

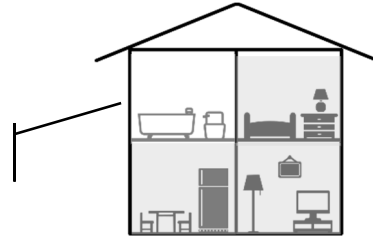
BIBLIOLOGY

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY – ENGAGING THE BIBLE

Prepared by Pastor Giles Litzner

LESSON THIRTEEN

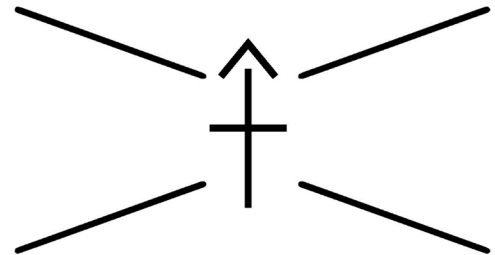
Practical Theology



TRAVELING THROUGH THE CROSS – The Gospel’s Impact on Interpretation

The Bible is a single, unified *Story* with Jesus as the centerpiece, the main character, the hero. As such, the redemptive narrative that unites the entire Bible is the macro-theme of the Scriptures. The *Seed Promise* (Genesis 3:15) and *Blood Picture* (Genesis 3:21) find their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus – the Messiah. The incarnation, sinless life, substitutionary death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is the centerpiece of this *Story*.

Consequently, the 39 books of the Old Testament anticipate the Messiah through promise, picture, prophecy, and pattern – they are shadows pointing to Jesus as the substance. The 27 books of the New Testament reveal how Jesus is the fulfillment of this mystery and how our identity in Christ transforms our relationship with God and with one another.



THE OLD TESTAMENT

When reading through or studying the Old Testament, it’s helpful to ask the following questions as we consider the legitimate connection from the biblical text to gospel of Jesus Christ:

- How does this text anticipate or point to the Messiah? (promise, prophecy, picture, pattern)
- What aspect of the gospel is on display in the text?
- Is this text quoted or paraphrased in the New Testament? (cross-reference)

THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we read or study the New Testament, some questions to consider are:

- How does this text accent the gospel?
- What are the consequences in light of the gospel?
- Is this text quoting or paraphrasing an Old Testament text? (cross-reference)

PRACTICE MAKES PROGRESS...

After the resurrection, Jesus shows the disciples how the Old Testament Scriptures point to him (Luke 24). He also declares that they will be witnesses of this gospel to the end of the earth. The context of those Scriptures and that witness specifically point to two things: his death and resurrection (which anticipate the intended response of repentance by faith, resulting in

forgiveness). In other words, the text of the Old and New Testaments point to the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

In order to faithfully understand the text, we must find the legitimate relationship between our text and this gospel of Jesus Christ. Learning to filter every text (OT/NT) through the gospel will help us avoid misapplication (i.e. moralism, legalism, or contextualizing).

What is the context of Luke 24:25-27?

What hermeneutical principle do we learn from Jesus in this text? (cf. Jn. 3:39; Acts 10:43)

What is the context, the principle, and application of Luke 24:44-49?

- **Context:**

- **Principle:**

- **Application:**

CONTEXT. CONTEXT. CONTEXT.

Context cannot be overemphasized. Who enjoys being taken out of context? Who likes being misinterpreted? Ignoring context will inevitably lead to misinterpretation and followed by a host of errors when studying, teaching, and applying the biblical text.

We must avoid the temptation to isolate the text (i.e. verse, paragraph, character, event, etc.). If we separate a text from its context, we run the risk of missing the point or getting the meaning wrong entirely. Learning to understand the text in its context or how it would have been understood by the original audience, we can be better prepared to understand the right application of the text to our lives personally and corporately.

Before we explore the three arenas of context, let's first consider three tools or principles that will help us better navigate this process.

STAYING ON THE LINE

The “Line of Scripture” presupposes that the content of every book, paragraph, and verse has intent by the Author through the authors. In our exploration of Scripture, we want to “stay on the trail” and avoid any temptation to veer from it. We can be

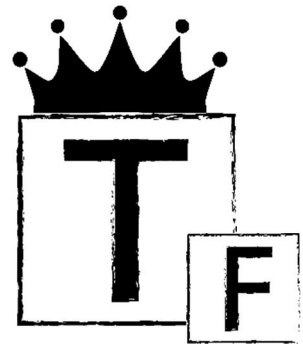


tempted to say more than the Scriptures, zealously venturing into religious pietism, which becomes either legalistic or moralistic. We judge others who do not maintain our extra-biblical traditions or standards. We can also be tempted to dip below the line into liberalism and pragmatism, ignoring both the content and the point of the text. We must commit ourselves to saying nothing more or less than the Scriptures say.

TEXT AND FRAMEWORK

We all have frameworks. We must let the Bible shape our framework rather than our framework shaping our interpretations and application of the Bible.

What do we mean by “framework”? A framework is the lens that shapes or colors our perspective when approaching life or our study of the Scriptures. A framework can also be described as our presuppositions that shape our thinking, processing, and responses. Our frameworks have been shaped by our past experiences and present level of knowledge, thus, they have developed and changed over the course of our lives. We don’t always realize the impact our framework has on our daily lives or on our approach to the Scriptures. Regardless, it is helpful to understand and be aware of (honest about) our frameworks and learn to submit them to the text, rather than bending the text until it says what we want it to say.



What are some examples of frameworks that shape our lives and approach to the biblical text?



MELODIC LINE

We will have a better understanding of a particular text if we understand what the whole book is about. Books of the Bible have a coherent, sustained message – big idea – similar to the unique melody of a song. This message is waiting to be heard! This melodic line or big idea unites the whole book – macro-theme and macro-aim – concisely stating what the whole book is about.

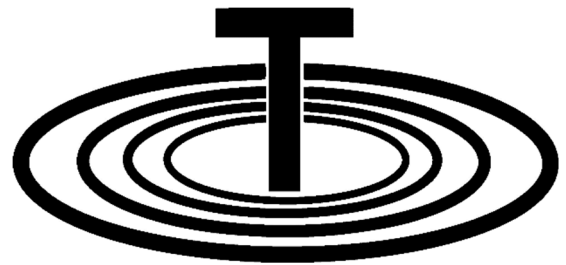
Every passage (think paragraphs) will be related to the melodic line in some way either directly or indirectly as support or contrast. Our task is to listen long enough and listen well in order to hear the melody. This takes time, reading and rereading, listening, practice.

Every text either contributes to or is informed by the melodic line.

Practice: Purpose Statement (John 20:30-31; Hebrews 8:1); Top and Tail (Romans 1:1-7; 16:25-27)

CONTEXT. CONTEXT. CONTEXT.

Taking the three tools into consideration – Staying on the Line, Text & Framework, and Melodic Line – we now turn our attention to the importance of CONTEXT. The questions we must be willing to ask and answer regarding context are, “Why has the author put this passage here (at this place) in the book?” and “What immediately precedes and follows this passage?”



The three arenas of context we will consider are 1) Literary 2) Historical 3) Biblical.

1) LITERARY CONTEXT

The literary context is navigated by considering the genre of literature, the book/letter as a whole (melodic line/big picture), and paragraphs (organized thought/structure).

- a. **Genre** – Just as grammar matters, the style of literature matters. We must learn to read and interpret with the type of literary work in mind. Should we read parables same way we would an epistle? Should poetry be considered differently than narrative? What will happen if we ignore the genre when studying Scripture?
- b. **Whole Book** – Each book of the Bible has structure, purpose, and intent. In order to better grasp any section within the book we must understand the big picture of the whole book. Attempting to study a verse or paragraph in isolation from the whole can be dangerously problematic.
- c. **Paragraphs** – As we learn to “think paragraphs,” we get better at finding the structure and the emphasis. We must also consider the paragraphs immediately preceding and following our selected paragraph? Why might this be important?

2) HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Discovering the historical context takes a deeper dive into the circumstances and culture of the original audience. The first step in this process is to read and reread the text. Reading the text multiple times helps us discover what we learn about the original audience explicitly from this book of the Bible. Are there other passages that shed light on the historical context of the audience? (i.e. 1 Thess. 1:1-10 and Acts 17:1-9)

After mining everything we can about the original audience from what is written, we turn our attention to information that is implicit from the text. This is where we cautiously reverse engineer the problem being addressed. In the epistles, it's like we're eavesdropping on a phone conversation trying to piece together enough information while only hearing one side. (i.e. Rom. 6:1, 15).

Finally, we turn our attention to outside resources. We always approach outside resources with great caution. A "good" study Bible provides a helpful start. Consider the time period, culture, and geography of the book studied. Commentaries and online resources are very helpful, but everything must be verified.

3) BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Discovering the biblical context reminds us of the meta-narrative (big picture) of the Scriptures. Scripture is a unique literary work spanning 1500 years and written by 40+ writers from all walks of life with one author – God. While several themes may be traced throughout the Scriptures, it is a single, cohesive *Story* with Jesus as its center.

This is where we learn to cross-reference. Footnotes in the margins of our Bibles are helpful starting points as we consider direct quotations and paraphrases from other passages of Scripture. There is really no substitute for reading through your Bible and becoming very familiar with the overarching *Story*. The more we read, the more we see and hear, the more we will connect the dots to the promises, pictures, prophecies, and patterns on display throughout the biblical narrative.

STRUCTURE

Regardless the genre of literature used in the Bible, every literary work has structure. The structure will reveal the emphasis of the author (author's intended meaning). Why is this important? What's the big deal if I discover the structure or not?

It's very helpful to discover how the author has organized the material if we want the author's emphasis to shape our understanding and lead our response to the text. We might think of this as the skeleton of the text. We must get the "bones" put together properly in order get an accurate picture of the body. Once we are able to apprehend the structure, we must determine the emphasis that structure reveals. Only then will we begin to see the "life" of the passage. We must learn to look at the text with x-ray eyes to see the skeletal structure.



Practice Makes Progress:

It can take a lot of practice to begin identifying bones and structures accurately. There are a variety of strategies to learn, but we'll focus on two primary strategies: divisions and plot arc.

- 1) Divisions** – Discovering how the book (letter) is logically divided helps the reader understand and follow the author's argument and find his purpose in writing. It further helps when studying smaller sections or divisions: a) considering how this section fits into the big picture b) considering context.

Process: This can be a first step in discovering divisions, but will later be tested and verified with continued study.

A) Take a piece of paper and make columns for each of the chapters in the book you're reading.

B) Considering the paragraph divisions within the chapter, start by listing the verse divisions. Look for rational units with a discernable beginning and ending.

C) Read the paragraph and write a summary statement of the paragraph (clear, concise).

D) As you read through the paragraphs, make sure you tie each one to what precedes and follows. There should be consistency and continuity between paragraphs.

Think Paragraphs: Rational units of thought that have a clear beginning and ending. Paragraphs are a series of sentences with prominence (a main idea) and cohesion (held together by and relate to the main idea).

- 2) Plot Arc** – The structure in a narrative or story is typically discovered by following the plot arc. This strategy can very helpful when reading the Old Testament historical books and the prophets, along with the New Testament Gospels and Acts.

Process:

A) Setting: Where is the scene taking place (location)? Who are the characters? What time of day is it? What is the situation?

B) Rising Action: What is the rising action taking place? What's the conflict or tension? Is there an incident needing correction or solution?

C) Climax: Where has the story hit its turning point? What is the moment in the story that has the greatest amount of drama, action, or movement? What moment make the resolution inevitable?

D) Resolution: How does the conflict play out? Is the problem resolved? Is the outworking positive or negative?

E) New Setting: How does the setting change? How is this connected to the entire narrative within the book?

WRAP-UP

It's important to remember that structure is NOT ultimately what we are after. Structure is a servant, a tool, a resource to discover the author's emphasis or claim.