

Studying  
the Bible  
for ALL  
Its Worth

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*Interpreting the Bible*

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Lectures by Dr. Douglas Stuart

**About the Ockenga Institute and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary:**

*Established in 1985, the Ockenga Institute exists to make the rich educational resources of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary available to Christian leaders throughout the world. Through our various centers and programs, we serve as the research and continuing education arm of the school, seeking to build Christian leaders for the Church of Jesus Christ, present and future.*

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**Preface:**

The *Dimensions of the Faith* series is developed with the firm conviction that a life of faith and obedience in Jesus Christ is based upon a working knowledge of God's word. You cannot obey what you do not know.

For this reason, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has developed the *Dimensions of the Faith* series for any Christian who desires foundational knowledge in the areas of Old and New Testament, Biblical Interpretation, Church History, Theology, and Missions. The goals of each course are the following:

1. To paint the big picture of what you are learning
2. To provide you with the basic content
3. To introduce you to key words that will enlarge your capacity for knowing
4. To guide you to understand how greater knowledge of God's word can be applied naturally to everyday life and service, and
5. To direct you to valuable resources as God's word whets your appetite for further study.

The *Dimensions of the Faith* series is designed to be used in a variety of settings. You may wish to use the materials as a source for your own spiritual growth and enrichment. You may also wish to study the materials as a group. The series may be used as a leadership tool for churches or a training tool on the mission field. We encourage pastors to use the series with your ruling boards or your volunteer teaching staffs. A certificate is available for those who complete all six subject areas of the *Dimensions of the Faith* series.

In addition to the notebook and tape/CD version you currently own, you may listen to the lectures on the Gordon-Conwell website: [www.gordonconwell.edu/dimensions](http://www.gordonconwell.edu/dimensions). The variety of formats will allow greater flexibility in the use of this material.

For more information about the *Dimensions of the Faith* series, please contact the Ockenga Institute, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts 01982, or email us at [ockenga@gcts.edu](mailto:ockenga@gcts.edu).

We pray that God will use this series as a powerful tool for expanding your knowledge of God and God's word so that you may be able to share the good news throughout the world.

## About the Study and Workbook Guide:

The following study guide is designed as a scratch notepad to be used as you listen to the accompanying taped lectures. You may have noticed that we have used the drawings of Leonardo Da Vinci as a motif for our materials. Just as Da Vinci sketched out his ideas in the process of creating a final painting, so we invite you to sketch out your own thoughts in the notebook while you listen to the lectures. Each chapter includes valuable information and questions for you to ponder while you listen. Use the designated blank spaces and margins as your opportunity to interact with what you are learning.

To guide you through the materials, we have provided you with a series of icons. We do so under the firm conviction that *a fuller knowledge of God and his word requires expanding your horizons in all directions.*



*Breadth of Biblical Knowledge:* Grasp the big picture, from A to Z.  
SCOPE



*Width of Biblical Knowledge:* Expand your understanding through enlarging your vocabulary.  
DEFINITION



*Height of Biblical Knowledge:* Grow in your knowledge of the basic content of Scripture, theology, church history, and culture.  
BASIC CONTENT



*Length of Biblical Knowledge:* Stretch yourself to obedience and service through correct understanding.  
APPLICATION FOR SERVICE



*Depth of Biblical Knowledge:* Use these resources to grow deeper.  
QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

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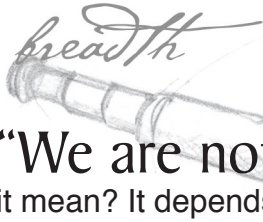
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Its Worth

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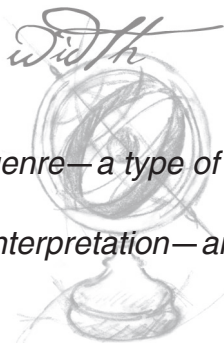
*Interpreting the Bible*

Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture One



Notes

**“We are not alone”**—a simple phrase, but what does it mean? It depends, of course, on the context. Who is being quoted? In what situation are they making the statement? Who is being included in “we”? What is meant by “alone”? The meaning we assign to this phrase will be different if it is spoken by a scientist who has just discovered evidence of microbial life on a distant planet, by a government official asserting international support for a proposed initiative, by a pastor encouraging Christians in their walk in Christ, or by a character in a horror movie who has just heard strange noises coming from the basement. Our reading of even this briefest and simplest of sentences forces us to do a bit of interpretation. In everyday life, of course, when we read a newspaper or a novel, listen to the radio or watch television, we instinctively ask ourselves—or already know the answer to—questions like those above, questions of genre and context. We have some sense of what to expect of an article in our favorite magazine or of a poem by a well-known poet. We can usually interpret correctly what we read and hear because we have familiarized ourselves with how people communicate in different contexts through different forms. This lesson suggests that when we read Scripture we are facing the same sort of interpretive questions. But because the various books that make up our Bible were written to people who in certain respects were quite different from us and who may have been familiar with different forms of communication than we usually use today, we need ask these questions more deliberately. We need to work a little harder to be sure we don’t misunderstand the original meaning of Scripture and thereby miss its message to us today. If we want to understand the Bible, we cannot ignore the manner in which it is communicated.



*genre—a type of literature; a literary category*

*interpretation—an explanation of the meaning of a text*

## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth

Notes

height

What was the intended audience for the book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*?

Why should we be cautious of “unique” interpretations of the Bible?

“The Holy Spirit never inspired nonsense. It was always the purpose of God to have people understand his word. God designed his word for everybody, not just for an elite.”

What is the difference between saying the Bible has a “plain” meaning and saying that a person can read it and immediately understand it?

What does Dr. Stuart mean by the “eternal relevance” of the Bible, and how is this related to the Bible’s “historical particularity”?

Give an example of how the Bible provides clues to what things are eternally relevant.

What is the implication of the fact that Scripture is more than a list of “do’s” and “don’ts”?

length

Have you ever had a bad experience with how someone “interpreted” the Bible—either in a way you strongly disagreed with or with an attitude about interpretation that you found bothersome?



## The Need to Interpret

In your experience, what is the role of “scholars” or “professionals” in biblical interpretation? Give an example of a time you found the advice of a “professional” helpful.

Notes

*Depth*

*Has the approach to interpreting Scripture changed over the history of the church? If so, how?*

*How do Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians approach the interpretation of Scripture?*

Gerald Bray. *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word, 1993.

“The Bible itself contains statements that help you to know that the cross story was not just an [incidental] event and that its location in time and space is not irrelevant. It helps you know that God sent his Son to die once for all, for everybody, that all sins might be forgiven.”

# What is a Good Translation?

## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Two

### Notes

"Words don't so much have a single meaning as a range of meaning."

*breadth*

If you consult several well-known English translations of 1 Cor 7:36, you may be a bit puzzled. For the first part of the verse, the New King James Version reads, "But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin . . . ." For "virgin," the New American Standard Bible reads "virgin daughter"; the New International Version has "virgin he is engaged to"; the New English Bible, "partner in celibacy"; the New Revised Standard Version and New Living Translation, "fiancée." What is going on here? As Dr. Stuart will point out in this lesson, modern translators are unsure as to the exact meaning of the Greek word Paul uses in this verse. It could refer to a father's unmarried daughter (or slave) or to a woman (most likely a virgin) to whom one is engaged. Translators are forced to decide between these options based on the context and their understanding of the customs of Paul's day. Dr. Stuart suggests that in this case Paul is most likely referring to a woman to whom one is engaged; however, a translator still must decide whether to render it "virgin he is engaged to" (NIV), more idiomatically as "fiancée" (NRSV, NLT), or in some other way. All translations involve many such decisions, and readers should be aware that a measure of interpretation is necessarily involved whenever one language is translated into another. However, the message of Scripture is nevertheless clear, and it is certainly not necessary to learn Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic to interpret it correctly. We simply should be aware of the limitations of translation, work with a good and reliable one, and be prepared to compare it with other translations when possible.

*width*

*dynamic equivalence—a style of translation in which a translator would ask, "How can I best render that statement in normal English?"*

*semantics—the study of meaning*

## What is a Good Translation?

*height*

Why is the difference between a word and a concept such a challenge to translators? What are some examples of this?

Notes

What do we mean when we say that the Bible is “infallible”?

What are some textual problems that might cause a translator to have difficulty?

How does the example of the “holy kiss” illustrate the kinds of linguistic choices a translator has to make?

Why is it important that a translator understand the customs and idioms of a culture as well as its language?

*length*

What translation of the Bible do you use? What do you like or dislike about it?

“What we want you to do is intelligently choose a good translation. Work with it. Stick with it. Use it. But remember, they all have flaws. So don’t hesitate to consult others whenever you get a chance.”

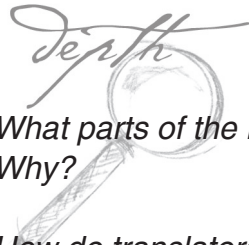
Do you prefer a more literal translation or one that takes more of a “concept” translation approach?

## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth

Notes

After hearing Dr. Stuart discuss some of the challenges translators of the Bible face, do you feel more or less able to tackle the task of understanding its “plain” meaning?

“The concern of Scripture is to be clear. The concern of the scriptural writers at the human level is to be clear. The concern of the Holy Spirit, as far as we know it, is to be perfectly clear.”



*What parts of the Bible present the most difficulties to translators? Why?*

*How do translators begin translating the Bible into a new language—one that hasn't had a Bible translation before?*

Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth, eds. *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003.

Bruce M. Metzger. *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001.

Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Three

*breadth*

On April 3, 1860, the Pony Express was inaugurated with the mission of relaying and delivering mail between Missouri and California. Riders were paid \$100 a month to carry the mail for seventy-five to one hundred miles at a stretch. Of course, the focus of the Pony Express, historically, is on the process needed to move written communication in a fast, reliable way. But the way letters were carried in the 1800s isn't that much different from the way they're carried now: hand to hand to hand. And it's not much different from the way they were delivered in the ancient world. It's easy to forget that the "books" of the Bible we call the "epistles" were once written down with pen and ink, folded or rolled, sealed, and carried by hand to the recipients. They were communications between real people, who knew one another and had important things to say to one another. By God's great blessing and purpose, they are also communications to us.

Notes

"Meaning is a matter of combinations of words and sentences and sometimes even paragraphs. Meaning is not exhausted by a word or a sentence or just a paragraph. Meaning comes from the whole thing."

*width*

*exegesis—close, careful, analytical study of a passage of Scripture done so as to understand its meaning*

*hermeneutics—the process of interpretation; the rules for interpreting; the science of interpretation*

*height*

What does it mean to think "contextually"? What are the advantages of thinking about Scripture in a broader context?

What is the difference between a letter and an epistle?

## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth

Notes

What does Dr. Stuart mean by “task theology” and “systematic theology”?

What might be a good source of information about the historical context of the epistles?

What are some of the questions that will help you interpret and understand the epistles?

“You have to differentiate the possible from the certain. Good interpreters always do that.”

*length*

How does it affect the way you read the epistles to consider that the authors and the recipients knew each other—that Paul, for instance, had a lot more knowledge of the Corinthian church than we do?

When you read the epistles, do you tend to focus on specific sentences and passages that have a lot of meaning for you, or are you a “big picture” type of reader?

*Depth*

*Is there a specific form or forms that the epistles are written in?*

*How does the occasional nature of the epistles influence the way they are written?*

## Studying the Epistles

Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Notes

Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Thomas R. Schreiner. *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1990.

“As a general rule,  
thinking paragraphs  
saves a lot of misery.”



## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Four

Notes

*breadth*

**H**ave you ever read a detective novel? If you have, you know how the detective gathers evidence by interviewing various witnesses and suspects, comparing stories, examining the physical evidence . . . until, at last, some small fact or group of facts becomes known that makes everything fall into place, and the detective has a moment of illumination in which he or she can see how the pieces of the puzzle fit together. Sometimes studying the Bible can be like solving a mystery—we can read and read a passage and understand a little of what it says, but then we learn something of the historical context, or we see how it fits within the greater progression of the author’s thought, and we suddenly get to the meaning of what we’ve read. In this lesson, we learn some guidelines we can use to carefully study, not just read, the words of God to us and, by his grace, to understand them.

*width*

*comparable particulars—similar life situations that can be compared in a meaningful way*

*occasional—having to do with specific situations; addressing things that happen to come up on one occasion or another*

*height*

What is the first, most basic rule of hermeneutics?

What is the second rule?



How can the extended application of a part of Scripture cause problems?

Notes

How should we treat the “matters of indifference” that are mentioned in the epistles? What two things are important to remember about these matters?

What should we do when, after careful study, we cannot discern if a passage of Scripture is applicable only to the first century or if it is directly applicable to us as well?

“We’ve got to be content at times with limitations to our theological understanding of the epistles. That’s just what we’re up against.”

What are some of the guidelines and bits of advice that Dr. Stuart lists in this lesson?

*length*

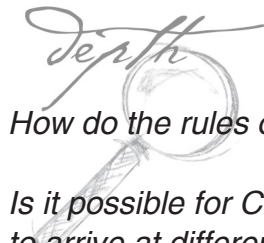
Can you think of a time when you felt called to greater obedience through reading the Bible, especially the epistles?

## Hermeneutics

Notes

What are some of the peripheral issues that Christians sometimes focus on? What are the “core” issues we should be focusing on?

“What in these epistles and elsewhere in Scripture transcends all culture and is the word of God for all seasons, all places, all peoples, all times?”



*How do the rules of hermeneutics influence interpretation?*

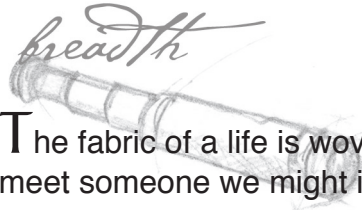
*Is it possible for Christians to use the same rules of hermeneutics to arrive at different theological viewpoints?*

Grant R. Osborne. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Gordon D. Fee. *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991.



## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Five



Notes

The fabric of a life is woven together by stories. When we first meet someone we might inquire about one another's occupations, families, places of residence, and leisure activities. But if we want to get to know each other better, we'll move beyond bare assertions of who or what we are and start talking about where we're from, how we got where we are today, what experiences and people shaped us into who we are, and what our hopes are for the future. As we talk, we'll be selecting from the jumble of events that have made up our lives those experiences that we believe are most important or interesting, weaving from the stories we tell about ourselves a narrative in which we attempt to define who we are. When we read Old Testament narratives, we are hearing the stories God chose to reveal about himself, about his creation and about his chosen people. Rather than giving us only propositional statements about who he is and how we are to live, Scripture also gives us vivid descriptions of God's actions in the world, of how his redemptive plan has unfolded through the brightest and the darkest times of history, and how people through many ages responded to God and to the situations of their day. And unlike some of the stories we tell about ourselves, we have the assurance that the narratives of Scripture are accurate and that we can learn truly from them something about the character of God and what it means to follow him. We can identify with and learn from the good and the bad examples of those who have sought to do his will or who have fought against his will, and we can learn of God's intentions for his people and his creation. Along the way we may be swept up in the drama of the action and find ourselves asking once again with renewed commitment and deeper insight, "What would this same God have me do today with my life?"

Notes

*width*

*narrative*—a story that covers a relatively extensive amount of material and that is nonfictional

*compound narrative*—when two or more individual narratives together constitute a larger story

*height*

What are the three levels of narrative Dr. Stuart refers to in this lesson?

“A great thing about all narrative literature is the way that it allows you to face situations in theory that you aren’t facing in fact. Remember that God knows that and has put a lot of that type of literature in the Bible.”

What is “redemptive history”? Why is it important to keep this level of the story in mind as we study the Bible?

Who is the hero of all stories in the Bible?

What is the main way we learn from the stories in the Bible?

What are some of the interpretive mistakes Dr. Stuart cautions us against?

*length*

Do you ever find yourself focusing on the human characters of the Old Testament narratives, such as Moses, Jacob, or David? What is the result?

Think of a movie you got so involved in that you were able to really identify with the characters and their stories. Have you ever felt that way about a Bible story?



Depth

*Novels and films often use symbolic elements to represent good and evil. Does the Bible ever employ similar devices?*

*Why do you think Scripture includes so much narrative? Should the preponderance of stories in the Bible affect the way in which we teach others and share the gospel, or can we communicate the same information we find in narratives through other means?*

Leland Ryken. *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1987.

Richard L. Pratt, Jr. *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives*. Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990.

“You are going to be deeply disappointed if you are looking for skillful character development about human beings, because that has been suppressed. But what you will find is brilliant character development about God himself.”

## The Book of Acts

### Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Six

#### Notes

*breadth*

It is easy to get caught up in small details. For many of us, our familiarity with the Bible and our tendency to read only a few verses at a time encourages us to pay attention to the small things. And often a perceptive reader will find that taking the time to explore every detail of a passage can be very rewarding. But if this is all we do, we will of course miss what a book like Acts is all about. By ignoring the fact that such relatively short books were meant to be read all at once, we can miss the book's overall purpose, get lost in individual characters and events that are meant to be seen as parts of a larger story, and overlook the foundational themes that the author means to emphasize. This lesson suggests that we take the time occasionally to read Biblical books—especially the book of Acts—in one sitting. If we do, we might find that the power of the gospel is made clearer to us than ever before as we witness in the book of Acts, for example, the amazing expansion of the Christian church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of the apostles and early followers of Christ.

*width*

*Sola Scriptura—only the Bible; only Scripture*

*Sola Fide—only faith [salvation is by faith alone]*

*Sola Gratia—only grace [salvation cannot be earned; it is God's gift of grace to us]*

*Apologetic—an argument in favor of something; making a case for something*

*height*

What is the special nature of the book of Acts?

## The Book of Acts

Why do Protestants, especially, look to the book of Acts as a model?

Notes

What were Luke's two main purposes for writing?

How are the Gospel of Luke's themes of *God's kingdom* and *Jesus' presence* continued in Acts?

"Luke's model for us is in the big picture, and not in the specifics."

Why is it helpful to outline a book of the Bible when you study it?

What is the outline of the Book of Acts?

*length*

How have you experienced the "big four" of Acts—expansion, Holy Spirit, individual conversion, and changed lives of communities—in your own life and community?

Now that you've outlined a book of the Bible, which one do you want to outline next? Why do you think outlining this book would be helpful to your study of the Bible?

Notes

Depth

*What is the geographic movement of the gospel in Acts?*

*How does the gospel expand through the various ethnic groups throughout the book of Acts?*

Ben Witherington III. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997.

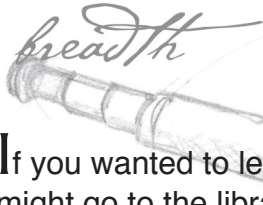
John B. Polhill. *Acts*. New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992.

“Constant expansion, powered by the Spirit, changed lives, changed communities—that’s what God wants to happen until Christ comes again.”



## One Story, Four Perspectives

### Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Seven



Notes

If you wanted to learn something about Thomas Jefferson, you might go to the library, do a bit of research, and decide to read several different biographies about him. Ideally, you would find an early biographer or two who had actually known Jefferson, but in any case you would hope to read people who could give you varying perspectives on who the man was, what he was like, and what the significance of his life was. Even if you could be assured that every book about him was entirely accurate, you would want to see how different people portray him, which events from his life they find important enough to relate, and what interpretations they give to those events. Through such wide reading, your picture of Thomas Jefferson would be fuller and better-rounded than if you had stuck to just one source.

In the case of Jesus, we don't have any early *biographies* of his life (as we use the term "biographies" today). But we do have four *Gospels*, four accounts written from four different perspectives by people who knew Jesus or his followers personally. Each account is reliable and trustworthy. The particular emphases and style of each Gospel give us a richer portrayal of Jesus than if we had only had one, and speak to a wider variety of circumstances in our lives and in the life of the church. This lesson helps us begin to understand what the Gospels are and what the special concern of each is.

*width*

*New Testament Apocrypha—a collection of books written after New Testament times which contain a variety of materials including legends about and sayings attributed to Jesus; none of these books were ever accepted as canonical by the Christian church. It should be distinguished from what Protestants refer to as the Old Testament Apocrypha (and Roman Catholics as the deuterocanonical books), which are Jewish compositions written between the Old Testament and the New Testament and which are included between the Old and New Testament in Catholic Bibles.*

Notes

*height*

What are the two basic divisions in the Gospels?

Why is it important to have four Gospels, rather than only one?

What are some of the ideas about why and how the Gospels were originally written down?

What five literary forms make up 98% of the Gospels?

What is the special concern, or emphasis, of each of the Gospels?

“God gave us what we know about Jesus’ earthly ministry in this way, not in another way that might better serve someone’s mechanistic tape-recorder mentality. If you just want to have unedited tape recordings of what Jesus said, you can’t get that from the Gospels.”

*length*

What is your favorite Gospel? Why do you think the “special concern” of this Gospel particularly appeals to you?

Has anyone ever challenged you with the so-called “discrepancies” between the Gospels? How did you/would you respond to such a person?

## One Story, Four Perspectives

*Depth*

*How do the Gospels use many of the same elements to emphasize different aspects of Jesus' life?*

*Why is the Gospel of John so different from the others? What parts of John's Gospel reflect a different point of view on the events that are recorded in the other three Gospels?*

Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds.  
*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove, Ill.:  
InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Craig L. Blomberg. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997.

Notes

Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Eight

Notes

*breadth*

There are times when being told to do something just doesn't work. Maybe we've heard it a hundred times before and have grown deaf to the command. Perhaps we just can't see why it could be important and we can't be bothered. Or maybe our refusal to act stems from willful disobedience. But put the call to action in the form of a story, in terms we can relate to, with an implicit call to respond in one way or another, and we may not be able to ignore it any longer. If we work to understand the story, to allow our hearts and minds to be caught up in the narrative, to put ourselves in the place of the characters, we may find our former wall of indifference pierced by sudden illumination and feel for the first time the urgency of the issue. Of course this won't always mean a proper response on our part: even if we have gone beyond the surface of a story to understand its message for us—we get the point—we might decide we don't like it and reject its message. Thus it was with the parables Jesus told. Many heard his stories, with their implicit call for a response. Some either couldn't or wouldn't understand what they meant. Others understood the message but only rejected it all the more strongly. But some heard, listened, and obeyed. Some—and may we be among them—still listen to the parables and are ready to heed the call of Jesus. This lesson helps us begin to learn how to interpret the parables so that we can respond rightly.

"Will you take the time, do you have the interest, do you want to learn about how to live in God's kingdom and what his kingdom is all about?"

*width*

*parable—a fictional short story that has a special purpose: to get a response out of you*

*similitude—where Jesus says, "the kingdom of God is like . . ." followed by a very short illustration that compares the situation in God's kingdom to some situation that Jesus brings forward*

*height*

How did St. Augustine interpret the parable of the Good Samaritan?  
Why should we avoid allegorical interpretations of the parables?

Notes

What does Dr. Stuart mean when he says that parables are “divisive riddles”?

What was the significance for the Jews of the parable of the Prodigal Son? What is its significance for us?

What does Dr. Stuart say the “contextless” parables are about?

What should be our reaction to the parable of the Good Samaritan?

“Will you have an attitude of generosity? Will you have an attitude of grace? Will you have an attitude of caring? Will you be interested in people? . . . Do you want to be part of that kingdom? Because in the kingdom, loving your neighbor as yourself is big. And that’s what Jesus is teaching.”

*length*

If you were to pick a parable and retell it in a “modern” way, which one would you pick and how would the story go? What things might change, and what would have to stay the same?

What is one way you can “love your neighbor as yourself” today?

Notes

*Depth*

*How are the themes of grace, judgment, and the kingdom developed in the parables?*

*Why did Jesus interpret the parable of the Sower only for the disciples, after everyone else had left?*

Craig L. Blomberg. *Interpreting the Parables*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990.

David Wenham. *The Parables of Jesus*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989.

# Interpreting the Law

## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Nine

*breadth*

Are you among those readers of the Bible who find themselves bewildered by all the laws of the Old Testament? Not by the Ten Commandments, of course—but are you bewildered by the ones about mildew, clean and unclean animals, and material made of different kinds of fibers? Why was it important to God that the Hebrews obey those laws? What were they for in the first place? Do Christians have to obey them? And even if they don't *have* to, is it beneficial for them to do so? As this lesson will suggest, there are a few simple principles that can help us form answers to these questions, and help us understand what the Old Testament law was all about and what application it has for Christians today.

Notes

*width*

*covenant—a type of contract that establishes relationships*

*stipulation—a law, rule, or regulation of a covenant*

*paradigm—a sample, or model, that can be applied to many similar situations*

*testament—a covenant*

*height*

What is the meaning behind Deuteronomy 22:10, which says that you should not plow with a donkey and an ox together?

Why is it important to remember that most of the Bible is information, not instructions?

“All of the old covenant law is still the word of God for us, even if it's not the command of God to us.”

## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth

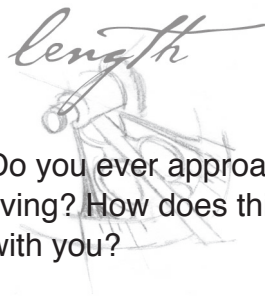
Notes

How can we discern which parts of the Old Testament law still apply to Christians today?

What two laws does Jesus explicitly “carry over” from the old covenant to the new?

How have the Ten Commandments been renewed, and clarified, in the new covenant?

What are the two types of laws that appear in the old covenant? Which one of these applies to new covenant commands?



“Do see God’s justice, love, and high standards revealed in the Old Testament law, but don’t forget to see that God’s mercy is made equal to the severity of the standards. Don’t forget that the law is given as a gracious thing to help people know how to be holy.”

Do you ever approach the Bible as a list or set of instructions for living? How does this affect your perception of God’s relationship with you?

Do the Old Testament laws strike you as being similar or different from the laws of our society? In what ways?



Depth

*How does the narrative surrounding the Old Testament laws relate to the laws themselves?*

*Some people claim that there are health benefits to following the Old Testament dietary laws. Is this true? What is the purpose of those laws, and do they apply to Christians?*

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *The Christian and the "Old" Testament*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998.

T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003.

Notes

# Old Testament Prophecy

## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Ten

Notes

*breadth*  
What do you think of when you think of a prophet? Many of us probably think first of someone who predicts the future. However, as Dr. Stuart will suggest in this lesson, Old Testament prophets were much more than foretellers of the future; in fact, this role was subsidiary and merely a part of their primary duty as called by God to be “covenant enforcement mediators.” To understand what this means, along with an introduction on how to read and interpret Old Testament prophecy, follow along as Dr. Stuart explores the meaning and function of biblical prophecy.

*width*  
oracle—a prophecy; something a prophet says on God’s behalf

orthodoxy—right teaching

orthopraxy—right behavior

*height*  
What was the role of a prophet in Old Testament times?

What does it mean to say that prophets were “covenant enforcement mediators”?

Why and how does the nature of prophecy change from the Old Testament to the New?

## Old Testament Prophecy

Why were true prophets sometimes unpopular, while false prophets often had huge followings?

Notes

What effect did Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and Persia have on Israel and Judah? Why?

What are the five main types of oracle?

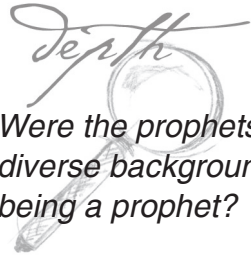
“God’s a delegator and an inviter in the way he relates to us. He doesn’t force everything. And he doesn’t do everything himself. He has honored his human creation by entrusting us with huge numbers of responsibilities.”

*length*

Can you think of any “false prophets” in our time? What are their false teachings? Why do they have followers?

Dr. Stuart says in this lesson that God “honored his human creation” by entrusting many responsibilities to us. What are the primary ones, in your view?

Notes



*Were the prophets all of similar social class, or did they come from diverse backgrounds? Were there educational requirements to being a prophet?*

*What was the legal or political role of the prophet in Old Testament times?*

Elmer A. Martens. *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981.

Michael J. Williams. *The Prophet and His Message: Reading Old Testament Prophecy Today*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2003.

"The huge difference in the new covenant, the big thing that is unbelievably significant is that every single Christian believer has the Holy Spirit in a better and different way than any Old Testament prophet."

# The Prayers of God's People

## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Eleven

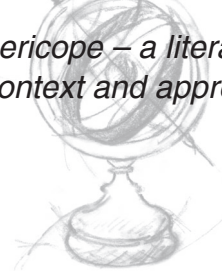
*breadth*

Communication between people is incredibly variable. We have ways of speaking in public and ways of speaking in private. We use spoken and written language as well as music and the visual arts to communicate meaning and emotion. In the same way, there are many ways we communicate with God—we pray out loud in our churches as well as privately in our hearts; we sing songs of worship and whisper quietly at a hurting loved one's bedside. And for all of these situations and ways of praying, there are psalms to guide us. Psalms are just as good for reading aloud in our churches as they are for our private moments. They are glorious when set to music for worship and even more so when whispered so that no one but God can hear. As we learn more about how to read the Psalms, may our prayer lives be strengthened and our spirits be refreshed.

Notes

*width*

*pericope – a literary unit that may be extracted from the general context and appreciated for its benefits*



*height*

Why does God want us to pray?

What is the difference between synonymous parallelism and antithetical parallelism?

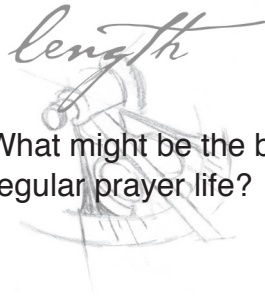
## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth

Notes

What does Dr. Stuart mean when he says that the book of Psalms is “all-purpose”?

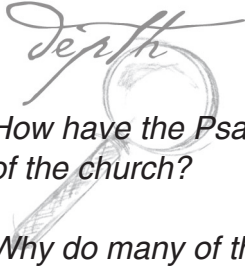
What were the Psalms used for in Ancient Israel?

What are the main types of psalms?



What might be the benefits of using the Psalms as part of your regular prayer life?

What are some of the things that get in the way of prayer? What are some of the distractions, doubts, or worries that keep you from sincere and consistent prayer?



*How have the Psalms been used in worship throughout the history of the church?*

*Why do many of the psalms seem so angry?*

Bernhard W. Anderson and Roy Steven Bishop. *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*. 3d ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000.

C. Hassell Bullock. *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001.

Notes



## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Twelve

### Notes

“Will you choose to follow God, belong to him, live for him, even if you don’t see tangible rewards in your physical, material life? Will you be faithful to him even if things become hard for you, painful, sad—even if you feel like you’re in despair?”

*breadth*

As we have learned throughout this series of lessons, interpreting the Bible involves many decisions. We have to read carefully to discern the overall purpose of the text, we have to make informed choices about translations, and we have to decipher the meaning of parables that are deliberately “divisive riddles.” This process of making interpretive choices mirrors the decisions we face in our lives, as well. Dr. Stuart points out in this lesson that we are always making decisions about a variety of issues, both trivial and important. And just as we have to use all our faculties to make right decisions about interpreting the biblical text, we have to use those faculties to make right decisions about life issues. We know the Bible is more than a list of rules for living, but does it offer any practical help to us as we face those life decisions? The books of Wisdom can help us, once we understand how to read them.

*width*

*proverb—a short, pithy, memorable statement designed to help make right decisions*

*speculative wisdom—a form of wisdom literature in which the writer wrestles with what is the right way to live based on certain assumptions*

*height*

What is the Hebrew word that is translated “wisdom” in the book of Proverbs? What does it mean?

What are three characteristics of proverbs?



## Gaining Wisdom

What are the kinds of decisions the book of Proverbs can help us with?

Notes

What is the main point of Song of Songs?

What does Ecclesiastes say about the meaning of life? What gives our lives purpose?

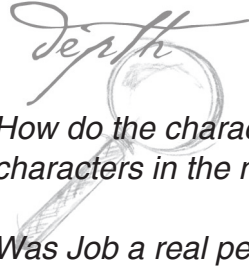
What life decision does the book of Job address?

*length*

What are some of the decisions you are facing at this time in your life? How might the Bible's Wisdom books help you in those decisions?

Based on what Dr. Stuart has said about the book of Job, what would you say to a friend who asks you, "Why does God let bad things happen to good people?"

Notes



*How do the characters in the books of Wisdom differ from the characters in the narrative sections of the Bible?*

*Was Job a real person?*

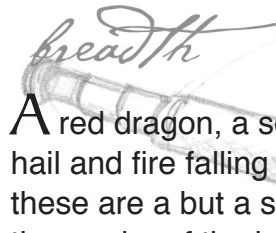
Robert L. Alden. *Job. New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993.

Duane A. Garrett. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs. New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993.

“God wants us to realize that life is full of choices: great big ones and little everyday ones. And in all of them he wants our choices to be godly.”

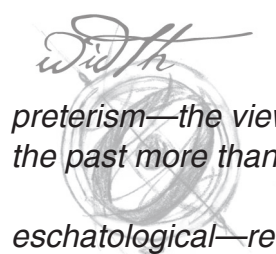


Studying the Bible for All Its Worth: Lecture Thirteen



A red dragon, a seven-headed beast, a city that falls into the sea, hail and fire falling from heaven, lion-headed horses breathing fire: these are a but a small selection of the vivid images that confront the reader of the last book of the Bible. Filled with fantastic pictures of woe but also of great beauty and hope, the book of Revelation has posed a special challenge to interpreters throughout the centuries. For some, the book has become a happy hunting ground for supposedly veiled hints about present world powers and their impending rise or doom; for others, the book has been seen as nothing more than a description of the fall of the Roman Empire; many others have steered clear of it entirely. But when read in its proper context as an example of first-century apocalyptic literature in the tradition of Old Testament prophecy, John’s letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor has a vital message for believers then and now. In this lesson, Dr. Stuart begins to explain for us how to read and interpret this sometimes enigmatic book so that we might respond appropriately to John’s call for faithful witness to Christ.

Notes



*preterism—the viewpoint that understands Revelation as depicting the past more than the future*

*eschatological—referring to the end times*



What four Old Testament books significantly influenced Revelation?

What are some ways that Revelation is “apocalyptic”?

“At the end of history there is the ultimate final total absolute triumph of right and total final absolute judgment of evil. That’s the way everything ends up because that’s the way God has decided it will end. Whatever else happens, however hard things may be, however many difficulties, persecutions, oppressions, and suppressions of our faith may come, in the end, there’s going to be absolute, total, final victory of the good guys because God will make it work that way.”

## Studying the Bible for All Its Worth

Notes

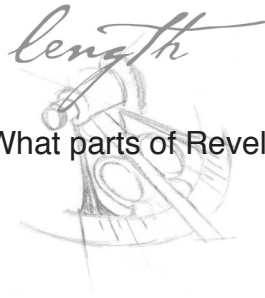
Why is it important to note that Revelation contains symbolic elements? What are some of those symbolic elements?

How is Revelation also traditional prophecy? How is it an epistle?

What images does John himself interpret?

How does Revelation tell us about the past, the present, and the future?

“Apocalypses don’t give detailed chronological accounts of the future. That’s not the way they work. They give imagistic symbolic accounts of the present and past and future.”



What parts of Revelation are most encouraging to you?

What are some of the stranger theories about Revelation that you have heard? How do they contrast with Dr. Stuart’s teaching about Revelation?

Depth

*What similarities are there between the book of Genesis and the book of Revelation?*

*Do the events of Revelation occur in cycles or in a linear way? How so?*

Richard Bauckham. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

G. B. Caird. *The Revelation of Saint John*. London: A & C Black, 1966; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999.

Notes

"Don't miss the fact that it's general enough, imagistic enough, symbolic enough that it intends to provide its message for everybody at every time until Christ comes again."