**Part 3: Tips for Deeper Understanding**

(Including Various Portions and Types of Literature in the Bible)

**1. Interpreting Scripture with Scripture**

Read 1 Corinthians 2:11-13.

* What does this passage tell us about God?
* What does this passage tell us about people?
* If we don’t understand something in one part of God’s Word, why might some other part of his Word help us toward better understanding?
* What steps can we take to fill our mind and heart with God’s Word, so the Spirit can easily point us to other relevant passages of Scripture?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through this passage?

**2. Interpreting Earlier Scriptures in Light of Later Scriptures** (progressive revelation)

Read Matthew 5:17-22, 27-42.

* What does this passage tell us about God?
* What does this passage tell us about people?
* What does this passage tell us about Jesus’ relationship to the Old Testament law?
* What is the difference between abolishing something and fulfilling it?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through this passage?

Read Malachi 3:6.

* What does this passage tell us about God?
* What does this passage tell us about people?
* Review Hebrews 1:1-2 and Matthew 5:17, 21-22.
* How shall we understand the will of an unchanging God who gives new revelation in Scripture that updates earlier revelation?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these passages?

Read Luke 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 25-26.

* What do these passages show us about how the Apostle Paul applied Jesus’ teaching to situations in the early church?
* What conclusions can we draw about developing a systematic overview of the Bible’s teaching and application, as we study the Old Testament, the Gospels and the NT Letters?

**3. Interpreting Stories**

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-11.

* What does this passage tell us about God?
* What does this passage tell us about people?
* What does this passage tell us about God’s reasons for recording the Old Testament stories in the Bible?
* What does God want us to do when we hear or read a story in the Bible?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through this passage?

Read Romans 4:18-24, note especially verse 20.

* What does this passage tell us about God?
* What does this passage tell us about people?
* What does this passage tell us about God’s reasons for recording Abraham’s story in the Bible?
* What response does God hope will arise in us (in relationship to him) when we hear or read a story in the Bible?
* hat will you do to obey one thing God has told you through this passage?

Read John 21:25.

* What does this passage tell us about God?
* What does this passage tell us about people?
* What does this passage tell us about the information included (and not included) in John’s Gospel?
* What does this teach us about all the stories recorded in the Bible (and their relationship to the Bible’s message as a whole)?
* What difference does this make as we interpret stories in the Bible?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through this passage?

Read Genesis 38:6-30 and 1 Corinthians 10:6-13.

* What do these passages tell us about God?
* What do these passages tell us about people?
* Why do you think God included in the Bible stories of the sinful behavior of important people like the ancestors of King David and Jesus the Messiah?
* How can the Bible help us discern which parts of stories are positive examples to follow and which things are negative examples to avoid?
* What difference does this make as we interpret stories in the Bible?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these passages?

Read Romans 15:4; Romans 4:23-24; Psalm 102:18; 1 Corinthians 9:9-11 and

Review 1 Corinthians 10:11 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

* What do these passages tell us about God?
* What do these passages tell us about people?
* What questions do these verses encourage us to ask when we read any stories in the Bible (about the story’s immediate context, its place in the context of salvation history revealed throughout the Bible, and possible applications to us personally and our group’s situations)?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these passages?

**4. Interpreting Law**

Read Gal 3:19-25 and Psalm 1:1-2.

* What do these passages tell us about God?
* What do these passages tell us about people?
* What do these passages tell us about God’s reasons for giving the Old Testament laws to Moses (as recorded mainly in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy)?
* What do these verses tell us about appropriate interpretation and application to us in Christ?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these passages?

Read Romans 10:4; Hebrews 10:1-14; Hebrews 9:11-14 and Hebrews 7:18-19, 22.

* What do these passages tell us about God?
* What do these passages tell us about people?
* What do these passages tell us about God’s reasons for giving the sacrificial (ceremonial) laws in the Old Testament (Old Covenant)?
* Since the ceremonial laws have been fulfilled in Christ, what blessing does God intend us in Christ to receive from them?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these passages?

Read Deuteronomy 4:1-8; Exodus 19:3-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 7:9-10 and Matthew 5:17.

* What do these passages tell us about God?
* What do these passages tell us about people?
* What do the Old Testament passages tell us about God’s reasons for giving the national laws to the nation of Israel?
* What do the New Testament passages tell us about God’s holy nation in Christ?
* In what way does Jesus fulfill the national laws that were given to Israel?
* Why is this important for us in Christ as we interpret Israel’s national laws? How can we find appropriate applications to our lives as God’s holy nation/people, wherever we live?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these passages?

Review Matthew 5:17-20 and read Psalm 119: 137-138, 142 and Romans 2:12-16.

* What do these passages tell us about God?
* What do these passages tell us about people?
* What does Romans 2:14-15 tell us about the relationship between God’s moral law and human consciences?
* What standard will God use when he judges all humanity?
* Does God still expect obedience to his moral law?

Review Matthew 5:17-20 and read Matthew 5:21-48.

* How is Jesus’ fulfillment of God’s moral law different than his fulfillment of Israel’s ceremonial law and national law?
* How can the New Testament help us discern the difference between the three types of laws and thus the difference in their application to us?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

**5. Interpreting Poetry.**

Hebrew poetry (as found in Psalms, Proverbs and parts of a few other books) is usually expressed in pairs of lines (parallelism). The second line is related to the first line in one of the following ways:

1. Synonymous Parallelism (repetition), in which the idea of the first line is repeated, but with different words.

Read Psalm 117:1; Psalm 118:25; Proverbs 15:30.

* What do these verses tell us about God?
* What do these verses tell us about people?
* How does understanding the parallelism in these verses help you understand and apply them?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

2. Antithetic Parallelism (contrast), in which the idea of the second line is contrasted with the thought in the first line. The second line often begins with the word “but.”

Read Psalm 1:6; 11:5 and Proverbs 15:30.

* What do these verses tell us about God?
* What do these verses tell us about people?
* How does understanding the parallelism in these verses help you understand and apply them?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

3. Synthetic Parallelism (completion), in which the thought of the second line completes the thought of the first line. The two lines usually can’t stand alone; both are needed to complete the thought. Some key words often used or implied in synthetic parallelism are “for,” “that,” “so that,” and “because.”

Read Psalm 25:21; 116:7; Proverbs 4:2 and Ecclesiastes 4:9.

* What do these verses tell us about God?
* What do these verses tell us about people?
* How does understanding the parallelism in these verses help you understand and apply them?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

4. Symbolic Parallelism, in which a word picture—a metaphor—in one line illustrates the thought stated literally in the other line. The comparison words “like” or “as” are often found or implied in one of the lines.

Read Psalm 42:1; Proverbs 10:26 and 26:18-19.

* What do these verses tell us about God?
* What do these verses tell us about people?
* How does understanding the parallelism in these verses help you understand and apply them?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

Hebrew poetry often uses picturesque and strong language to convey a message. Trying to interpret poetic language literally can sometimes lead to incorrect understanding.

Read Psalm 34:15-16; 91:4; Deuteronomy 4:15-18 and Romans 1:21-23.

* What do these verses tell us about God?
* How can you tell that the verses in Psalms contain metaphorical (not literal) descriptions of God?
* What biblical truths are being portrayed by the poetic language in these verses from the Psalms?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

Read Psalm 46.

* What do these verses tell us about God?
* Which verses or parts of verses contain picturesque (not literal) language?
* What biblical truths are being conveyed by the poetic language in these verses?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

**6. Interpreting Proverbs**.

A proverb is a short, memorable summary of a general truth. It is not an absolute or universal truth or a guaranteed promise. Proverbs are worded to be memorable guidelines to good behavior, not to be theoretically precise.

Read Proverbs 26:4-5; 18:22 and Proverbs 27:15-16.

* What do these verses tell us about people?
* Why is it important to understand that God doesn’t intend these proverbs as absolute truths?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

**7. Interpreting Prophecy**

Old Testament prophets proclaimed messages directly from God to the people of their time. To correctly interpret and apply prophetic writings, we need to remember that the prophetic messages we read were not originally given for us. The specific issues addressed are usually not the specific issues that we or the people around us are facing. Some prophecies include prediction of events that were future (including the first and second coming of the Messiah), but most focus on exhortation for the prophet’s immediate audience. We can be encouraged as we understand how God’s message for that time fits into the big picture of salvation history. And as we compare their situation to ours, we can draw timeless principles (relevant for all times and cultures) that will help us obey God’s will for us in Christ.

Read Isaiah 45:1-13.

* What parts of these verses are specific to Isaiah’s context and not directly relevant to your context?
* What do some of these verses tell us about God?
* What do these verses tell us about people (that are as true in your context as they were in Isaiah’s context)?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

Read Jeremiah 11:1-8.

* What parts of these verses are specific to Jeremiah’s context and not directly relevant to your context?
* What things mentioned in these verses are similar *but different* for God’s people today under the New Covenant in Christ? (Remember the earlier lesson about “Interpreting Earlier Scriptures in Light of Later Scriptures.”)
* What do these verses tell us about God?
* What do these verses tell us about God’s eternal will for his people (things as true in your context as in Jeremiah’s context)?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

Read Isaiah 30:12-22.

* What parts of these verses are specific to Isaiah’s context and not directly relevant to your context?
* What things mentioned in these verses are similar *but different* for God’s people today under the New Covenant in Christ?
* What do some of these verses tell us about God?
* What do these verses tell us about people (things as true in your context as they were in Isaiah’s context)?
* What do these verses tell us about God’s eternal will for his people (things as true in your context as in Isaiah’s context)?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

**8. Interpreting Imprecations (Curses) on Old Testament Enemies**

Some Old Testament poetic textsuse very strong language about enemies. How does God want us to understand and apply these texts?

Read Matthew 5:43-48 and Romans 12:14, 17-21.

* What do these passages tell us about God?
* What do these passages tell us about people?
* How does Jesus want us to view and treat our human enemies?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these passages?

Read 1 Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians 6:10-12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

* What do these passages tell us about God?
* What do these passages tell us about people?
* As followers of Jesus, who are our real enemies?
* How is our warfare in Christ different than the warfare of the OT nation Israel?
* How can understanding this difference help us draw timeless principles from OT texts about enemies?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these passages?

Read Psalm 139:17-24.

* If we understand the difference between OT believers’ enemies and NT believers’ enemies, how does that understanding help us find eternal principles in these verses?
* What things mentioned in these verses are similar *but different* for God’s people today under the New Covenant in Christ?
* What do some of these verses tell us about God?
* What do these verses tell us about people (things that are as true in your context as they were in David’s context)?
* What do these verses tell us about God’s eternal will for his people (things that are as true in your context as in David’s context)?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

Read 1 Samuel 24:1-7; 26:1-11 (If needed as background, also 1 Samuel 19:1-10; 23:7-14.)

* When King Saul was clearly David’s enemy, how did David treat him?
* What does this tell us about David’s view of strong emotional language in prayer (calling on God to act) *in contrast with* his actions in personal relationship with his enemy?

Read Psalm 42:5-11.

* What does this show us about honestly telling our negative feelings to God and inviting him to work?

Read Psalm 4:4; Ephesians 4:25-26, 29-32.

* What do these verses tell us about God’s will when we feel angry toward other people?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

**9. Interpreting Picturesque Sayings of Jesus**

Read Matthew 7:3-5 and 19:24.

* Do you think Jesus intended the log and the camel to be understood literally?
* Why do you think Jesus used such striking pictures to illustrate his point?

As we saw with poetic language in the OT, trying to understand figurative language literally leads to incorrect understanding.

Read Matthew 5:29-30.

* What point do you think Jesus was trying to convey by using such striking language?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

**10. Interpreting Parables**

Read Matthew 13:44-46.

A parable isa memorable story illustrating one main point. Focus on that main point; details are only relevant to the extent they support the main point. Make sure the main point you see agrees with the rest of biblical teaching.

* What do these two parables tell us about the kingdom of heaven?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

**11. Interpreting Acts**

Read Matthew 28:18-20; John 14:11-14 and Acts 1:1-2, 8.

* How do Jesus’ statements before he returned to heaven help us understand what happens in the rest of the book of Acts?
* Why do you think Luke (the author of Acts) wrote “all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1)? How does the book of Acts describe a continuation of what Jesus did in the gospels?
* Look again at Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8.
* Do you see any indications that these statements were intended only for the original apostles?
* Do you see any indications that these statements were intended to apply until the end of this age?

Read Acts 1:21-22; 2:1-25 and 3:13-15.

* What are some things found in Acts that are unique to that time and the new elements of salvation history being revealed at that time?
* How would you summarize the difference between things in Acts that God intended to be unique to that time and things in Acts that God intended to serve as examples and patterns for his people throughout this age?
* Remembering the earlier lesson about “Interpreting Earlier Scriptures in Light of Later Scriptures,” how can the teachings in the Epistles help us discern the difference between things in Acts that God intended to be unique to that time and things in Acts that God intended to serve as examples and patterns for his people throughout this age?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

Read Acts 13:13-48; 14:8-20 and 17:16-34.

* As the gospel moved from the Jewish context into other cultural and religious contexts, how did the messengers adjust their approach in sharing the gospel?
* In light of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, what can we learn and apply from the different approaches Paul used with different audiences in Acts?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

**12. Interpreting Letters.**

Read Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 and 1 Peter 1:1-2.

* Who were the NT letters originally written to?
* In what ways is our situation similar to theirs?
* In what ways is our situation different from theirs?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.

* What parts of this text are specific to the situation at that time?
* What parts of this text contain principles that are applicable for all times and places in this age?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

**13. Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature** (especially the Book of Revelation)

Read Revelation 1:9-11; note also Revelation 2:1-3:22.

* To whom was this message originally given?
* How is our situation the same as theirs and how is it different?

Read Revelation 1:1-3 and 22:6-7.

* What kind of message is contained in this book?
* Why was this information revealed?

Read Matthew 24:3-14; 42-44 and Acts 1:7-8.

* When Jesus talked about the end of the age, what did he say about dates and times?
* What did he say his followers should be doing as we prepare for the end of the age?

Read Revelation 12:1-17.

* Which parts of this are difficult to interpret and which parts have a clear and useful application for us?
* What will you do to obey one thing God has told you through these verses?

For the Book of Revelation, as well as all other parts of the Bible: If the meaning of a passage is unclear, even after comparison with other Scriptures, don’t worry about it. Obey the parts of Scripture you *do* understand, and God will give you sufficient insight for a blessed and holy life in eternal fellowship with him