

I

Rewarding Bible Study

John T. Willis

If the Bible contains God's message to man, man's most important task is to interpret the various books of the Bible as their authors intended for them to be understood. The Bible is not written in a special "Holy Spirit language." If it were, man could not understand it unless God gave him the key for decoding that language or a miraculous, super-human wisdom that would enable him to comprehend it. In other words, God communicated with men in languages they already knew and were using. Thus, in interpreting the biblical text, it is essential to use the same method and tools that are used in approaching other types of literature. This is not to imply that the Bible is not unique among the world's literature. It simply affirms that man must strive to ascertain and employ a responsible method of study if he wishes to understand the Scriptures correctly.

One's approach to the Bible, as well as the method he uses to try to understand it, is governed partially by his view of inspiration. The Bible claims to be inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16). There is no way to prove or disprove this claim absolutely, although arguments have been advanced on both sides of the issue. It must be accepted by faith or rejected by unbelief. The contributors to the *Bible Study Textbook Series* believe this claim.

Now this faith in itself demands that one go to *the Bible itself* to learn *how* God did this. Man is in no position to

dictate to God how he must have done it. Texts like Luke 1:1-4, John 20:30-31, 1 Kings 11:41, and many others show that at least much of the time *God did not dictate words mechanically* to men who wrote the Bible as an employer would dictate a letter to his secretary. Rather, the various biblical authors wrote to people with real needs and problems in living situations. They were personally involved in the lives of their readers and often told them how they felt about them. When Paul says to his brethren in Colossae, "I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face" (Col. 2:1), he is relating *his own* feelings, and not words that God is forcing him to say by mechanical dictation. A warm, intimate, personal relationship usually existed between biblical authors and their audiences.

The Holy Spirit superintended the writing of the various biblical books. As Luke did research in preparation for writing his gospel to Theophilus, as he scrutinized the narratives in his possession and the oral reports that he had received, God superintended his work so that those things he selected were the most relevant to the needs of his audience and so that he presented them in the most suitable fashion for that audience. But Luke still used oral and written sources and did research in preparing his gospel. Perhaps a theoretical example would best demonstrate the point. If some early Christian preacher related to Luke Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, and if he did so accurately with proper emphasis and meaning, there would be no point in God *dictating* this story to Luke *mechanically*. And when Luke himself declares he gained his information through reading earlier narratives and through hearing oral reports of eyewitnesses and ministers of the word (Luke 1:1-4), it would be a denial of God's inspiration of Luke to argue that God dictated it to him.

It would be presumptuous to think that any person or group could construct a method for studying the Bible that would be flawless or that would stand the test of all archaeological, linguistic, and literary discoveries that present and future generations of scholars will make. This chapter

suggests certain principles that are generally recognized as basic in understanding a biblical passage. The various books of the Bible contain the message of God delivered to man on different occasions over a period of approximately one thousand three hundred years. That message was always relevant to the intended audience, even when it announced events in the distant future. The first task of the commentator is to ascertain the way an author (or authors) of a biblical book intended to speak to the needs of the audience to whom his (or their) book was addressed. This puts one in a position to evaluate modern problems and needs and to apply the message of the Bible to contemporary situations.

THE PANORAMIC VIEW

It is basic to a correct understanding of any biblical text that the modern reader not lose sight of the larger picture in which an event occurred, a statement was made, or a book was written. The author (or authors) of each book of the Bible wrote for a specific audience that had its own peculiar set of needs and problems, and his intention was to speak to those needs and problems in a meaningful way. The apostle John said to his readers: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you [this shows John had a particular audience in mind] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). It is possible for one to know well the intricate details of the events in the life of Jesus that John relates without understanding *why* John related *these events* in the manner that he did for *his audience*. It is one thing to know the details of a historical event (or a sequence of events). It is quite another thing to understand the *religious purpose* the writer had in mind (his theology) in relating that event to *his* readers. And to fail to understand the writer's theology is to miss the basic purpose of the Bible.

There are three indispensable tools that the serious student must repeatedly consult to keep the panoramic view of

the various books of the Bible in mind. One is competent *introductions* to the OT. These works treat the date, authorship, structure, and purpose of the various OT books. Without these matters fixed in mind, one is not in good position to do an exegesis of a specific text in a book. Major recent introductions include: O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968); and R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971).

A second indispensable tool is good works on OT *history*. It is not adequate to understand the details of a historical event. One must also see the complex combination of people and circumstances that led up to and produced that event, and in turn other events to which it ultimately pointed. Important histories of Israel are: J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (2d ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972); and M. Noth, *The History of Israel* (2d ed. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965).

A third essential is studies of OT *theology*. Because of the various personalities, periods, and circumstances connected with the writing of the biblical books, each book (or group of books) has its own theological terms and emphases. Different authors may use the same words in different ways because of their theological interests. Major recent OT works in this area include: W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965); G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962 and 1965); and H. Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

Generally speaking, the modern reader finds it easier to apply these principles to Paul's letters than to other biblical writings. One reason for this is that Paul wrote within a relatively brief period of time, was not recording or interpreting the meaning of a lengthy period of history, and spoke directly to the immediate needs and problems of his readers. But many biblical books differ sharply from Paul's

letters on these points. It would be a serious mistake, for example, to approach 1 and 2 Kings in the same way as Paul's letters.

Much biblical literature that records historical events is the end product of a long process. First, the event itself actually occurred. Second, that event or a portion of that event was preserved in the memory of an eyewitness or participant or in writing. Third, this was handed down orally or in writing from generation to generation. Finally, a biblical writer (under divine guidance) *selected* events or portions of events that had been handed down to him as he recounted past events for his audience. This selection was governed by the needs and problems of his audience and by the message that he intended to convey to them (John 20: 30-31; 21:25).

Writers of Scripture often claim that this is the way in which they wrote their books. Luke explains to Theophilus that he was not an eyewitness of the events in the life of Jesus that he was recording, but that he had gleaned information from reading "narratives" written by "many" authors prior to the writing of the gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1), and from hearing or talking to people who were "eyewitnesses" of the events or who had preached about events in the life of Jesus ("ministers of the word") (Luke 1:2). Luke further declares that he did not take at face value everything that he had read or heard but did careful research to make sure that what he wrote Theophilus was correct (Luke 1:3). He states that his purpose is that "you [Theophilus—note that Luke had a specific audience in mind] may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed" (Luke 1:4). Each event recorded in this gospel must be interpreted in light of this stated purpose else it may be misinterpreted.

The two books of Kings cover a period of approximately four hundred years (from the death of David ca. 961 B. C. [1 Kings 2:10] to the elevation of Jehoiachin of Judah in Babylon by Evil-Merodach or Amel-Marduk ca. 561 B. C. [2 Kings 25:27-30]). Obviously, a book cannot have been written earlier than the latest event recorded in that book.

Thus, 1 and 2 Kings did not exist in their present final form earlier than 561 B. C., and they could have been completed much later than this time. Yet, frequently the reader is invited to consult sources used in preparing 1 and 2 Kings if he wishes to learn additional information: "the book of the acts of Solomon" (1 Kings 11:41), "the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" (1 Kings 14:19; 15:31; etc.) and "the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah" (1 Kings 14:29; 15:7; 2 Kings 14:18; etc.). Since this author could not have been an eyewitness of much of the information related in his book, he had to depend on earlier sources handed down to him. It is both interesting and important to understand the events he selects and includes in his work, and the sources from which they came to him. But it is of primary importance to understand the needs and problems of the people for whom he wrote and the purpose he had in mind in writing. A detailed knowledge of the historical events related in 1 and 2 Kings is insufficient if one does not gain an understanding of the purpose the author had in mind in relating these events. (For a more detailed discussion of the making of biblical books, see Ch. 7.)

One gets insights into the needs and problems of recipients of a biblical book and into the author's purpose by weaving together the various statements in that book. For example, from Paul's admonitions in 1 Corinthians, it is possible to reconstruct a reasonably clear picture of the situation in the church at Corinth when he wrote this letter. Recurring words, expressions, or ideas and an author's own summary of events provide clues to his thought. Before recounting details about specific judges that delivered Israel from foreign oppressors during their early years in the land of Canaan, the author of the book of Judges gives his own summary of this whole era (Judg. 2:11-23). He emphasizes that it was characterized by four religious features: (a) Israel *apostatized* from God by serving the Baals (vss. 11-13, 17, 19); (b) God *punished* them for this by sending enemy nations to oppress them (vss. 14-15, 20-23); (c) Israel "cried to the Lord" or *repented* and returned to his service (vs. 18); (d) God *delivered* them from their foes by

raising up a judge to save them (vss. 16, 18). Then, as he rehearses the story of the major judges, he follows this same four-point pattern:

Judge	Apostasy	Punishment	Repentance	Deliverance
Othniel	3:7	3:8	3:9	3:9
Ehud	3:12	3:12	3:15	3:15
Deborah	4:1	4:2	4:3	4:4ff.
Gideon	6:1	6:1	6:6-7	6:7ff.
Jephthah	10:6	10:7	10:10	11:1ff.
Samson	13:1	13:1	X	13:2ff.

This recurring theological pattern is hardly accidental. The author of the book of Judges is trying to show the original readers of his work that when God's people forsake the Lord for other gods, they are punished; but when they repent and return to him, he delivers them from their enemies.

In attempting to comprehend an author's purpose, it is important to determine whether he approves or disapproves the words or actions of people in his account. Sometimes the author makes this clear by his own statements or by the way he relates an event. For instance, when Samson asked his father and mother for permission to marry a Philistine woman of Timnah, they rebuked him for wanting to marry a foreigner (Judg. 14:2-3). But the author of the book of Judges tells his reader: "His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord; for he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines" (vs. 4). This writer approves Samson's desire to marry a Philistine woman, because this provides a situation in which Samson can carry out God's will to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. (See 13:5.) Frequently it is very hard to determine whether a biblical author approved or disapproved the words or actions of his subjects. For example, it is not clear whether the author of the book of Genesis condoned or condemned Jacob for forcing Esau to sell him his birthright before allowing him to eat some of the red pottage he had prepared (Gen. 25:29-34).

Determining the religious thrust or theology of any biblical context is an art that perhaps no man ever masters completely. It demands that one put himself wholly into the situation. He must understand the historical situation that gave birth to a

biblical book (or set of books). But more than this, he must try to capture the intentions and feelings of the biblical author and his audience. He must seek to understand how that author expected his audience to respond to his work and what responses he hoped to achieve in writing as he did. Frequently some things an author did not say are as significant as the things he did say; or the attitude in which he wrote is just as important as what he wrote; or the order in which he presented his thoughts reflects his emphasis more than any one of those thoughts in isolation. (See Ch.9 for a presentation of the major emphases in OT theology.)

FROM THE LARGER TO THE SMALLER CONTEXT

It is essential to a correct understanding of the Bible to begin with a whole book in its larger historical and theological setting and then move to the smaller subdivisions, paragraphs, verses, lines, and words in that book. Here again competent OT introductions and theologies are indispensable. After determining the major theological emphases in a book, it is necessary to determine the extent of each subdivision and paragraph in that book. For example, the famous passage on love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is part of chapters 12-14, as Paul's recurring introductory phrase "Now concerning" (12:1) and the subject matter demonstrate. It is also part and parcel of the entire book of 1 Corinthians. If one studies these verses apart from their larger contexts, it is possible that he will miss the emphasis Paul had in mind.

In chapters 12-14, Paul is discussing the problem involving tongue speakers and prophets in the Corinthian church; throughout the book of 1 Corinthians he is endeavoring to build bridges between brethren who envy one another and brethren that feel superior to their fellows. The commentator must try to understand how Paul intended for the admonitions in 13:4-7 to speak to the immediate situation involving tongue speakers and prophets and to the more general problem of envy and arrogance, but also how these admonitions fit together with the rest of this book to convey a

relevant divine message to his Corinthian brethren. Only then is one in a position to decide how the message in these verses applies to situations in the modern church and world. If one isolates 13:4-7 from chapters 12-14, or chapters 12-14 from the spirit and message of the whole book, he runs the risk of misunderstanding the passage itself. At the same time, of course, the way in which one determines the larger theological thrust of a book is by carefully doing exegeses of the different passages in that book.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

In order to interpret a passage correctly, it is necessary to understand the historical setting in which an oracle was delivered, or a conversation was held, or a song was composed, or a narrative was written, or a book was completed. The more information one can accumulate concerning the speaker, the audience, the place, events leading up to what is recorded in the text, and results of what is said or done, the more likely he is to understand the passage correctly. Concrete illustrations emphasize the importance of these considerations.

The speaker. John 9:31 says, "We know that God does not listen to sinners." This passage has been used to argue that God does not answer a person's prayers if he is not a Christian. But the *speaker* here is the blind man that Jesus healed at the pool of Siloam. (See vss. 1, 6-7, 13, 24, 30.) "We" refers to the blind man and the Pharisees. This statement shows that in the days of Jesus one group of Pharisees believed that any Jew who was not a Pharisee (or at least a supporter of the Pharisees' position) was a "sinner" and that God would not answer his prayers. The Pharisees contended that since Jesus was not a Pharisee or a supporter of the Pharisees' position, he was a "sinner" (vss. 16, 24). It is in response to this that the blind man speaks in verse 31. He reasons that he could not have been healed unless Jesus had asked God to heal him, and since he did heal him, God must have listened to Jesus—because "we know that God does not listen to sinners." Since God listened to Jesus, he cannot be a sinner, as the Pharisees

insist. This verse does not mean that God does not answer a person's prayers if he is not a Christian. For one thing, the speaker (the blind man) is *not speaking authoritatively* like Moses at Sinai or Paul on the Areopagus but is simply stating the view of the Pharisees and their sympathizers. Not everything that is said by everyone in the Bible is the word of God to man. It is important that this be kept in mind if one is to determine what portions of the Bible express the views of Satan (as Gen. 3:1, 4; Matt. 4:3, 6, 9), the opinions of men (as the words of Peter in Matt. 16:22), or views contrary to those of an inspired writer, quoted by him for the sake of refutation (Col. 2:21). Second, the context of John 9:31 makes it clear that the author of this book opposes the position of the Pharisees on this point. Third, other passages in the NT teach that God does answer prayers of people who are seeking him, even though they are not yet Christians (Acts 9:11; 10:1-4).

The audience. The Lord says through the prophet Ezekiel, "When I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, . . . I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live" (Ezek. 37:13-14). Some have interpreted these words to refer to the resurrection from the dead in the last day. However, the people to whom the Lord is speaking here (his audience) are not individuals who had died physically. The context shows that they were very much alive physically when the Lord spoke these words, for they were the Jews who had been carried into Babylonian exile in 587 B. C. Now they were cumbered with despondency; they had lost all hope (vs. 11). The Lord addresses himself to *that* problem. He compares their feeling of hopelessness with *death*. Then he promises that they will return to Palestine by using the figure of enlivening the dead (vss. 12-14). If one takes seriously the audience, he cannot interpret Ezekiel 37:1-14 to refer to the resurrection from physical death in the last day.

Factual details of an event. The more factual information one can glean and reconstruct of a historical situation lying behind an event, a conversation, a message, or a song preserved in a biblical passage, the more likely he is to understand that passage correctly. Reconstructing the historical

background of a text usually requires a great deal of research. A case in point is Isaiah 1:7-8. This text comes from a time when the country of Judah lay desolate, the cities of Judah had been burned with fire, a foreign army ("aliens") had devastated the land, and the "daughter of Zion" (Jerusalem) was left like a besieged city. The only event that fits all these details in Isaiah's lifetime is Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and Jerusalem in 701 B. C.

However, in order to get a proper picture of this event, it is necessary to examine a number of primary sources: 2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36-39; the Annals of Sennacherib (which are available in English translation in J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* [3d ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969], pp. 287-88; D. W. Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* [New York: Harper & Row, 1961], pp. 64-70); other passages in the book of Isaiah that may come from the same time period or that shed further light on Hezekiah's reign, as Isaiah 10:5-32; 17:12-14; 28-33; relevant passages from Isaiah's contemporary Micah, as Micah 1:8-16; 3:9-12; 4:8-5:6; Jeremiah 26:16-19; and possibly certain psalms, as Psalm 83 (which specifically mentions Assyria in vs. 8).

It is also important to become acquainted with the views of specialists on Hezekiah's reign. A wide variety of literature is available in this area. For the sake of illustration, representative types of studies may be listed:

(1) Commentaries: e.g., Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12. The Old Testament Library* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972).

(2) Histories of Israel: J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (2d ed., Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 277-308.

(3) Bible dictionaries: H. B. MacLean, "Hezekiah," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 598-600.

(4) Bible atlases and other works on archeology: G. E. Wright and F. V. Filson, *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible* (2d ed., Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 54-55, 73.

(5) Articles in scholarly journals: S. H. Horn, "Did

Sennacherib Campaign Once or Twice against Hezekiah?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 4 (1966), pp. 1-28; J. B. Geyer, "2 Kings 18:14-16 and the Annals of Sennacherib," *Vetus Testamentum* 21 (1971), pp. 604-606.

(6) Special studies: Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (London: SCM Press, 1967).

A vast amount of literature is available on almost any biblical text or subject, not only in English, but also in many foreign languages. Only very rarely (if ever) is it true that one has read *everything* on any biblical passage or problem. There is always information to which the commentator has not yet been exposed, and thus his interpretations must be offered in a spirit of humility and as views subject to change as new discoveries are made and new information is learned. He who is serious about discovering what actually happened historically and about learning God's message in that situation is eager to read all he can on the subject and to abandon incorrect impressions or beliefs for more accurate ones, both intellectual and spiritual.

In order to get a better understanding of many historical events recorded in the Bible, it is necessary to consult reliable maps. One should learn the locations of cities, mountains, rivers, valleys, and lakes in relationship to each other, and distances between various places (geography). He should also fix in mind the lay of the land, so that he will know whether a locality is *down* in a valley or *up* on a hill, the features of the surrounding terrain, etc. (topography). Y. Aharoni and M. Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1968), offer excellent aids along these lines.

In many biblical stories, it is important to learn as much as possible about clothing worn by various groups of people or nations, kinds of equipment used in warfare, different sorts of money, secular and sacred buildings with their furniture, agricultural implements, types of animals and plants, means of transportation, political and economic practices, etc. The five-volume work edited by M. Avi-Yonah and A. Malamat, *Illustrated World of the Bible Library* (Jerusalem: The International Publishing Co. Ltd., 1958), is

very illuminating in these matters. (For an outline of Old Testament history, see Chs. 4 and 5.)

LANGUAGE

Meaning of words. It is basic to a study of any literature to understand the meaning of words used in the text. One must be extremely careful to discover the meaning that the biblical writer or speaker had in mind and avoid superimposing his own definition on a word. This is very difficult and requires much work and self-discipline.

In addition to the difficulty of translating Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into the best possible English equivalents, three matters pose serious problems for English readers. First, modern English-speaking people often use words found in the Bible but attach a different meaning to them from what was intended by the biblical writer. One example is the use of the word "soul" (Hebrew *nephesh*; Greek *psyche*). The average twentieth-century man in the English-speaking world uses "soul" for the inner part of *man* that will live *eternally*. However, many passages where this word appears will not allow this meaning, and even the KJV avoids translating the original words by "soul" in a number of places. According to the Hebrew of Genesis 1:20 God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living *souls*" (KJV, "the moving creature"); and in Genesis 1:24 God said, "Let the earth bring forth living *souls* (KJV, "the living creature") according to their kinds." Biblically speaking, then, fish and beasts have *souls* just as man does. Now since this word cannot mean the inner part of *fish* or *beasts* that will live eternally, biblically speaking it is not clear that the word "soul" is what distinguishes man from other creatures of God. "Soul" usually denotes the whole living being or life itself. For example, when 1 Samuel 18:1, 3 says that Jonathan loved David "as his own *soul*," it means that Jonathan loved David as *himself*. When Paul tells the Thessalonians, "we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own *souls*" (1 Thess. 2:8, see the KJV and the ASV), he means that he and Silas and

Timothy were willing to share *themselves* with them (see the RSV and NEB).

Second, frequently words have changed their meaning in the course of the development of the English language. A word that had one meaning when the KJV was published in Great Britain in 1611 may have an entirely different meaning in America today. One example is "treasures" (Hebrew *'otseroth*) in the KJV of Job 38:22:

Hast thou entered into the *treasures* of the snow,
Or hast thou seen the *treasures* of the hail?

Three to four centuries ago, the word "treasure" meant not only wealth or riches, but also a place where treasures were stored. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 9 (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 305, cites several examples of this usage of "treasure" in English literature from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries A.D. To be sure, the Hebrew word *'otseroth* can mean wealth (Isa. 2:7; 30:6; Jer. 15:13), but frequently it means places where wealth and other things are stored up (1 Kings 7:51; 15:18; 2 Kings 12:18; Jer. 38:11; Ezek. 28:4). The context of Job 38:22 demands this latter meaning. In verses 19 and 24, the Lord asks Job if he knows where light dwells; in verse 19, he asks him if he knows where darkness lives; in verse 24, he asks him if he knows where the east wind is kept until God is ready to scatter it on the earth; and in verse 22, he asks him if he knows where snow and hail are stored up until God is ready to use them. God is not asking Job if he has "examined" the "riches" that *come out of* the snow, but if he has "entered into" the "treasuries or storehouses" *out of which snow comes*. Deuteronomy 28:12 speaks of *rain* coming out of God's "good treasury the heavens"; Jeremiah 10:13; 51:16; and Psalm 135:7 say God brings forth the *wind* from his "storehouses"; Psalm 33:7 declares that God puts the *deeps* in "storehouses"; and, following the same basic figure of these verses, Job 38:22 presupposes that God keeps *snow* and *hail* stored up in heavenly treasuries or storehouses.

Now since "treasures" meant "treasuries or storehouses"

in 1611, the Anglican and Puritan scholars who translated the KJV correctly chose "treasures" to translate the Hebrew *'otseroth*. However, since "treasures" has now come to mean primarily "wealth or riches" and since this is not what God intended in the words recorded in Job 38:22, it has become necessary to translate *'otseroth* by "treasuries" (ASV), "storehouses" (RSV), "storehouse or arsenal" (NEB), and the like, to convey the correct thought to English-speaking readers living in the twentieth century. The issue here is not which English version is truest to the original Hebrew. They are all accurate, and they all say the same thing. The only thing that would make them *appear* to differ in the modern reader's mind is that the word "treasures" does not mean the same thing to the average man today that it did 350 years ago. Because the English language has changed, more recent translations have been forced to use different words from those found in earlier versions in order to avoid conveying an incorrect idea of the meaning of the original to modern man. (A complete list of passages using *'otseroth*, with the meaning of this noun in each passage, is given in F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968], pp. 69-70.)

Another English word whose meaning has changed since the publication of the KJV in 1611 is "simplicity" in 2 Corinthians 11:3—"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the *simplicity* that is in Christ." Occasionally, modern man uses this passage to show that the *Bible* is "simple" (i.e., "easy to understand"). If this is true, it contradicts passages like 2 Peter 3:15-16:

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things *hard to be understood*, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.

(KJV)

But there is no contradiction here, because in 2 Corinthians 11:3 (a) Paul is not talking about the Bible, but about the devotion of the Corinthian brethren; and (b) in 1611 "simplicity" in a context like this did not mean "easy to understand," but "sincerity." The average man understood "*simplicity*" to be the opposite of "*duplicity*," "*hypocrisy*," "*dishonesty*," or "*infidelity*." *The Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 9 (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 66, provides examples of this meaning in English literature from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. The Greek word here is *haplôtēs*. All Greek scholars agree that it means "singleness, sincerity, honesty, fidelity." So in 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul is expressing his fear that Satan will cause Christ's bride (here the Corinthian church) to become unfaithful to her betrothed. (See also vs. 2.) The word "simplicity" conveyed this idea to the average man when the KJV and ASV were published, but in more recent translations it has become necessary to use "sincere devotion" (RSV) or "single-hearted devotion" (NEB) to render the original correctly for modern man, because the generally accepted meaning of "simplicity" has changed as the English language has developed.

Third, the same word does not necessarily have the same meaning everywhere it appears in Scripture. An example of this is the word "heaven." According to Genesis 1, "heaven" stands over against "earth" (vs. 1), God makes a firmament to separate the waters above from the waters below and calls it "heaven" (vss. 6-8), he creates the sun, moon, and stars and sets them in this firmament of (called) "heaven" (vss. 14-15, 17), and he makes birds to fly above the earth across the firmament of (called) "heaven" (vs. 20). Clearly "heaven" here means the sky or the atmospheric space above the earth. But the apostle Peter tells Christians, "we have been born anew . . . to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in *heaven* for you" (1 Pet. 1:3-4). Here "heaven" does not mean the sky, but the eternal home of God's people.

It is indeed important to interpret scripture by scripture. But this does not mean that it is correct methodologically to transfer the meaning of a word in one context to other contexts that use the same word. Instead, the first responsibility of a Bible student is to seek to understand a word in its own context, for it is possible

that it may have a meaning there which it has nowhere else in Scripture. For various reasons, a particular author may choose a particular word (which is commonly used in different senses elsewhere) to convey his theological emphasis. For example, Paul uses "the Lord" almost exclusively of Jesus Christ.

Meaning of expressions. Man uses not only words but also phrases to express his thoughts. Frequently words that mean one thing when they are used in isolation have an entirely different meaning in a stereotyped expression. A case in point is the contemporary American expression "You are pulling my leg." One would arrive at a very amusing interpretation of this phrase if he analyzed each word instead of looking at the whole expression. "You are pulling my leg" does not mean "You are exerting a force on my limb so as to cause motion toward you," but "You are teasing me." Similarly, the Bible contains many phrases that must be understood as idiomatic or stereotyped expressions if one is to interpret them correctly.

Several OT passages contain the phrase "He slept with his fathers." To "sleep" means to fall into a natural and temporary diminution of feeling and thought, and "father" means a male parent. Yet the expression "He slept with his fathers" does not mean "He fell into a natural and temporary diminution of feeling and thought with his male parents." It simply means "He died." This is clear from the context, because after a person "sleeps with his fathers," he is "buried" (1 Kings 2:10; 11:43, 14:31). It is also clear from synonymous expressions used with this phrase. God says to David, "When *your days are fulfilled* and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you" (2 Sam. 7:12). According to 1 Kings 11:21, "Hadad heard in Egypt that David *slept with his fathers* and that Joab the commander of the army was dead." "When *David's time to die* drew near," he said to Solomon his son, "I am about to go the way of all the earth" (1 Kings 2:1-2); a few verses later the text says, "Then David *slept with his fathers*" (vs. 10). The Lord said to King Josiah, "I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace" (2 Kings 22:20). All these passages show that the expression "to sleep with one's fathers" means "to die."

A proper understanding of this principle partly explains why it is impossible to translate many passages in the Bible literally. If

scholars did this, not only would numerous lines sound strange, but they would be unintelligible to modern man. One example is 2 Samuel 5:4. Translated literally, the original Hebrew says, "A son of thirty year David in to reign him, forty year he reigned." No English version translates this verse literally. If one did, it would be wrong. The task of biblical translators is to transfer the *ideas* of the Bible into corresponding modern ideas, and not to translate each word slavishly into a corresponding English word. Thus the translators of the KJV in 1611 wisely avoided a literal translation of 2 Samuel 5:4 and produced a good correct English sentence: "David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years." More recent versions have adopted this same policy. All English versions of the Bible have their strengths and weaknesses, and therefore one should examine all of them as he seeks to understand God's word. A careful study of the RSV shows that it is a most accurate translation. (Unless otherwise noted, this version is quoted in the *Bible Study Textbook Series*.)

Figurative language and linguistic peculiarities. A major problem God has in communicating his message to man is couching divine attitudes, thoughts, and imperatives in understandable, challenging, relevant, memorable human language. He bridges the communication gap by beginning with concepts man already understands and using them as avenues for conveying his will. Thus the Bible is full of allegories, parables, figures, and other types of linguistic peculiarities. If one is to interpret the biblical text correctly, it is essential that he determine whether the original writer or speaker *intended* for his words to be taken literally or figuratively. Sometimes the Bible specifically states that a certain paragraph is allegorical or parabolic: Paul says his remarks on Sarah and Hagar compose "an allegory" (Gal. 4:24—applying to 4:21-5:1); and Matthew states that Jesus' story of the sower who planted seed on different types of soil was a "parable" (Matt. 13:3, 18—applying to 13:3-9, 18-23). In other instances, it is clear from the nature of the statement itself that a biblical text is intended to be taken figuratively. Problems arise for the reader when the biblical writer or speaker does not state specifically whether he *intends* to be relating historical facts or whether he *intends* to be telling an

allegory or parable or using a figure. In passages or books where this is not clear, it is necessary to admit that a dogmatic conclusion cannot be reached. Here it may be helpful to note and illustrate various kinds of figures used in Scripture.

Hyperbole is intentional exaggeration used for the sake of emphasis. When a hunter says, "I missed that deer a mile," everyone knows that he does not mean this literally, but that he is exaggerating to show disgust because he missed his game. On one occasion Jesus said: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). Some take this statement literally and then try to explain it by claiming that "the needle's eye" was a small gate through which a camel could not pass unless all his load was taken off his back. But there is no evidence for such a fanciful interpretation. Jesus is simply using hyperbole. He means that the possession of great wealth makes it very difficult for man to put his trust wholly in God. In Obadiah 4, the Lord speaks of Edom setting her nest among the stars. Obviously this is not intended to be taken literally, but is a hyperbole used to emphasize Edom's arrogance.

A *simile* is a comparison using "like" or "as" and clearly indicates a figure. One psalmist says, "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God" (Ps. 42:1). Clearly his point is that man's yearning for refreshing strength from God is like a thirsty deer's desire for fresh water. A *metaphor* is a comparison not using "like" or "as." A psalmist says: "We are . . . the sheep of his (God's) pasture" (Ps. 100:3). This cannot mean that human beings are *really* sheep, or imply that God is *really* a shepherd that brings sheep to a literal pasture. Rather, it suggests that God's relationship to his people is similar in a number of ways to a shepherd's relationship to his sheep.

Metonymy is the use of one word for another with which it is closely associated. When a guest says to a woman who has prepared the meal he is eating, "You set a good *table*," everyone knows that he means, "You prepare good *food*." He uses the word "table" because it is closely connected with "food" that is set on the table. Paul writes: "As often

as you eat this bread and *drink the cup*, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). But it is obvious that he does not really mean for Christians to drink the cup (i.e., the container), but the *wine* contained in the cup.

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which part of an object is used for the whole object or the whole is used for a part. When Paul says, "How beautiful are the *feet* of those who preach good news" (Rom. 10:15, quoting Isa. 52:7), both the context and common sense show that he has in mind the whole person, and not just his feet. God promises Abraham, "Your descendants shall possess the *gate* of their enemies" (Gen. 22:17); similarly, Jesus promises Peter, "The *gates* of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). In both cases the "gate" is used as a symbol for the whole city or kingdom.

Irony and *sarcasm* are methods of expression in which a speaker or writer means exactly the opposite of what he says. If a child rushes into the house covered with dirt and mud and his mother says, "Billy, you look beautiful," everyone realizes she is being sarcastic and means the opposite of what she actually says. When Job says to his three friends, "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you" (Job 12:2), there can be no question that he means they are very imperceptive and unwise. And when Elijah says mockingly to the prophets of Baal, "Cry aloud (i.e., to Baal), for he is a god" (1 Kings 18:27), he really means, "You can yell as loudly as you like, but you are wasting your time, because Baal is a nonexistent figment of your imagination and not a god."

Litotes is the use of an understatement in order to increase the effect. The psalmist declares, "A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). But it is clear that he is not concerned with God's not despising his penitent heart, but with his enthusiastically welcoming it.

Personification is speaking of an object or an abstract concept as if it were a person. First Chronicles 16:33 says that trees will sing for joy, and in Psalm 98:8 the poet

summons the floods to clap their hands. Proverbs 9:1-6 depicts wisdom as a woman who prepares a sumptuous banquet and invites all men to come into her house and eat of her food.

A *euphemism* is the substitution of an inoffensive expression for one that might be offensive. The KJV of 1 Samuel 24:3 (following the Hebrew text literally) says that Saul went into the cave "to cover his feet." This is a Hebrew idiom meaning "to have a bowel movement" (see also Judg. 3:24), not "to take a nap," as the casual reader might think. The "running issue" (KJV), "issue" (ASV), or "discharge" (RSV, NEB) from a man's body described in Leviticus 15:2, 3, and 19 is probably gonorrhea, a contagious inflammatory disease of the genitourinary tract affecting the male's urethra.

In order to speak of God in language that man can understand, it is necessary to speak of him as if he were a man (*anthropomorphism*) with human passions (*anthropopathism*). Such language is always inadequate because it cannot describe God as he is in the absolute, but only in accommodative language. Many problems have arisen because men take anthropomorphic statements literally. If God warns certain people that he will do something and then does not do it because they repent, the Bible says that God "repented" (Jon. 3:9; 4:2). This is not to be taken literally. Rather, the Bible is using language common to men to convey a great truth concerning God (*viz.*, he is compassionate and forgiving). To pursue the meaning beyond this is to go beyond the intention of biblical writers.

Aposiopesis is the sudden breaking off of a thought before it is completed. Several examples of this phenomenon appear in the OT, and it is important to recognize this for correct interpretation. When Moses prayed to the Lord in behalf of Israel, he cried: "But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exod. 32:32; see also Gen. 3:22-23).

Hendiadys is the use of two words occurring together or joined by "and" to express one idea. The phrase translated "my rock and my salvation" in Psalm 62:2, 6 appears to be a

hendiadys meaning “my rock of salvation” or “my mountain of triumph.”

Merismus is the expression of a totality by using the two extremes in a class. The expression “good and evil” in 2 Samuel 14:17 means “all things that are on the earth,” as the parallel line in verse 20 shows. “Man and beast” in Psalm 36:6 is a comprehensive term meaning all God’s creatures.

Any time the word “of” occurs in an expression, one must decide whether the author intended for the word after “of” to be the subject (*subjective genitive*) or the object (*objective genitive*) of the word before “of.” This must be decided in each context on the basis of context and parallel texts. The “love of Christ” in 2 Corinthians 5:14 must mean “Christ’s love for us” (subjective genitive), and not “our love for Christ” (objective genitive), as the following line and the whole context show. The “gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38 must mean “the gift which is the Holy Spirit” (subjective genitive), and not “the gift which the Holy Spirit gives” (objective genitive), because this is most natural in the context and is parallel to Acts 5:32.

Singular and plural. In many passages, a correct understanding is possible only if one rightly discovers whether a certain word is singular or plural. One problem area here is the second person pronoun. Modern American English makes no distinction between “you” (singular) and “you” (plural). But there is a distinction in the biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). In earlier stages of the English language, this distinction was made by using “thou, thine, and thee” for the singular and “ye, your, and yours” for the plural. This was part of daily speech. If a man met one person on the street he would say, “How art *thou*?”; but if he met two or more he would say, “How are *you*?” The idea that “thou” carries with it a special connotation of reverence cannot be substantiated. When Jesus says, “*Thou* blind Pharisee” (Matt. 23:26, KJV), he has no intention of showing reverence. And when he says to the devil, “Get *thee* hence, Satan” (Matt. 4:10, KJV), it would contradict the whole tenor of the paragraph and of the entire

New Testament to conclude that Jesus was showing him reverence. The word "thou" indicates the singular number and has nothing to do with showing reverence.

This understanding is crucial in interpreting a number of texts. One example is Luke 22:31-32:

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you (plural, so all the apostles), that he may sift you (plural) as wheat: But I have prayed for thee (singular, so Peter), that thy (singular) faith fail not: and when thou (singular) art converted, strengthen thy (singular) brethren (i.e., the other apostles who are weaker than you, Peter, and will depend heavily on your stronger faith).

A second problem area involving the singular and the plural is the adjective. In English it is often impossible to tell whether an adjective is singular or plural. There is a clear distinction in the biblical languages. One passage in which this distinction must be understood in order to interpret the text correctly is Hebrews 12:23, where the KJV and ASV have the expression "church of the first-born," and the RSV has "assembly of the first-born." On the basis of passages like Hebrews 1:6, a few have erroneously assumed that "first-born" in Hebrews 12:23 refers to Christ and from this conclude that the author of Hebrews had in mind "the church of Christ." The fact is that the Greek word translated "first-born" here is a genitive plural (*prototókōn*), and the writer means "church (or assembly) of first-born ones (people) who are (note the plural verb) enrolled in heaven." Just as the phrase "church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1) means the church *made up of* people who live in Thessalonica, so "church of the first-born" means the church made up of first-born people.

A third problem area involving the singular and the plural is the imperative. In the biblical languages it is easy to distinguish between a command addressed to one person and one addressed to many, but the English language frequently does not make this distinction. For example, if a man says "Go!" in English, it is impossible to tell whether he is speaking to one person or to a group. An understanding of this principle is important in interpreting Micah 6:1-2. In

verse 1, "Arise" and "plead" are singular, i.e., they are addressed to *one* person: apparently the Lord is speaking to Micah here. But in verse 2, "Hear" is plural, i.e., it is addressed to a *group*: now Micah is speaking to the "mountains."

The thoughtful biblical student who does not know Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek should use other means of finding out whether an ambiguous second person pronoun, adjective, or imperative is singular or plural. (a) He should consult as many English versions of the Bible as possible. The NEB would help one avoid an incorrect interpretation of Hebrews 12:23, for it reads, "assembly of the first-born citizens of heaven," which is an excellent translation of the meaning of the original. (b) He should consult a number of responsible commentaries written by scholars that know the biblical languages. (c) He should study competent Bible dictionaries that are devoted to word studies, such as *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* and *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

Tone of voice and emphasis. Subconsciously everyone who reads the Bible hears a certain tone of voice and emphasis in many texts. Admittedly, these matters must remain subjective in numerous passages, but there are many where the original emphasis is clear from the nature of the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek expression, or from the context. Certain clues may be suggested here.

Many statements in the Bible are not complete sentences. They indicate excitement or an inability to express oneself adequately because of the nature of the situation, thus reflecting an air of authenticity. This is often obscured in various English translations, apparently because the translators feel that they must produce a smooth-flowing literary work. According to the Hebrew text of Amos 3:11, the Lord urgently warns Israel: "An adversary! Even round about the land!" Usually English versions obscure this urgency by reading: "An adversary there shall be even round about the land" (so KJV and ASV, similarly RSV and NEB). A similar exclamation appears in the Greek text of Acts 8:36 when the eunuch cries out: "Look, water! What is to prevent my being

baptized?" His excitement is obvious. But English versions diminish this by reading, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (so KJV and ASV, similarly RSV and NEB).

In the biblical languages, the pronoun appears in the verb form itself. Therefore when a pronoun appears along with the verb, ordinarily the speaker or writer is placing emphasis on that pronoun. Gideon's reply to the men of Israel who wanted him to rule over them was, "I will not rule over you" (Judg. 8:23), and in the Hebrew the "I" is emphatic. It is unfortunate that translators of modern versions have not devised means to indicate when such emphases are intended in the original text.

The word order of the original text often shows where the biblical writer or speaker intended for the emphasis to be placed. When the elders of Israel urged Samuel to give God's people a king, Samuel prayed to the Lord. According to the word order of the Hebrew text, the Lord answered, "Not *thee* have they rejected, but *me* have they rejected from being king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). The emphasis is on the words "thee" and "me."

Once again, it is important for one who does not know the biblical languages to compensate for this by reading several English translations, consulting good commentaries, and studying scholarly articles dealing with the biblical text.

CUSTOMS AND ABIDING TRUTH

Throughout the history of Christianity, followers of Christ have debated the difficult question of whether a certain biblical command was intended for Christians in all times or whether it was limited to Christians in the first-century world. No certain solution to this problem which would apply to all situations has yet been suggested. Thus serious searchers for truth must respect each other's opinions in these matters and refrain from taking dogmatic positions which are unwarranted on the basis of present knowledge of Scripture. (See Rom. 14:1-8.)

Two observations are important here. First, the study of

one biblical text after another leaves the distinct impression that what is essential to religion is not merely external acts performed correctly, but the meaning of those acts and the motives of those doing them. Fasting was a widespread practice in biblical times, but it meant different things on different occasions. Sometimes people fasted to show their grief over someone's death (1 Sam. 31:13; 1 Chron. 10:12; 2 Sam. 1:12), sometimes to express their penitence of sins they had committed (1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Sam. 12:16, 21-23; Jer. 14:12; Jon. 3:5; Matt. 6:16-18), and sometimes to reflect great concern over the seriousness of a critical situation (Neh. 1:4; Esth. 4:3, 16; Ps. 35:13; Acts 13:2-3). But Isaiah 58:1-9 declares that for God, genuine fasting is liberating the oppressed, sharing bread with the hungry, taking the homeless poor into one's house, and clothing the naked.

Second, a belief, teaching, or religious practice does not have to originate in Israel or Christianity to be central to Judaism or Christianity. Jesus declared that no commandment is greater than to love God with one's whole being and one's neighbor as himself (Mark 12:28-34). Yet God summoned man to do this long before Christ ever came to earth (see Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18). To love God and one's fellowman completely is central to Christianity, and yet this did not originate with Christianity, nor is it unique to Christianity.

TYPES OF LITERATURE

In order to interpret any piece of literature correctly, it is necessary to determine the type of literature it is and the characteristics of that type. Generally speaking, the literature found in the OT may be divided into six large groups. This chapter offers a brief introduction to each group. (A more detailed discussion is given in Ch. 6.)

Narrative. The primary means of recording history in the OT is prose narrative. The following things should be kept in mind in reading narrative material. (a) The major emphasis in relating history is religious, not preserving facts. The various biblical writers describe events for the purpose of

teaching great lessons concerning God and man. Frequently an author states the theological point he wishes to make in the midst of the account he is handing on to his readers. As the writer of 2 Samuel 8 tells of David's victories over the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians, and the Edomites, he declares that "the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went" (vss. 6, 14). (b) Biblical writers selected those stories or parts of stories that would make the greatest impression on their readers and that would best suit their purpose in writing a book (John 20:30-31). (c) The Bible does not always present events in the exact chronological sequence that they occurred. There are many ways in which narratives can be arranged, and the Bible student should try to discover the arrangement intended by the authors of the various books.

Law codes. Most of the legal material in the OT is found in Exodus 20-31, Leviticus, Numbers 2-6, 8-10, 15, 19, 28-30, 34-36, and Deuteronomy 4-30. Many of these laws are bound together in codes, such as the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21), the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:23-23:22; see 24:7), the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26), etc. These laws fall into two large categories. Some are stated absolutely without any modifications, as "You shall not kill" (Exod. 20:13). Scholars call these *apodictic laws*. Others depend on the circumstances, as:

If he (a slave) comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's and shall go out alone. . . .

Exodus 21:3-4

Scholars call these *casuistic laws*. Unfortunately, many find biblical laws meaningless and uninspiring. If one could realize that they are people-centered, and are designed to meet the needs of men in real life situations, he would study them enthusiastically and greatly benefit from it.

Poetry. Much of the OT is in Hebrew poetry. It is a great weakness of the KJV that it is printed so modern man cannot tell what is poetry and what is prose. The serious student must consult the RSV and other modern translations to

discover this. Hebrew poetry occurs in Job 3:1–42:6, Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, large portions of the prophetic literature, and various portions of the historical books.

The most prominent characteristic of OT poetry is parallelism, which consists of various types. Sometimes two lines say the same thing in different words, making synonymous parallelism:

Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 16:18

Sometimes the second line expresses a thought that stands in contrast to the first line, which makes antithetic parallelism:

A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 15:1

The OT also contains synthetic, emblematic, stairlike, and inverted parallelism.

There are also other characteristics of Hebrew poetry. Frequently the same refrain occurs several times in a poetic piece:

How are the mighty fallen.

2 Samuel 19:25, 27

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to the sons of men.

Psalms 107:8, 15, 21, 31

Many poems in the OT are acrostics, i.e., each succeeding line, verse, or group of verses begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet, as Psalm 119, the description of the good wife in Proverbs 31:10–31, and Lamentations 1–4.

Prophetic. A number of literary types appear in the prophetic books. Biographical and autobiographical accounts occur in both prose and poetry. The most predominant literary type used by the prophets is a brief oracle which was originally addressed to a specific situation. The literary style

of an oracle was often derived from familiar facets and customs of Israelite life. The prophets used oracles of doom to announce imminent punishment (Mic. 3:9-12) and oracles of hope to announce future deliverance (Jer. 30:18-22). They pronounced warnings and woe oracles upon God's people (Isa. 5:8-23) and foreign nations (Isa. 10:5-19; Amos 1:3-2:8) because of their sins. They used taunt songs against enemies (Isa. 37:22; Jer. 48-51) and laments or dirges over God's people (Amos 5:1-2; Ezek. 19:1-9). They assumed the role of the plaintiff's lawyer in God's lawsuit against his unfaithful people (Mic. 6:1-8; Hos. 4:1-3).

Wisdom. The fundamental literary type found in the OT wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and certain Psalms) is a simple proverb, designed to teach a great lesson in memorable words. Many proverbs are couched in the form of comparisons:

Like a madman who throws firebrands,
arrows, and death,
is the man who deceives his neighbor
and says, "I am only joking!"

Proverbs 26:18-19

There are many numerical proverbs in the OT, and frequently they assume that a riddle has been proposed which deserves solution (Prov. 6:16-19; 30:11-31; see Judg. 14:14, 18). Occasionally the Wise Men (see Jer. 18:18; Prov. 24:23) presented their teaching in rather long poetic pieces that dealt with the same subject throughout, as the loose woman (Prov. 5:7-23; 6:20-35) and wisdom (Prov. 8).

Apocalyptic. There are a few chapters in the OT that deal with an ideal future for God's faithful people (Isa. 24-27; Ezek. 38-39; Dan.; Zech. 9-14). Scholars call this type of material *apocalyptic*. Although there is no consensus concerning this material, a few observations can be made. These works were delivered in a time of great crisis for the purpose of encouraging God's people to stand firm in the midst of severe persecution. Their various authors used fantastic symbolism, imagery, and visions to convey their message. Evidently the meaning of this imagery was clear to the original audiences (although much of it is not clear to

modern man), because these authors intended to "reveal" God's message to their hearers or readers, not to "conceal" it. It seems likely that they chose to use imagery in order to protect themselves and their audiences from persecution that would surely come if their enemies understood what they were saying. The modern reader should interpret apocalyptic pieces as God's message addressed to the writer's audience, and not as a panoramic view of human history from the writer's time to the end of the world. This is not to deny that apocalyptists spoke of the end of the world, but to emphasize that they spoke primarily for the people of their own day.

The same God who guided the production of the Bible gave man a highly complex mind. The biblical message is addressed to this mind. Therefore it is a very complex message. God expects man to use his mind to its fullest capacity in comprehending that message. This is a long and difficult process. One must give his lifetime to it. But it is extremely rewarding for the humble, growing, responsible student.

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