

## Tools for Understanding God's Word – Week 3

### **Summary from last week**

#### **Structure tool:**

How has the author structured his text?

*Questions:*

*How has the author broken down his material into sections?*

*How do those sections fit together?*

Look for:

- *Bookends*—See the same phrase at the beginning and the end of a section. Everything in between goes together. (e.g., Rom 1:5 and 16:26; Mark 11:12-25)
- *Hinges, turning points* (e.g., Mark 8:29)
- *Side-by-side comparisons* (e.g., Jn 18:12-32)
- *Chiasm* — Passage with a symmetrical pattern of pairs, where the central point is in the middle. Could be a verse up to several chapters (e.g., Daniel Chs. 2-7)

#### **Parallels tool:**

*Parallelism* is a major structural feature in Hebrew poetry. Can use parallelism to help determine the meaning of a passage. (e.g., Ps 24:1-2; Is 55:6)

Antithetical parallelism: second part contrasts with the first (e.g., Prov 10:1; 29:11; Jn 6:54 and 6:40)

#### **Repetition tool:**

Repetitive use of the same *word or phrase*. (e.g., Jn 6:47-59; Dan 3:1-7)

Repetition of an *idea*. (e.g., Is 53:4-6)

What is the author's purpose in doing this? What point is he trying to make?

#### **Bible timeline tool:**

Questions: Where is this passage on the Bible timeline? (in terms of salvation history)

Where am I on the Bible timeline?

How do I read this in light of things that have happened in between?

Example: (Lev 4:27-31 interpreted in light of Heb 10:1)

The one time we do not need this tool is when looking at the character of God. God is unchanging—forever the same. (Mal 3:6; James 1:17; Heb 13:8)

### **This week**

#### **Narrator's comment tool:**

The narrator (i.e., author) occasionally breaks off from a narrative and gives a few words of explanation, which can be key for understanding a passage.

*Examples:*

Matthew 2:13:-15

John 2:18-22

**Linking words tool:**

Certain words help show the flow of thought and can reveal cause and effect.

**Therefore:** reason → result or consequence

Example: Phil 2:5-11

**For:** statement/result ← reason

Example: Heb 4:14-15

Could reverse the arrow and change *for* into *therefore*.

Words like:

|                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| <b><i>therefore</i></b> | <b><i>for</i></b> |
| <b>consequently</b>     | <b>because</b>    |
| <b>for this reason</b>  | <b>since</b>      |
| <b>thus</b>             | <b>so</b>         |

In each case, one can reverse them and substitute the corresponding word.

Exercise: John 7:3-5 What do the linking words tell us?

There are other linking words that can have more than one meaning.

*Group exercise:* Determine what two meanings the following words seem to have:

**If** – compare Deut 28:13, 15 with Rom 8:31

**So that** – compare 1 Jn 2:1 and 2 Cor 4:8-11 with Matt 8:24, Mark 1:45; 2:2

**Translations tool:**

The main languages of the Bible are Hebrew and Greek.

There are many translations. Some are more **literal** (meaning word for word). Can make certain passages difficult to understand.

*Example:* Read Gen 4:1 (ESV) Sounds strange

Other translations try to translate idea for idea. Principle of **dynamic equivalence**.

Now read Gen 4:1 in (NLT) translation. Basic idea is clearer.

However, there are problems with dynamic equivalent:

1. They can sometimes send you off in a wrong direction
2. Sometimes they omit or change the linking words.

*Group exercise:* Compare Jn 11:5-6 in KJV (literal translation) with the NIV. What key point is lost in the NIV?

**Different translations:**

*Literal:* ESV, NASB, KJV

*Dynamic equivalent:* NLT seems to be the best

In between: NIV

*Recommendation:* Check more than one translation!

**Quotation/Allusion tool:****Quotations:**

NT authors (and Jesus himself) frequently quote passages from the OT.

Sometimes they quote only a few words.

It is a good idea to look up the entire paragraph or section to get the context of the original.

Example: Luke 4:16-21

What is the significance to the place where Jesus stops the quotation?

**Allusions:**

Allusions are not a direct quote of another passage. There is no “It is written . . .”

They are an echo of another part of Scripture.

You must be *tuned in* to catch them – know the big storylines of the Bible.

Example: Mark 12:1ff “A man planted a vineyard . . .”

A first century Jew would recognize this right away – language of Is 5

Requires that we know the OT! We should be reading through the entire Bible.

**DANGER!!**

The use of the same word by two Biblical authors does not necessarily imply a connection!

Donkeys: Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (Jn 12:14)  
Sampson killed 1000 men with the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15-16)  
Saul was looking for lost donkeys when he first met Samuel (1 Sam 9)

*Donkeys were common – no connection!*

The danger is seeing allusions that are not there!

How to tell if an allusion is real or spurious?

⇒ The more specific or unusual the expression the less likely that its use in two places in the Bible is coincidental.

If sheep are mentioned in two places – no big deal. But the phrase “sheep without a shepherd” is distinctive enough when it occurs both in Mark 6:34 and Num 27:17 that it is likely not an accident.

Frequent allusions are made to God’s covenant with Abraham, both in the OT and NT. See, for example, Gal 3:9

*Group exercise:*

In Mk 14:36, Jesus refers to a cup. From the context of Mark, which group of verses is a better fit in terms of what Jesus is alluding to:

Ps 16:5; 23:5 OR Ps 75:8; IS 51:17; Jer 25:15-16; Lam 4:21; Ez 23:31-34; Hab 2:16