

Old Testament Survey - Part 3

by Dick Woodward

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the background of the Bible, knowing it is the inspired word of God, and approaching it with the right attitude to deepen our faith and understanding.

Duration: 28:31

Scripture: Deuteronomy 29:29, Psalm 27:13, Psalm 119:160, John 7:17, John 17:17

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the Bible as the word of God amidst modern skepticism and attacks on its credibility. It highlights the significance of knowing the background of the Bible, the inspiration of scripture, and the practical approach to studying and applying its teachings. The speaker encourages a humble and open-hearted attitude towards scripture, seeking truth, and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide interpretation and application.

Transcript

Please enjoy this original recording of the Mini-Bible College, also known as MBC, hosted by the author himself, Pastor Dick Woodward, in the 1980s. International Cooperating Ministries is privileged to make his timeless Bible lessons available. Each weekly episode is 30 minutes.

Together, these sessions create a three-year curriculum. This practical walk through the Bible is nurturing believers and equipping disciples speaking 31 languages in more than 50,000 small group Bible studies around the world. Now here's Pastor Woodward with the Mini-Bible College.

In this session, I would like to conclude our introduction to our survey of the Bible. In the first three sessions of this course, we are trying to set some perspective on the Bible that will open up our understanding of the Bible. Jesus said at the end of the Gospel of Luke that if we just understand that the Bible is all about him, then perhaps our understanding of the scripture will be opened up.

It makes a big difference to get this perspective on the scripture. And so I would like to conclude our introductory sessions by continuing with some of this perspective on the Bible that can open up our understanding of the Bible. We have considered the way the Bible is organized, and we've considered something about the history of the Bible, how we got the Bible, and we've considered something of the purposes of the scripture.

Now, what is the importance of our knowing this information? Why is it important for us to understand something, for instance, of the background of the Bible? Well, I believe it's important today because the Bible is under very severe attack today. There are a great many people today who know the Bible but do not believe the Bible to be the word of God in the sense that we have described it to be the word of God. A good friend of mine recently, who was entering into a survey study of the scripture with me by way of audio tape, was listening to his pastor every Sunday while he was listening to these tapes.

And he came to this conclusion, he said, about midway through that year when he was listening to these audio tapes and at the same time listening to his pastor. He put it this way. He said, the people in the church who know the Bible don't believe the Bible, and the people in the church who believe the Bible don't know the Bible.

This man determined that he was going to know something about the Bible and believe the Bible. Now, because there are many people in the church today who know the Bible but don't believe it to be the word of God, and because these people have studied primarily the backgrounds of the Bible rather than the content and the devotional application of the Bible, it is important for us to know something about the background of the Bible. If you make a statement like, the King James was good enough for Paul and it's good enough for me, then you just confirm the conviction of many of these people that the only people who really believe the Bible are the people who don't know anything about the Bible.

Their attitude is, I know something about the background of the Bible, that's why I don't believe it to be the word of God. And if you knew anything about the Bible, you wouldn't believe it to be the word of God either. Now, for this reason, it's important for us to know something about the background of the scripture.

It's also important because the writing of the scripture was a very great miracle, and we should be fascinated to see how God brought about this very great miracle. And thirdly, it's important for us to know something of the background of the Bible, because it has an important effect upon our approach to the Bible, especially in the matter of the translation of the Bible. If you realize that the Bible was not written in King James English, but it was written in Koine Greek, it was written in the kind of Greek that was understood by the common, ordinary, everyday person, then you realize that the Bible was meant to be understood by the lay person, and you should then get translations of the Bible that you can understand, that are very readable translations.

Now also, as we come to the subject of the background of the Bible, we need to face this question, how do we know that the Bible is the inspired word of God? Since there are so many people today who know the Bible and don't believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, we need to be able to discuss this issue, how can you know that the Bible is the word of God? I would like to suggest some answers to that question in this last introductory session on our survey of the scripture. First of all, in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John, chapter 17, I believe Jesus gave us a tremendous insight into the scripture itself when he made this simple statement, Thy word is truth. He's praying in the garden for the apostles, and he prays this petition for them, sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth.

As he prays for the apostles, he prays that the Father will not take them out of the world, but keep them from the evil of the world. Now the way he wants them to be kept from the evil of the world is to be set apart to the Father, and the instrument that sets them apart to the Father is the scripture. He describes the scripture as the truth.

He says, Thy word is the truth that can sanctify these people or set them apart to you while they live their lives in this world. This means that if we come to the scripture, the thing we should look for is truth. According to Jesus, the word of God is truth, and that's what we should look for as we come to the scripture.

In John 7, verse 17, Jesus takes this a little further, and he says, If many man's will is to do God's will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. In the seventh chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus claimed that his word was the word of God. When that was challenged, he told people how they could know that this was so.

He said, If you come to my word with the will to do what it says, in doing what it says you will come to know that this is in fact the word of God. In other words, Jesus put this issue on a very practical basis. If you want to know that the Bible is the word of God, come to it with the will to do it, and in the doing will come the knowing.

The intellectual seems to come at this the other way. The intellectual seems to say, Seeing is believing. When I see it, I'll believe it.

Or they say, If you reach me intellectually, then I'll follow through volitionally. First convince me that it's true, and then I'll implement it, I'll apply it. Now, Jesus consistently and the scriptures consistently say, No, that's the wrong approach to these issues.

First you should commit yourself volitionally, and then you will become convinced intellectually. In other words, according to Jesus, the only people who are qualified to express an opinion on the inspiration of the scripture are the people who have come to the scripture with the will to do what it teaches. People who come to the scripture looking for truth, truth that can make a difference in their lives, truth that they can apply to their everyday situations.

Now when they do apply the truth of God's word to their everyday lives, the change that causes, or the impact that makes upon their life, that convinces them that this is in fact the word of God. Now I honestly believe as we come to the issue of the inspiration of the scripture, we should put it on this pragmatic, practical basis, this basis of experience. Jesus consistently teaches this in the gospels when he meets the apostles.

He meets them by asking them the question, What do you want? And their response is, Where do you live at, Rabbi? And he says, Come and see. And it says, They came and saw where he lived, and they lived with him. And we all know that they lived for him, and every one of them died for him because of what they saw when they made the commitment to come and see.

Now that's how you prove that the scripture is the word of God. Not by studying Semitic languages, and not by going to seminary or Bible college, you prove that the Bible is the word of God by implementing the truth that the Bible teaches. The psalmist teaches us this also in Psalm 27.

David says, I would have fainted unless I had believed in order to see the goodness of God in the land of the living. First I believed, he says, and then I saw. First I believed it, and then I saw it.

That's how we're supposed to prove that the scripture is the word of God. Now again as we consider the backgrounds of the Bible and how we got the Bible, we should ask questions like this. How should our attitude toward the scripture be affected by its history? Now one of the things that comes across to me as I

consider this question is this.

There's a principle in public speaking, one of the basic principles of public speaking, that goes something like this. The purpose of public speaking is communication, not exhibition. If you're a good public speaker, the purpose of your speech is not exhibition.

You don't want people to go away saying, my, what a great speaker. Wasn't that an exhibition of public speaking? The important thing is what you're communicating to those people. Your purpose is communication, not exhibition.

Now this is intensely true of the scripture. When you come to the scripture, realize this. The purpose of the scripture is God wants to communicate with man.

God wants to communicate with you. God has truth he wants you to know. He has truth he wants you to implement or apply to your life, because he wants you to have life and have it more abundantly, and he knows that if you apply this truth to your life, you will have this eternal life that he planned for you and me to have.

Now it's so important to come to the scripture realizing that that's the purpose of the scripture, communication between God and man. The Bible is not supposed to be an exhibition of ancient literature. It's not supposed to be some sort of a rabbit's foot that we carry around with us.

The purpose of the Bible is that God might communicate with us. And again, we see this by way of the fact that the Bible originally was not written in the classical Greek, but the New Testament books that were written in Greek and the Septuagint that was translated from Hebrew into Greek, put the Bible in the everyday Greek of the everyday person. I think this shows us that the intent of God and the intent of these translators was that the everyday man in the street should understand the scriptures.

It's also important to realize that as we read the Bible, we should not take verses out of context. Remember that chapters and verses didn't come along until long after these books had been collected into their two groups under the classification of Old Testament and New Testament. In 1236, a Roman Catholic cardinal named Cardinal Caro divided the Bible into chapters, and then in the 16th century it was divided into verses.

But for many, many centuries, the Bible was not divided up into chapters and verses. Now it's very convenient to have chapters and verses, but remember, chapters and verses are not inspired. So never let chapters and verses break your train of thought as you're reading or studying the scripture.

Most important of all, as you understand what the Bible is, what its purpose is, and how God put it together, realize that the purpose of the Bible is God wants to communicate with you. We should approach our scriptures the way Thomas Akempis used to approach the scripture. He opened the scripture with this prayer day after day.

Let all the voices be stopped, speak to me, Lord, thou alone. That's the way we should come to the Bible, asking God to speak to us through the Bible. The hymn writer puts it this way, beyond the sacred page I seek thee, Lord, my spirit pants for thee, O living word.

I wonder, have you ever gone beyond the sacred page? It's the intent of God that he would communicate with us through the sacred page, and that beyond the sacred page we would actually meet him, the living

word. One final thought about the background of the Bible. Remember as you open this Bible in the English language that you owe a great debt to a great many people.

Jesus said in the fourth chapter of the gospel of John, one sows and another reaps. I have sent you to reap where other people have sown. Others have labored and you have entered into their labors.

Never forget that when you come to the scripture. Many people labored that you might have the scripture. Many people gave their lives that you might have the scripture.

Always approach the scripture with the kind of historical perspective that appreciates that fact. And thank God for the many people who have labored that you might have the holy word of God, all 66 of these books in your language and in a translation that you can understand. Now I would like to share some approach to scripture under the heading, How to Study the Bible.

I believe it's so important that we know how to approach the scripture. And I would like to suggest some rules for Bible study at this time. First of all, there are three steps that we should take every time we open the Bible, whether we're studying a whole book or a chapter or just one verse.

The three steps can be called observation, interpretation, and application. Observation asks the question, what does it say? Interpretation asks the question, what does it mean? And application asks the question, what does it mean to me? Every time you come to a passage of scripture, ask yourself these three questions. What does it say? What does it mean? And what does that mean to me? I remember having a Bible class in a home in Texas one year, and there was an old West Texan in that class who used to say this almost every night when we had that Bible study.

We'd come to a verse in a chapter, and I would say to the group in that home, now what does that mean? And this old Texan would bite down on his cigar and look at that Bible, and he'd say, I reckon it means just what it says, boy. And he was always right, because it always means just exactly what it says. But the real \$64,000 question is, what does it say? In order to know what it says, you need your revised translations.

You might need to look up some words in a dictionary. You have to understand what those words say before you know what that verse is saying. And remember, the scripture always means what it says.

So if you know what it says, you know what it means. And then the next step is, what does it mean to me? That's application. With those three steps in mind, follow these rules as you open the scripture.

First of all, remember this. There is only one interpretation, but there can be 1,000 applications of any verse of scripture. The interpretation, there's only one, really.

It only really says one thing, it only really means one thing, and you should be very humble about interpretation, especially if others don't agree with your interpretation. But application, now that's something else. The Holy Spirit can take one verse of scripture that means a certain thing, but he can apply it in your life 1,000 different ways.

That's a good rule for Bible study. Again, remember in the light of all that we've seen, that you must always realize that the purpose of scripture is to reveal Christ. So look for him in every passage, Old Testament and New Testament.

And then remember, when you're reading the Old Testament history books, everything that happened to them in those historical narratives happened to them for examples and warnings. So look for examples and look for warnings as you read those history books. And then here's another rule for Bible study.

Always interpret obscure or puzzling scriptures in the light of verses which have a clear meaning. There are many verses of scripture that are difficult to understand. I looked up a verse in 1 Peter one day in a commentary written by Martin Luther, and I was so refreshed to see that Martin Luther said in that commentary, nobody knows what this verse means.

It's good to see somebody that honest, that he would say nobody understands that particular verse of scripture. In Deuteronomy 29, it says, "...the secret things belong to the Lord, but the things that are revealed are revealed to us and our children, that we may do all the words of this law." What that means is, there are many secret things that God isn't revealing. He isn't revealing those things to anybody.

I don't know where we ever got the idea that we should understand everything, that we should know everything. That's part of our intellectual approach to things, part of the way we're trained perhaps in our universities. But the scripture doesn't say that we're supposed to know everything.

It says there are many secret things God isn't revealing. Now, praise God, he has revealed so very much, but there's a whole lot he hasn't revealed. Now, what Deuteronomy 29, 29 is saying is this, the things God wants us to do, he's made those very plain.

Really, it's not such a mystery to understand the things that God wants us to do. We just need the charisma and the dynamic to do them. We need the power to do them, but it isn't really hard to understand what God wants us to do.

Someone said to Mark Twain one day that they had very little use for the Bible because there were so many verses they didn't understand. And Mark Twain said, the verses in the Bible that bother me are not the ones I don't understand. The verses that bother me are the verses I do understand.

Well, remember, there are many verses that are hard to understand, they're very obscure. Always try to interpret those verses insofar as they can be interpreted in the light of the verses that are very, very clear. Another principle for approaching the Bible is never come to a passage of scripture with your mind made up as to what it means.

Like the lady who said to her pastor when her pastor was trying to counsel her, Pastor, don't confuse me with scripture, my mind is made up. Many people come to the scripture that way, with their mind already made up. And if you don't come with an open heart and an open mind, how can God possibly communicate with you if you've already made up your mind as to what he's going to say to you in that scripture? As you've already seen, it's important, another rule for Bible study, is once you learn the meaning of a verse of scripture, ask yourself, are you willing to obey it yourself before you teach it to somebody else? Always come to the scripture with the will to do it.

Always remember also that God speaks to us through his words, so always come asking him to speak to us through the scripture. And then, do not become unbalanced in your concern for those things that are not basic and as important as the fundamental doctrines of the word of God. I think that's an important perspective as we come to the scripture.

Never forget that there is no verse of scripture which can be interpreted privately or apart from the rest of scripture. For many years the Church said that that verse, 2 Peter 1, verse 20, meant that no private individual had a right to interpret the scriptures. That isn't really what it means, according to our interpretation.

What it means is that every verse of scripture should be interpreted in the light of other scripture. This is called correlation, this is why a survey of the Bible is good. And a survey of the Bible, it's our objective to give you a telescopic view of the scriptures.

We want to go from Genesis to Revelation in 180 sessions, that's giving you the big picture. And one advantage of getting the big picture as compared to the analytical or microscopic approach is that you'll see the correlation of the Bible, of all the books of the Bible, and you'll see that every verse of the Bible should be interpreted in the light of the rest of the Bible, which is another way of saying the best commentary upon the scripture is the scripture itself. Now remember also that biblical knowledge is not virtue, but virtue results from the application of biblical knowledge.

In our culture, again, I believe we are sold this bill of goods, knowledge is virtue. It's very virtuous to know a lot. Now in some fields, in some disciplines, that may be true, but when it comes to biblical knowledge, that is not true.

Virtue is not biblical knowledge. Virtue results from the application of biblical knowledge as the Holy Spirit gives you the power to apply it. Remember that as you come to the scripture.

Our objective is not to make Bible experts out of people, our objective frankly is that if people don't know God, that if they get into the scripture and the scripture gets into their life, they'll be converted and they'll come to know God. Or if people do know God, as they come to the scripture, the scripture will bring them beyond the sacred page into fellowship with the living God, with the living word. Now that's our approach, not just to accumulate a lot of knowledge, but to accumulate a knowledge of God and the godly life for which God has given us the scriptures.

Remember, Paul said that the purpose of the scripture was that the man of God might be perfect or complete, thoroughly equipped for everything God wants him to do. Another important principle as you come to the scripture is this one. When you come to the scripture, look for truth without becoming preoccupied with the literary form in which that truth is presented.

What I mean by that is this. When you come to the book of Jonah, for instance, there is a great truth in the book of Jonah. It's really the truth about prejudice.

The book of Jonah is the story of a prophet who hated Ninevites and God had to show him that the love of God was for Ninevites also. Ninevites were Assyrians and they were the enemies of Jonah. That's the message of the book of Jonah and it's a dynamic message.

When you mention the book of Jonah, especially on a college campus, all you get is a debate on whether or not whales can actually swallow people or whether people can live in the belly of a whale for three days and nights. What people are really arguing about when they argue about things like that is the literary form of the book. Is it history or is it some sort of an allegory? Is it a myth? What is it? Now, that's the wrong question.

Instead of asking the question, what is it, when you come to the scripture, ask these questions. What does it say? What does it mean? What does it mean to me? These questions will help you find the truth that can change your life, that can perfect you for the work to which God is calling you. So that's what we mean when we say, when you come to a book of the Bible or a verse of the Bible or a chapter of the Bible, don't be preoccupied with the literary form in which that truth is presented.

Come looking for that truth and praying that God will give you the power, the charisma to obey that truth. Now, in Psalm 119, verse 160, you have this little expression, the sum of thy word is truth. And again, as we survey the scripture, this is an important approach.

Look for the big truth, look for the big picture, the summary truth, the sum of thy word is truth. Especially as you survey a book of the Bible, ask the question, God, what are you saying to us in this book? Or what are you saying to us in this chapter? Or what are you saying to us in this verse? And try to get the bottom line truth, remembering that the sum of thy word is truth. When you come to certain books of the Bible, try to determine the argument of the book of the Bible that you're studying.

This is especially important in the New Testament, in books like Romans or Hebrews, because some of these books have an argument from the first word to the last. This will be true in many of the Old Testament books. Each book of the Bible is in the Bible, remember, because scribes or prophets or church fathers felt that this book has a message for you and me.

Now the thing you want to do when you come to these books of the Bible is look for that truth, look for that summary truth, and sometimes it comes in the form of a thesis or an argument. So you should ask the question, what is this author's point? What's he driving at? What is the argument of the book? What's the point he's trying to get across? Another important principle for Bible study is, always consider the context of any verse or passage of scripture. In other words, consider what comes with the text.

One of the cleverest ways to lie is to misrepresent the truth, to tell part of the truth or to tell part of the truth out of context. People in the media are experts at this, and they can absolutely assassinate the character of someone by telling something that's true out of context and perhaps just part of the truth. Now, according to the scripture, it's important for us, if we're going to get the argument or the sum of the truth that God's presenting, it's always important for us to find out what comes with the verse of scripture we're studying.

That's what we mean when we say, never take a verse of scripture out of its context. Always see it in the light of what comes with the text, what comes before and what comes after that verse of scripture. I believe that's very important.

Another principle for Bible study is, remembering that you cannot understand the scripture apart from the Holy Spirit, always ask for the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit when you attempt to understand the scripture. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2 that truth is learned through the eye gate and through the ear gate and through the heart gate. Now, when it comes to spiritual truth, the Apostle Paul says, we don't just learn through the eye gate and the ear gate and the heart gate, but we have to have the gate of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit teaches spiritual things. That's why the unspiritual man cannot understand spiritual things and thinks that they're foolishness. He doesn't have the Holy Spirit.

But if you have the Holy Spirit, you have an unction, the scripture says, you have one living in you who is able to teach you to the extent that you really don't need any man to teach you. God has gifted teachers in the body of Christ to teach us. But if you were on an island by yourself, if you had the Holy Spirit in the scripture, the Holy Spirit could teach you the scripture.

Never forget that. Always ask the Holy Spirit to have the teaching ministry in your heart as you open up the scripture. Lastly, in the words of Samuel, when you open the scripture, you should say, Speak, Lord, thy servant is listening.

In other words, Speak, Lord, I'm going to do whatever you show me in this inspired book. Now once again, let me say that we've had three introductory sessions now before we begin to survey the Bible, and it's been my prayer as we've shared this perspective on the Bible, that this perspective on the Bible has opened up your understanding of the Bible.

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