

# How to Study the Bible

Spring 2017 Discipleship Class

Session 3 – Narratives and Law

*Homework from last time?*

## I. INTRODUCTION

- One of the hardest issues with interpreting the Bible is how to put the testaments together. Tonight we'll tap into one of the major issues with that: the law.
- And if the law is hard and so we need to think about it, narrative is massive and we need to think about it.
- Somewhere around 2/3 of the Bible is narrative—stories, histories, who did what. Genesis to Esther is all narrative; Matthew to Acts is all narrative, and these sections dwarf the rest of our Bibles.
- A glimpse at the challenges with the law in the Old Testament:

*"You shall not murder. (Exod 20:13)*

*For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. (Lev 11:44)*

*"Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house." (Lev 16:6)*

*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Lev 19:18)*

*"You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain. (Deut 25:4)*

*Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah (Ps 4:4)*

*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hos 6:6)*

## II. QUICK REVIEW: AUTHORS' FOUR STEPS FOR INTERPRETATION

- Their basic metaphor...



- Grasp the text in their town.
  - Read closely
  - Read for details
  - Read the words
  - Determine what the text is saying.
- Measure the width of the river to cross.
  - Assess the gap(s) between you and the passage.
  - Consider the differences.

- Cross the principalizing bridge.
  - Consider the common ground between you and the passage.
  - There is *always* significant common ground, but sometimes takes a little work to articulate it.
- Grasp the text in our town.
  - Apply it *specifically*.
  - Not just, "obey God." But, "work harder at my homework because of Colossians 3:23."
- Tonight we'll be thinking especially about the third and fourth steps in their process—principalizing bridge and grasping the text in our town.
- So, *how do we approach the law and narratives of the Bible?*

### III. HOW DO WE DO THIS?

- The Bible will teach you how to interpret the Bible.
  - Takes patience and work, but it will teach you. If you start in Genesis and work through Revelation repeatedly and intelligently, you'll start to make some critical conclusions. But it's also helpful to have others give you some guidance along the way to shorten the process.
  - A few principles to keep in mind...
- We read the OT as Christians!

*Keep in mind that we must read and interpret the Old Testament as Christians. That is, although we believe that the Old Testament is part of God's inspired Word to us, we do not want to ignore the Cross and thus interpret and apply this literature as if we were Old Testament Hebrews. We affirm that we are New Testament Christians, and we will interpret the Old Testament from that vantage point.*  
*Journey into God's Word, 130*

- Read your Bible *backwards* before you read it *forwards*.
  - Have to start with the New Testament or you'll never understand the Old Testament.
  - This isn't *Tom Sawyer* where you always start with page one and read until the last page. *Then* you go back and read it again to pick up on things along the way.
  - With the Bible, if you lack a good understanding of the New Testament you'll really mess up interpreting your Old Testament.
  - Put together the clues in the New Testament and build some principles for interpreting places where we lack direct connections between Old and New Testament texts.
- Remember that Jesus is the centerpiece of the entire Bible—not just the New Testament:

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matt 1:1)*

*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me. (John 5:39)*

*And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"<sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"<sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)*

*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)*

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." (John 15:1)*

*Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Cor 5:7)*

*And this is only scratching the surface...*

#### IV. LETTING THE NEW TESTAMENT GUIDE US IN OT LAW

- Another look at those texts...

*"You shall not murder. (Exod 20:13)*

*For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. (Lev 11:44)*

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- The New Testament counterparts and what they teach us:

*Exodus 20:13 →*

*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'<sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matt 5:21-22)*

**PRINCIPLE:** *Some commands are do not just have continuing authority, but intensify with the coming of Christ. Commands with continuing authority as written are sometimes called the moral law.*

*Leviticus 11:44 →*

*As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,<sup>16</sup> since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Pet 1:15-16)*

**PRINCIPLE:** *Some commands have continuing authority and should be obeyed as written in the Old Testament. This is part of the moral law.*

Leviticus 16:6 →

*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Heb 9:11-14)*

**PRINCIPLE:** *Commands related to the sacrifices for sin(s) are fulfilled by Jesus once for all. To obey them would be to reject the sacrifice of Jesus and say that it is not enough. These are sometimes said to be part of the ceremonial law.*

Leviticus 19:8 →

*Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Rom 13:8-9)*

**PRINCIPLE:** *Again, some commands have continuing authority for Christians. This is part of the moral law.*

Deuteronomy 25:4 →

*For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? <sup>10</sup> Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. (1 Cor 9:9-10)*

**PRINCIPLE:** *Some commands have continuing influence because of a principle they establish even more than the precise action they are requiring. Yes, treat your oxen well. Even more, though, treat all workers well and fairly.*

Psalms 4:4 →

*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil. (Eph 4:26-27)*

**PRINCIPLE:** *Commands in the Psalms and all parts of the Old Testament may have continuing authority. If there is no reason to connect a law to the sacrifices or priesthood of the OT, then it is likely one that has continuing authority.*

Hosea 6:6 →

*But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."<sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matt 9:12-13)*

**PRINCIPLE:** *Commands in the Prophets and all parts of the Old Testament may have continuing authority. If there is no reason to connect a law to the sacrifices or priesthood of the OT, then it is likely one that has continuing authority.*

- What else does the NT teach us?
  - Places like Matthew 7:1-19 and Acts 10-11 make a big deal about foods and people no longer being divided into clean and unclean. This happens after Pentecost, when the New Covenant goes into effect. This is important: All laws related to clean/unclean no longer have authority over us. This applies to places like Leviticus 14-15.
  - Jesus through his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of the Spirit inaugurates the New Covenant. Once this happens, the tabernacle/temple and priesthood of the old testament/covenant are over and done and obsolete. This is because Jesus is the new temple (how we meet with God) and he is the great high priest who was perfect and offered the perfect sacrifice (Heb 7-10).
- Thus, while the old covenant (made with Israel in Exodus 19-24) is no longer binding, many of the commands within the Old Testament are. The New Testament guides in how to think through them to apply them well.

## V. "ONCE UPON A TIME..." → INTERPRETING OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVES

- Again, let the Bible teach you how to interpret the Bible.
  - Bible teaches us what events and people are the important ones—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah; Creation, Adam and Eve, the fall of Adam, covenant with Abraham, the Exodus, the covenant with Moses, the tabernacle, the priesthood, the promised land, etc.
  - Typically, what the Bible talks more about is more significant. What names and events keep popping up in the OT? In the NT?
  - Look at historical summaries like Acts 7 and Acts 13. These give clues for what is of greater importance.
- Connect the narrative to Christ
  - How does the hero of the story model Christ or point to Christ?
  - How does the villain in the story point to our need for Christ?
  - Does this story appear in the New Testament with some connection to Christ? (in his teaching, in prophecies fulfilled, etc.)
- In narratives the characters and especially dialogue are a key way that the meaning is communicated. Action is relatively minor. Dialogue is a big deal. If events or scenes are described, pay attention!
- Plot where in OT history this story happens
  - Creation
  - Noah
  - Abraham
  - Moses
  - Promised Land
  - David (monarchy and the prophets)
  - Babylon (Assyria)
  - Return from Babylon



- Jesus
- Pentecost
- Return of Christ
- New Heavens and New Earth
- Remember that the OT is largely concerned with (1) how the promises to Abraham will be fulfilled (Gen 12:1-3, etc.) and (2) how Israel will occupy the land of Canaan and build a new nation there under the Mosaic (old) covenant.
- The perpetual failure of Israel in the OT provides a continual forward leaning that anticipates the Messiah (Jesus Christ).

## VI. HOMEWORK

- Laws of the OT
  - Use a good cross-reference Bible.
  - Look at Exodus 20:1-17 (ten commandments)
  - Go through each commandment and see where it is found in the New Testament.
  - Make observations and conclusions. Does God still want us to obey this law? Why or why not? If a command is not found in the New Testament, is it one that we should continue obey? Why or why not?
- **NEW ADDITION**: Narrative of the OT
  - Read Exodus 16 and John 6
  - How does John 6 help us to interpret Exodus 16 for our lives today?