiness and His mercy and His love all over the law. So, look for His character behind it.

Understand the law as a gift, not as a limitation. Old Testament law is a good thing not a bad thing.

Understand the law as a basis for the old covenant and not binding in the new covenant.

Understand the essence of the law that is repeated in the New Testament. For each set of laws, when you look at them collectively, write down what these laws mean. That is the interpretation part of this picture.

Then, just like we talked about, any Old Testament text, we have to look through the New Testament, and the primary filter here is "Are these laws restated or reinforced in the New Testament?" When it comes to these timeless truths, remember the value of the Old Testament law is eternal. The value of the Old Testament law is eternal. It is not that it is not important. All right. That is how to study the law. We are getting there. Okay.

JOURNEYING INTO THE OLD TESTAMENT Poetry

Difficulties in reading Old Testament poetry...

Poetry. Old Testament poetry. This is not just Psalms. Parts of Proverbs are different facets of poetry. Old Testament poetry. Here is what makes it difficult sometimes.

Old Testament poetry, first of all, is bi-directional. What I mean by that is, sometimes, poetry includes God's words to us, but sometimes, it is our words to God. When we usually think about the Bible, well, we think that these are God's words to us, but, actually, the Bible contains some of our words to God. So, how do you interpret our words to God as God word to us? Are you confused? That is what poetry does.

Old Testament poetry is, second, blatantly honest. Look at this verse. Psalm 88:14. "*Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?*" If you stood up in church and prayed that prayer, you probably would not be called on to pray any more. You couldn't pray a prayer like that in a Christian circle and people not look at you like you are weird. "*Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?*" and don't ask John to pray again. That is weird, but this is honest. It is honest, and it is good to be honest before God.

General guidelines for reading Old Testament poetry...

So general guidelines. Old Testament poetry is emotional. It is just emotional. Okay? We have to be careful to look at the emotions of the text and not to try to over-study it to get all we get out of Galatians in the same picture poetry. Just kind of see the emotions.

Old Testament poetry is metaphorical. Psalm 23: get it to break down. For "*The Lord is my what? ...shepherd.*" That is a metaphor.

Old Testament poetry is variable. You see poetry in Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, some of the prophetic books, but even the Psalms alone, I have listed them there. We won't go through them. There are all kinds of different Psalms.

So, there are all kinds of different poetry.

A practical process for reading Old Testament poetry...

Now here is the deal. Observe their home: What do I see? Practical process. Notice the brevity of Old Testament poetry. Old Testament uses a minimum number of words when it comes to poetry. Psalm 25:4, "*Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths.*" That is actually only five words in the Hebrew. Three words in the first part, two words in the second part. It is very brief oftentimes.

Notice the structure of Old Testament poetry. We talked about this some with the Gospels. Parallelism. Where there is close similarity between lines, where one line develops the next one: synonymous, developmental. Another kind of parallelism. The blank there is illustrative, which, basically, the first line conveys an idea and the second line illustrates it.

Sometimes it contrasts, and then, look, and you won't be able to see this actually, this is just kind of an extra. You won't be able to see this because this is only in the Hebrew, but an acrostic. You know what an acrostic is when you have something like "STOP:" 'S' stands for something, 'T' stands for something, 'O' stands for something, 'P' stands for something.

Well, I listed one there just so you might be able to make a note in your Bible, but on those psalms and this proverb, if you look down, this is the Hebrew. Thought you would like a little Hebrew tonight, and Hebrew is actually read from right to left. So, when you look at the first letters, that will give you the Hebrew alphabet. That first letter on the far right, top line is Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Heh, Vav, Zayin, Cheth, Teth, Yod, Kaph, etc., etc. So, it goes through the Hebrew alphabet going down the side there, and so, it is an emphasis there that just adds added meaning to that particular text.

Notice the figurative imagery in Old Testament poetry, all kinds of imagery. The similes like we have talked about. Listen to this one. Proverbs 11:22: *"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion."* Does that inspire you or what? So, there is strong imagery.

Metaphor. We talked about that. *"The LORD is my shepherd..."* (Psalm 23:1) *"A father to the fatherless...God..."* (Psalm 68:5)

Indirect analogy. This comparison it may not be as explicit, more implicit. *"Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me."* (Psalm 22:13) There are just some strong images in Old Testament poetry.

Exaggeration. You see some of the things like *"My tears have been my food day and night..."* (Psalm 42:3) Well, probably not. Come on. However, there is exaggeration there that just gives you that picture.

Personification anthropomorphism. Now, that is a ten-dollar word right there. Anthropomorphism is when we attribute to God the characteristics of a man. Listen to, well I don't think I have an example of that, but, anyway, that is what those are.

Cause and effect. *"Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice."* (Psalm 51:8) *"A foolish son is his father's ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping."* (Proverbs 19:13) Okay. These are good and encouraging texts. Okay?

Representation. What that means is sometimes the part is used to represent the whole. *"He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand."* (Psalm 40:2) Sometimes, a writer addresses a person like he or she is different, is present when they are not. *"Therefore, you kings, be wise..."* (Psalm 2:10) Well, the problem is there are no kings that are actually standing there. *"Why was it, O sea, that you fled, O Jordan, that you turned back."* (Psalm 114:5) I mean, you are talking to the water, but this is a picture that sometimes they use. There are just all kinds of different creative things that writers do to bring these texts alive.

Interpreting these things. Don't understand Old Testament poetry like you would interpret a New Testament letter. This is key. The letters appeal to logic; poetry appeals to emotion. Rational arguments are central in Paul's writing; images are central in poetry. Look at all those figures of speech, and look at these segments of poetry and ask the question, "Okay. What does this mean here in Psalms or Proverbs?" Beautiful stuff in Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, when it comes to poetry. Look for just some of the beauty of the imagery and the figurative language.

JOURNEYING INTO THE OLD TESTAMENT Prophecy

Difficulties in reading Old Testament prophecy...

All right. Prophets. I think prophets are probably the hardest part of the Bible to understand and read. So, if you are just kind of getting started at studying the Bible, I would encourage you to not to start in Ezekiel. That is just not, it is good to get in there at some point, but just don't start there.

We have got just flat out gruesome texts in the prophets. "*As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved...*" (Amos 3:12) Hmm. Okay?

What do we do with insulting texts? This is a picture in Jeremiah 2 that is just downright insulting. How God speaks to His people in this way? It got the point across.

What do we do with texts of judgment here in Jeremiah 15? Here is why I think things are so difficult. We have texts like this, and you read through the prophets, sometimes, and you are like, "How did that get in here?" The deal is we don't have a genre like this in our contemporary literature for the most part. We don't have this kind of literature. We don't hear much about the prophets themselves there. Remember from our Old Testament Secret Church, generally, the narratives tell us about the prophets, and the prophets tell us what they said but don't give us a lot of background there.

General guidelines in reading Old Testament prophecy...

Here are the general guidelines. Old Testament prophets were speaking in light of the old covenant. What that means is the prophets' message is unoriginal. They are delivering the same message that was delivered through Moses in the old covenant, just in different ways, different applications of that, but it is all based on the Old Testament covenant. The prophets' message is confrontational. Confronting people in their sins, and God's love for them. The prophets' message is also completed. Here is what I mean by that. About 99% has already been fulfilled. If you go to prophetic literature, sometimes we think, "Well, this is what is going to happen in the future, and this is talking about this or that contemporary event." Well, less than one percent hadn't really happened yet. So, we need to remember that when we study the Old Testament prophets.

The Old Testament prophets were God's direct representatives. They were speaking on behalf of God. You hear them saying, "Thus saith the Lord." God was speaking through them.

A practical process for reading Old Testament prophecy...

So, observe their home. We look at paragraphs in letters. We look at segments in poetry. We look at stories or discourses in other parts of genres. Look here at oracles. Look at them individually. Individually. They don't flow together from one to the next as easy as some other parts like paragraphs and letters. So, look at them as individuals.

Look at oracles historically. We have to know the historical context. Go back to your notes from Old Testament Secret Church and figure out what was going on in those times, those years 760 to 400 B.C., political, military, economic, and social upheaval, religious

unfaithfulness and reckless disobedience to the covenant and shifts in population, national boundaries.

Look for figures of speech. Instead of Amos saying, "God is mad," he says, "*The Lion is roaring.*" Isaiah says, "*Though your sins are like scarlet. They will be washed as white as...*" What? "...*snow.*" They are just incredible figures of speech.

Look for certain forms. The lawsuit. We are going to fly through these, the lawsuit, the woe. The woe contains three elements, and you see this illustrated on the back of two. It announces the distress, "woe upon this," the reason for that, and the prediction of doom. What is going to happen as a result of that? The promise. You have just incredible promises. Reference to the future, a mention of radical change, and then a promise of blessing to come.

Then, you have the enactment prophecy which is really when it gets interesting. God accompanies his Word with symbolic actions. It is a picture of Hosea. "Go and marry Gomer, a prostitute." Then, you have Isaiah here. You have to mention Isaiah 20:3-4. "*Just as my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years, as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot...*" Do you realize what that is saying? I mean poor Isaiah. God instructed him to go out publicly in his underwear, at least periodic times, for three years to be an illustration of what was going to happen in this picture. I mean, it is not fun to be a prophet. So, the enactment prophecy.

The messenger speech that says, "Thus says the Lord." This is going to happen. This is what the sovereign Lord says.

As I mentioned, think oracles. Think oracles. There are three main points in an oracle. You look for these. You have broken the covenant; repent! That is what they are saying. Here is where you have broken the covenant, and now, you need to repent. They talked about mainly repenting from idolatry, repenting from lack of social justice, and then their religious ritualism. That is Isaiah 1:13, "*Stop bringing meaningless offerings*" to me! Then, he says, "If you don't repent, you are going to experience judgment." If you don't repent, you are going to experience judgment, but here is the beautiful part, and you get to this in prophetic writings. You have hope beyond judgment for the future, for future restoration. You have hope beyond judgment for future restoration. Basically, you look at that oracle and you say, "Okay. What is the prophet saying here?" You look at it. I encourage you to look at it through those three facets. Okay. We have a couple more. We are going to make it.

JOURNEYING INTO THE OLD TESTAMENT Wisdom Literature

Difficulties in reading Old Testament wisdom literature...

Wisdom literature. Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. Isn't this keeping you awake? Okay. Here is the problem here. It is difficult to follow the line of thinking sometimes in these books. Difficult to follow the line of thinking in Job. If you read the old Job, you know that. It is difficult to understand literary styles. If we can't understand them, it leads to abuse of the text, and, sometimes, it is difficult to determine the meaning. Listen to Song of Solomon 4:1,

How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats... Is this a compliment? ...descending from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone.

Wow. Single guys, if you are looking for a wife, look for teeth like a flock of sheep. So, in application, don't marry someone without good hygiene. Is that what this is talking about? Only if she has white teeth and not one of them are missing. Okay. So, what do you do with that? I told you that was getting fun. This is so much better than any other date night on a Friday night. I mean this is beautiful.

General guidelines for reading Old Testament wisdom literature...

So, the goal of wisdom literature is to apply the Word to practical living. That is what wisdom is. Knowledge applied. The wisdom books are not a collection of universal promises. We talked about this some when we talked about Proverbs in Old Testament Secret Church. *"He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend."* (Proverbs 22:11) That doesn't mean that if you have gracious speech that the president is going to be your friend now, but the picture is not a universal promise, but it is knowledge applied to life.

A practical process for reading Old Testament wisdom literature...

A practical process here. Observe their home. Look for figures of speech. Look for the historical-cultural background. When you read that it is *"Better to live on a corner of a roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife,"* (Proverbs 25:24) realize that it was possible to live on the corner of a roof at that time. Men just have this picture of being out in the corner of the roof and just kind of hanging out there. Actually, you could live there.

So, understand their home: What does it mean? Interpret wisdom literature in light of its specific book context. What is going on in this book? Proverbs is a collection of proverbs that are not necessarily intended to flow from one to the next. They are a collection put together. Interpret wisdom literature in light of its overall biblical context. We have talked about these different books that are classified as wisdom literature.

Basically, you have Proverbs as kind of the foundation of wisdom literature. It gives us a picture of a rational and ordered approach to life. Then, you have a few exceptions. You have Job, the suffering of the righteous. What happens when you do these things and suffering comes? Exception number two is the failure of that kind of approach to life to providing meaning in Ecclesiastes, and exception number three: the irrationality of romantic love between a husband and a wife. So, read whether it is a proverb or a section of Job and ask, "What is the point of this thing?"

Bring it back home. Just like when we got to look through the New Testament to get it there. All right.

JOURNEYING INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT Revelation

Difficulties in reading Revelation...

We are in Revelation. All right. Here we go. We come back to the Revelation. So many difficulties, so many details, so many images, so many numbers, so many different views of Revelation, what do you do? It is an easy recipe for a headache. How do you understand Revelation?

General guidelines for reading Revelation...

Here are some general guidelines, and I am not going to pretend that in the next 60 seconds you are going to be able to understand Revelation, but just some things to think through.

Look at Revelation with humility. Okay? You can't figure everything out and that is Okay. Look for Revelation's message to the original readers. Don't forget this was not intended to inspire a "Left Behind" series. This was written to first century believers, first century believers in the context of persecution. Okay? Avoid trying to construct the strict chronological mapping of future events. Okay? What year is this going to happen, when, and what is going to happen the next year? I would refrain from trying to do that. Take Revelation seriously, but not always literally. Okay? A lot of imagery here when you walk through this process.

A practical process for reading Revelation...

Observe their home: What do I see? Look closely at the images that John specifically identifies. There are some images that are consistent throughout the book. John says this is what this image means, so write that down, get your arms around that. Look at the various segments as a whole, as a whole. Not always pressing every detail. A lot of the times, in other genres, we focus on all the details, and it gets us to this picture, well, start with that general picture. Don't get too caught up in all the details.

Understanding their home: What does it mean? Stay focused on the main idea. Keep the main thing the main thing in the book of Revelation as you read through it. When you read these different parts, write down what is the point.

An example of reading Revelation...

Let me give you an example. Do you have your Bibles? Let's open them one time tonight. Go with me to Revelation 12, and we will close out here. As you are getting your Bible out, I want to remind you what all this revolves around. It revolves around four steps in a process, and I hope, I hope that whether you use this or something different that, tonight, the result would be you saying, "Okay," and I know this is information overload, and I am not saying now you know how to study every facet of the Bible, but I hope you have a lens through which you can begin to formulate a plan for how you are going to study the Bible. I put a section in the back of your notes that says "Now what?" It identifies some steps to begin to take. I want us to be able to walk away from here, practically, tonight and be able to sit down with a passage of Scripture this next week and the following week, the following week, the following year, the following year, and be able to study the Bible, systematically study the Bible. Observe: What do I see in this text? Understand their home: What does it mean? In that context. Be able to write down, here is a statement or two that represent what that means, and then say, "Okay. How does this relate to me? What are the timeless

truths that are here?" Then, "Who am I going to be? How am I going to think? What am I going to do? Where am I going to go? Who am I going to teach based on this passage of Scripture?"

Revelation 12. We don't have time to study it completely tonight, but I want you to read with me Revelation 12:10-12. *"Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say, now have come the salvation..."* No, let's start in verse 7. I apologize. Let's start in verse 7.

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say this: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

While we don't have time to go into a thorough the whole observation/interpretation process with this text tonight, the picture is this. The picture is of Satan, the dragon being thrown down, being defeated by Christ, but at the same time, having arranged, so to speak, having a place where he went about accusing brothers day and night. At work, spiritual warfare is real. One of the timeless truths that comes away from this passage. There is also a picture of God's people still suffering in this picture of the dragon, and it is possible for God's people, who trust in Him, to still experience suffering. However, the picture in Revelation 12 is that Christians can overcome death itself by living and faithfully proclaiming the gospel of Christ. I want you to look at that verse 11. *"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."*

When I was in Indonesia, I was talking to one believer, and I asked him his testimony, how he had come to faith in Christ, and he described how he was from the Batak tribe of Northern Sumatra, Indonesia. He said at a point in history, the entire Batak tribe was entirely Muslim, completely Muslim, one hundred percent. He said, "Two missionaries came, a couple, and shared the gospel with my tribe. My tribal leaders took those missionaries, and when they would not stop sharing the gospel, struck them down and killed them, and my tribe cannibalized them." This couple that had given their lives to go to the Batak tribe in Northern Sumatra, Indonesia, eaten by that tribe. He said, "A few years later, another missionary came to my tribe, and he shared the gospel with us and this time my tribal leaders said, 'Hey, this guy is saying what that other couple had said. Maybe we should listen to him,' and they did. They listened to him over and over and over again, and, eventually, the tribal leaders came to faith in Christ." He said, "Once my tribal leaders came to faith in Christ, within a couple of months, the entire tribe had converted to Christianity." He looked at me, and he said, "Today there are 3 million believers among the Batak tribe of Northern Sumatra, Indonesia." Will you take this Word to the nations even if it means your life? I remind you that we will overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. May we not love our lives so much as to shrink from death, and may God exalt the greater glory of Christ through His Church, even if it costs us everything to make

this Word that we study known. We focus, each time we do Secret Church, on a different area of the world. Tonight we focused on Southeast Asia. The next time we gather together, we hope to focus on the Middle East, which you heard me talk about some tonight.

What I want to do tonight is to give you a gift. I am going to invite people to begin coming down and passing this gift out. What it is, let me encourage you, at first, as these are passed out, if you could take one of these per family. I just want to make sure that every family gets one. So, if you are here by yourself, then take one. If you are here with your wife, your husband, kids, then take one of these per family, and then, we will have some extras in the back if we have leftovers. What you are receiving right now, as these baskets are being passed, is a Christmas ornament, and it is actually the logo of Secret Church. If you look on the back, it says it is hand made in a country in the Middle East. This is a country that we had the opportunity to go to. This is a country where it is illegal to be a follower of Jesus Christ. If you come to Christ from Islam in this country, you will immediately be and legally be killed. I said it is illegal to be a follower of Christ. That is not true. It is illegal to convert to faith in Christ from Islam, and these ornaments were made by a people who are in a context, where for the first time, they were being exposed to the gospel. The hands that crafted the ornament that sits in front of you are made by men and women who are unreached with the gospel. So, my invitation for you is to take this ornament, and this Christmas put it on your tree and let this be a picture of the fact that you are ready to give your life to make the gospel known. The message of Christ that we celebrate at Christmas, you are ready to make it known among the hardest to reach places in the earth.

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