

How to Read Your Bible – Wednesdays at 6:30p

#3 How to Read a NT Epistle (Letter)

1 Thessalonians & Philippians

How did the homework assignment go? Questions?

Generally: What was your sense of the big picture?

Here are three great questions to ask yourself about an epistle:

(Imagine overhearing someone talking on a cell phone)

1) What did I learn about the recipients?

2) What was the author's general feelings?

3) Where there any clues as to the occasion for writing (why was the author writing?

Problems? etc.)

“Epistle”: an Apostolic **Letter** to a Congregation(s) or individual with a Spirit-led Purpose

There are two “contexts” to keep in mind:

I. The Historical Context (Occasion)

A. When was this written?

SEE TIMELINE

A. What can I learn about the person talking in the letter? Who was he?

(For example: Letters of John Adams to Thomas Jefferson)

1 Thess 1:1-5

200 level: A lot can be learned from the Gospels and Acts: the history of the early church, a whole course on this

B. What can I find out about the people that are being talked to? Where did they live?

What sort of people and culture were they?

1 Thess 1:2, 6-10

200 level: Much can be learned from historical research: Study Bibles, Introduction to Commentaries, Bible Dictionaries/Websites - For instance, What is the Greco-Roman world and why is that important?

C. What was the situation (problems, reasons) that “occasioned” this letter?

(For example: a collection of sermons from 2020)

Clues: 1 Corinthians 1:10-11; 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1

II. The Literary Context (Within the Text Itself)

Outline: Ancient epistles generally follow this structure

1. Name of the writer
2. Name of recipient
3. Greeting
4. Prayer
5. Body
6. Closing farewell

Every Letter is to Be Understood As “Occasional” (Purpose in Specific Situation)

Through his statements, exhortations, and flow, the writer will tell you:

- What his current **relationship** is with the people: visits, plans
- What his **concerns** are: thanks, behavior, belief, conflict, question, confusion
- What he wants to **accomplish in Christ**: Gospel focus for the congregation
- What he wants you to **do** about it: Exhortations (commands based on the Gospel to do something, stop doing something, or do something differently)

Let's look at Paul's letter to the Philippians:

- Relationships:
 - 1:12-26
 - 4:10,14-15
 - Concerns and Purpose:
 - 1:27-30 Main point of letter
 - 1:28-30 What does suffering have to do with it?
 - 2:1-4 How does this relate to unity?
 - 2:5-8 Why bring up Jesus here?
 - 2:12-13 “THEREFORE” What is the conclusion to be drawn?
 - 2:14-18 How does this follow from to the conclusion?
 - Christ Focus:
 - Focus on the Joy that Jesus has given you!
 - (How does “JOY” relate to the “UNITY” Point)
 - Exhortations... (now go ahead and do it)
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Assignment for Next Time:

Topic: #4 How to Read Narrative

Read: Start at 1 Samuel 8 through 2 Samuel 2:7

“How To Read” Bible Project Videos:

- (1) [The Bible Story](#)
- (2) [1 Samuel](#)

Getting More Out of Your Reading

- 1) Have a place and a plan
- 2) Skim headings to get a content awareness for the surrounding text
- 3) Try to read a specific chunk / whole book in one sitting & reread

Reading OT Narrative:

- 1) What problem/conflict/plot is revealed in the story?
- 2) Keep in mind the Big Story (Meta-narrative):
 - God is the Protagonist (Main Actor)
 - Satan and His Kingdom is the Antagonist (Against the Main Actor)
 - The People are the Agonists (Those Caught Up into the Struggle)
 - The Story is Ultimately Directing us the Resolution found in Jesus Christ