

**LIVING THE LIVING WORD**  
**Bible-Based Bible Study and Application**

**Fellowship Community Chapel**  
**Hemet, CA**

**Mr. Timothy R. Nichols**  
**Spring 2008**

## **SYLLABUS**

### **1. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND SYNOPSIS**

*Living the Living Word* is a course in how to use your Bible. Rather than indulge in the common practice of studying what a lot of well-educated people have said about studying the Bible, in this course students will focus primarily on what the Bible says about studying the Bible. As we will discover, the Bible won't just allow us to study it; if we are going to take the Bible on its own terms, we'll have to apply it as well.

We will begin at the beginning, studying creation and the fall, then moving on to God's covenant with Noah and His law given at Mt. Sinai. These accounts will provide us with the foundational truths about revelation that we'll need in order to understand the way Scripture handles itself in the remainder of the course.

Starting with David and Solomon, we will begin to look at how the biblical authors use the Bible. We will continue with the prophets, and then move into the New Testament to see how Jesus and the apostles use Old Testament truth in their ministries. We will conclude by looking at the use of previous Scripture in a few of the epistles.

### **2. THE CASE FOR CHURCH-BASED EQUIPPING**

Why do this kind of thing in church? Isn't this what Bible colleges and seminaries are for? In a way, it is what those schools are for, but the truth of the matter is that those schools are not strictly necessary, and while they can be helpful at times, they often exist only because the church has failed to do its job.

#### *Toward a Biblical Ecclesiology*

You will scour the New Testament in vain looking for a Bible college or a seminary. Jesus' closing instruction to His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20) was not to go forth and found seminaries but to go forth and make disciples who would follow Jesus' commands, *including the command to make disciples*. Peter and John and those guys were supposed to make disciples, who would make more disciples, and so on.

We find a similar command in 2 Timothy 2:2, where Paul instructs a young man in church ministry, "The things which you heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Although this verse is often taken as a charter verse for seminaries (including the one where I work), it is actually a prescription for a healthy *church*.

As the pastors and future teachers are supposed to be prepared in the church, so also are the saints, as we find in Ephesians 4:11-16. Using the foundation provided by the apostles and prophets, the evangelists, pastors, and teachers equip the saints in the church for the work of the ministry. The saints build up the body, and the whole body grows up in Christ to full maturity.

Let me be clear here: I am not saying that seminaries are necessarily illegitimate. Just as a godly vision for healthy families doesn't mean that it's wrong to be a foster parent, so a godly vision for healthy churches doesn't mean that it's wrong to fill in the gaps for churches that aren't ready to handle their responsibilities right now. Seminaries often fulfill the need for "foster care" for people who go to incapable, ineffective churches. Seminaries also should (although few *do*) help to work themselves out of a job by equipping churches.

Although I'm not saying that seminaries are illegitimate, I am saying that they are not strictly necessary. We often say that seminaries are *necessary* because many good churches just don't have the vision, funds, or expertise to fully prepare people for ministry. This is wrong for two reasons. First of all, if seminaries are necessary, then where are they in the book of Acts? What seminary did Timothy go to, or Titus, or John Mark? So clearly these things can be done in a church setting. Second, when we say that "good" churches can't prepare people for ministry, we clearly don't share the Bible's definition of a good church.

In light of that, part of the goal of this course is to equip *the church* with these skills so that members of the church can share them with each other. In other words, I don't want to come back and teach the same course every five years. I'm giving it to you; you pass it on to others.

### *Not Many Teachers, but All Disciple-makers*

Of course the command to pass it on comes with a caution. James 3:1 warns us that not many should become teachers. Probably not many of you ever will get up in front of a room full of people and teach as I am teaching. But *all* of you should be disciple-makers, and in that capacity you will need to share some of the truths you will learn here.

## **3. EXERCISES AVAILABLE**

As you will see, there is a lot of work in the handouts. There are little exercises that will take a half hour or so, and there are some that will take quite a long time. The goal of all this material is to take you as far as you want to go. If you're so busy you're lucky just to make it to church, then come and listen. I guarantee you'll take away something worth having. But ultimately, developing skills takes time and effort. If your goal is intensive skill development, it isn't enough to just listen; you need practice, and lots of it. If you have some time and

you want to develop your skills further, we have a wide range of options available to you.

Below is a list of the types of exercises you will find throughout the course. It may seem a bit like overkill to list so much work. It probably is, but remember, the goal is to equip *the church* with the tools to pass this material on to others. The exercises that you don't get to in the next 10 weeks will furnish you with study material for months to come, if you're so inclined.

As we go through the next 10 weeks together, feel free to mix and match as your schedule allows and your inclinations carry you along. In the unlikely event that you're doing everything listed, and you still want more, by all means ask. There's plenty more where this came from.

### Honing Skills (30-60 min.)

The "Honing Skills" exercises will all be in Psalm 139. You'll be amazed what happens when you spend 10 weeks of constant exposure to the same little bit of Scripture. Every week there will be a different exercise, designed to help you build skill at understanding a chunk of Scripture and working its truths into your life. These exercises will reward all the time you can pour into them, but if you can manage to at least put in a half hour to an hour each week, you should see good benefit from it.

### Reading (1-3 hrs.)

While the focus in this course is on what the Bible tells us about the Bible, sometimes it helps to get some perspective from another believer who has already worked through some of the questions you're struggling with. That's why I teach. It's also why some people write books. In the reading assignments, you'll encounter two of the best books around on the subject of Bible study. Howard Hendricks' *Living by the Book* is the most non-threatening introduction to Bible study in print, and it also has the best material on observation that I have ever seen. It is a very easy read, with short chapters and good illustrations. Leland Ryken's *Words of Delight* is more challenging. The whole book is good material, but because of time, we will only use Part One, which is one of the best treatments available of how stories work, and how to understand them.

One disclaimer should always go with non-biblical reading assignments: all this stuff was written by fallible men. There *will* be errors in it. So stay alert, and use discernment.

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

These exercises will be more challenging. They will be related in some way to the week's lecture topic, and allow you to explore the material in the lecture from another angle. These exercises are also designed to acquaint you with certain key issues in interpretation (e.g., interpreting poetry and parables) as well as important Bible study methods and tools (e.g., topical study, biographical study, horizontal chart).

## 4. SCHEDULE

We'll meet for 10 weeks, according to the following schedule. Assignments are due on the date listed. Of course you don't actually have to do *any* of the assignments if you don't want to (but if you're doing them, on time is good).

	Date	Lecture	Honing Skills	Reading	Heavy Homework
1	19MAR	Creation to Curse			
2	26MAR	Contract and Law	Observation	Hendricks ch. 1-7	Background Study: Gen. 1-3 and <i>Enuma Elish</i>
3	02APR	David	Questions	Hendricks ch. 8-18	Theme Study: Blessing and cursing in Abraham's family
4	09APR	Solomon	Memory	Hendricks ch. 19-26	Topic Study: Meditation
5	16APR	Prophets	Prelim. Interpretation	Hendricks ch. 27-34	Prose-Poetry Comparison: Ex. 14-15
6	23APR	Jesus	Application	Hendricks ch. 39-41	Horizontal Chart: 2 Chronicles
7	30APR	Acts	Memory	Hendricks ch. 35-38	Interpreting Parables: Mat. 13
8	07MAY	Paul	Application Progress	Hendricks ch. 42-45	Biographical Study: John Mark
9	14MAY	Peter	Reflection	Ryken intro, ch. 1-2	OT Quotes in Romans 1-3
10	21MAY	Hebrews	Memory, Summary	Ryken ch. 3-6	Theme Study: the Flood

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## CREATION TO CURSE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the next ten weeks I want to pose a question to you: **How should we use the Bible?** Please notice that I did not say “*study* the Bible,” but “*use* the Bible.” As we’ll see, we should indeed study the Bible, but our responsibility doesn’t stop there. If we’re going to take the Bible on its own terms, we’ll need to do much more than just study. In fact, as we’ll see, the Bible itself significantly shapes how we approach the Bible. So I’d like to refine our question a little bit: **How does the Bible say that we should use the Bible?**

In his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey famously wrote that one should always “begin with the end in mind.” As we approach the Bible with our question—or with any question—it seems prudent to begin with the beginning in mind. If we’re going to take the Bible on its own terms, we’ll have to start where the Bible starts: in the beginning.

### 2. CREATION TO CURSE

#### Creation: Overview

##### **The First Day: Genesis 1:3-5**

Notice that God speaks the world into existence, and the things that He says come to be. This immediately implies a unity between language and reality, but it goes a lot further than that. God passes a value judgment on what He created: He sees that it is good. There’s no record that he *says* “This is good” at the time, but as Moses records the account, he is able to state God’s value judgment in language. God then names what He has just created.

We’re only five verses into the Bible, and already we know that reality was created with language, and can therefore be described with language both in terms of its value and its name. We won’t go through every day of creation here, but the pattern established in the first day holds throughout, except that God stops naming what He created on the third day (remember that; it will be important later.)

We also have seen the incredible power of God’s word. God’s perspective is not just another opinion; when He wants to, His very act of speaking makes what He speaks true.

##### **The Fifth Day: Genesis 1:22**

On the fifth day, God creates animal life for the first time, and here He does something new: He blesses what He has created. As with the act of creating itself, the blessing is spoken.

### **God in Counsel: Genesis 1:26**

As you read through the accounts of the first five days of creation, you notice that there is a certain rhythm to the account. In the sixth day, though, that rhythm is broken by something new: God talks to Himself. Here the three Persons of the Trinity take counsel together about what they are about to do, and then they do what they have planned among themselves.

### **Instructions to Humanity: Genesis 1:28-30**

Here we have yet another break in the familiar pattern set up in the first five days. As on the fifth day, God blesses them, but the communication here goes far beyond that. He gives them basic orienting instructions about their place in the world (vv.28-29), as well as describing the animals' place in it (v. 30).

Notice that God doesn't just make them smart and leave them to figure it all out. God doesn't make man to be autonomous; He makes man to live in obedience to Him and in reliance on His word.

### **Creation: More About Man**

#### **Genesis 2:15-17**

In the expanded account of the sixth day, we learn that God intended Adam to work at cultivating the garden, and from the beginning God instructed him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Here we also encounter God's first prediction of consequences, if Adam should disobey.

#### **Genesis 2:19-23**

Remember back on the third day when God stopped naming what He created? Here He instructs Adam to pick up where He left off. We have a vivid picture of God's image in man, as Adam sees the nature of the creation for what it is, and accurately names it.

### **The Fall: What Not to Do with the Word of God**

#### **Traditions of Men: Genesis 3:1-3**

We do not know who the first "rabbi" was that formulated this false idea of God's instructions, whether it was Adam who failed to pass on God's instructions properly to his wife, or whether she took it on herself to add to God's word. Either way, humanly-formulated theology is off to a very bad start.

#### **The Lie: Genesis 3:4-5**

Once Woman (her name isn't Eve yet) has drifted away from what God actually said, she is ripe for the lie. Compare the statement here to Genesis 3:22. Even part of this lie turned out to be true...but not the way Woman thought it would.

#### **What Was She Thinking? Genesis 3:6**

No, seriously, let's look at what she was thinking. We pass over this easily because in modern storytelling, it is very common to delve in to a character's thoughts, but in Scripture, it is rare that the narrator tells us what motivated someone

to do what they do. There are three elements to Woman's thought here: she saw that...

1. the tree was good for food, and
2. it was pleasant to the eyes, and
3. a tree desirable to make one wise...

...and on that basis she made her decision and ate the fruit.

Now what are these three elements? Let's take the first one: she "saw that the tree was good for food." How did she know that? Is "good for food" something that you can see? Of course not. But what has she been eating all this time she's been in the garden? Every green herb, and fruit from the trees in the garden. So she has seen other fruit trees, and tasted their fruit. She sees that this is a fruit tree resembling other fruit trees, with fruit resembling other fruit, and concludes that this must also be good for food, as the other fruit in her experience has been. In philosophical terms, this is a rational induction based on prior experience.

The second element is simple sense experience: she saw that "it was pleasant to the eyes." The third element, of course, she acquired straight from the serpent. So her decision was based on reason, empirical evidence, and a satanic lie.

But let's leave the serpent out of it for a moment and just look at the first two elements. As Woman tries to interpret the world independently based on reason and sense experience, where do her reason and sense experience point her? In the wrong direction. Why? Should we not trust our reason and our sense experience? Adam trusted his reason and his senses when he was naming the animals, and everything worked out fine. What was the difference between that and this?

The difference was that Adam was obeying God. He founded his reason and sense experience on a proper regard for God's word. Here, the Woman does not have a proper regard for God's word; in fact, she seems to have left it out of her calculations entirely.

Let's indulge in a little theological science fiction. What might have happened if she had added God's word to her reason and her perceptions? God says that eating from this particular tree will kill her, but it looks good to eat and resembles all the other trees that she has eaten from; in fact, she would never know that eating the fruit was harmful except that God said so. Conclusion: her senses and reasoning are not by themselves sufficient to enable her to navigate her world; she needs to ground her understanding of the world on God's word first of all. Then, when the serpent comes along contradicting God, she remembers that she is supposed to have dominion over all the animals, including this talking snake, and she doesn't listen to him.

Unfortunately, it didn't happen that way. She left God's word behind, tried to evaluate the world independently, and wound up believing the serpent's lie. Her husband, standing there with her, ate as well. We don't know what he was thinking,

but if Niemelä is right that the Woman was already pregnant with Cain at this point, we can offer a pretty good guess.

### *The Consequences: Corruption and Curse*

#### **Corrupted Thought and Perception: Genesis 3:7-8**

Immediately after they ate, their perception changed. Before they had been naked, and not ashamed. Now, they felt a need to hide their bodies from each other. We don't know exactly what changed, but we do know that they saw themselves, and each other, in a way that they were never meant to. Their perception became corrupted in some way that is not described in detail in Genesis.

It gets worse. Not only has their perception changed, but their theological thinking begins to degrade as well. When they hear God in the garden—this is God the creator, who knows everything and sees everywhere—they hide from Him. It's not clear what they hope to accomplish with this.

#### **Corrupted Speech: Genesis 3:12-13**

When God calls them to account for what they have done, do they confess their sin and repent in truthful, straightforward fashion? They do not. Adam blames his wife and God for his failure; his wife follows his spiritual leadership and does a little blameshifting herself.

#### **A Promised Rematch: Genesis 3:14-15**

As God condemns the serpent, He also gives hope to Woman that one day, one of her offspring would win the victory that she and Adam had failed to win.

#### **Death and Exile: Genesis 3:16-24**

Man's responsibilities after the fall remain the same, but everything gets harder. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Because man gave attention only to the things of this world, and not to God's word, death comes to the whole world. This fact is gruesomely illustrated as God kills animals and peels off their skins, then dresses Adam and Eve in the freshly-killed hides.

Finally, God drives them out of the garden and places an angel with a flaming sword as a guard to enforce their exile.

## **3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### *Your Daily Walk*

If there's one thing to take away from this passage, it is that we *must* begin with God's word, and do all our reasoning from there. As you encounter struggles and trials in your life this week, whether it's someone cutting you off in traffic or the death of a close friend, start by asking "What does God have to say about this?" As you encounter perplexing situations where it's hard to know what to do, ask, "What does God have to say about this?"

Then do all your thinking on that basis.



### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

We are going to use Psalm 139 as our practice passage, and for the next 10 weeks, we will spend a little time with it each week. This week, just observe the psalm. Don't try to decide what it means yet; just list as many things about it as you possibly can.

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Read the first 7 chapters of Howard Hendricks' *Living by the Book*. If you read Hendricks first, it will help your work in Psalm 139.

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

Go to <http://www.crivoice.org/enumaelish.html> and read through the text of *Enuma Elish*. *Enuma Elish* is a pagan creation story, and it is part of the cultural backdrop against which Moses would have been writing Genesis. Observe Genesis 1-3 and *Enuma Elish* side by side. What is the same? What is different? In the way that he tells the Genesis story, Moses highlights certain differences. What are they? Why would Moses highlight those particular differences? What points is he trying to make?

### For Further Study

Remember how at the beginning of the lesson I said that we need to begin with the beginning in mind? Most people have one or more fields of specialty. Whether it's astrophysics, digging ditches, or talking people into things they wouldn't otherwise do, we all have things that we're good at. Take an area that you're good at and read back through Genesis 1-3. What do you see in these three chapters that might apply to your area?

## **CONTRACT AND LAW**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

We opened last week with the Creation, noting the following important points:

- Language and reality meet in God's creation; language can truly describe reality.
- Man was made to live dependent on God. Man is to start with what God reveals, and then use his reason and senses on that basis. Only in that way can we arrive at truth.
- Man, even fallen man, can understand what God has to say to him.

In this lesson, we will continue our quick-march through biblical history, beginning with the aftermath of the Flood and moving through the call of Abraham and the Egyptian captivity to the Exodus, Sinai, and ending with the instructions to the conquest generation in Deuteronomy. Of course in this kind of survey, we will be touching only a few of the high points.

This period of biblical history is punctuated by a series of divinely-established contracts and laws, so we will pay particular attention to the nature of these things. In order for contracts and laws to function, certain basic things have to be true about language, and about the parties involved. In this session, we will explore the nature of contract and law as it relates to the Bible.

Before beginning, I need to make one quick note about the term "covenant." We don't often use that word in modern society, and so we tend to think of it as some sort of strange spiritual thing (in other words, we don't really know what it means.) A covenant is a contract, pure and simple.

### **2. LINGUISTIC DEPENDABILITY IN CONTRACT AND LAW**

#### ***The Contract with Noah***

In Genesis 8:21-22, God takes counsel with Himself again as He did before the creation of man. Beginning in Genesis 9:1, He instructs Noah and his family on their responsibilities in the newly-cleansed world. In 9:8-17, God makes promises, and it is these promises we want to examine more closely.

There are a few key things we should observe about this passage:

1. God establishes the contract not only with Noah's family (i.e., humanity), but with the animals as well.
2. The substance of the contract is a promise not to repeat the Flood.
3. The duration of the contract is *forever*; God promises *never* to flood the whole earth again.
4. God sets the rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the contract.

What does God have to control, in order to keep His promise here? He has to have perpetual control of the earth's environment, but it doesn't stop there. Events beyond the earth could cause a flood, such as a comet striking the earth, severe tidal fluctuations caused by the moon coming much closer to Earth, and so on. If you follow this line of reasoning out, the conclusion is that God must have control of the whole universe in order to make good on this promise. Not only that, but he has *certain* control *forever* in order to make a perpetual promise.

Now, let's consider this contract in light of a couple of common assertions today. You'll often hear silly "intellectuals" assert that it's impossible to tell what a linguistic expression really means. We dealt this idea a death blow from the creation account last week, but let's consider it again. What good would it do for God to make this promise to Noah, and even set the rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the promise, if Noah couldn't quite really tell exactly what God meant? If Noah couldn't be sure that God *really* meant that He would *never, ever* flood the whole earth again, what would be the point of all this?

Let's consider a second idea. The more canny "intellectuals" will argue that language changes over time. Of course, in that particular place and time, the language meant something, they'll say. But what? We're far removed from that time and place, so how could we really know? There's a little more substance to this one, because it's true that usage of words changes over time. "Embarrass" used to mean "prevent," "weird" used to have to do with fate and magic, and "objective" and "subjective" have effectively traded places; they used to have exactly the opposite meanings that they do today. How do we know all this? Because we pay attention to the history of the language, and therein lies the key to answering the objection. Whatever the language of the contract means when the contract is signed, *that's what it means for the duration of the contract*.

This is just common sense. Imagine a situation with me. You own your home, and your homeowner's insurance insures your home against fire. So one night you wake up to the smell of smoke and the sound of the smoke detectors. You get your family out safely, but your house burns to the ground. When you submit your claim to the insurance company, they tell you that they're not paying, because they promised to insure your "home." See, what really makes a house a home is family, and your family is safe; it's just your house that burned down, so they don't really owe you any money. This is ridiculous, right? This is not what the language of the contract meant when the contract was signed. *And so it can't be what the*

*contract means now.* You can't change the meaning of the contract while it's in force; otherwise, what's the point of even having a contract?

Exactly. The point of a contract is to measure behavior according to a predetermined standard, in order to guarantee that certain promises are kept. What would be the point of having this contract that endures for the lifetime of the earth, unless its meaning is both fixed and understandable for the lifetime of the earth? So the very existence of the contract with Noah bears testimony to the fact that the language of the contract has meaning, that the meaning does not change, and that it is accessible to us.

### *Babel*

In Genesis 11:1-8, God confuses the languages. (Keep this story in mind when we get to Acts 2—there's a big point to be made there.)

In the meantime, consider the contract with Noah again in this light. God made the contract with Noah about 5000 years ago in whatever the pre-Babel language might have been. That language may have been basically Semitic in its structure, but it wasn't classical Hebrew; at best it would have been some sort of proto-Hebraic dialect. So when Moses and the Holy Spirit record the contract with Noah about 3500 years ago, writing in classical Hebrew, that clearly demonstrates that the meaning of the contract can be transferred successfully into a different language.

### *The Contract with Abraham*

#### **The Call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3)**

In God's initial contact with Abram, He gives instructions and makes promises, but doesn't formalize them as a contract.

#### **Elaboration and Formal Ratification of the Contract (Genesis 15:1-21)**

Notice the circumstances under which God formally ratifies the contract. Abram has been operating on the basis of the promises God made, and thus far he is getting very rich, but there is no sign of a legitimate heir, and he owns no real estate. Abram is beginning to get nervous, and presses God for assurance that He will do as He has said.

It is in this context of Abram's uncertainty that God makes a contract with him. This is a vivid illustration of the fact that the whole point of a contract, *any* contract, is to guarantee behavior. Given the span of time covered by the contract—especially given the later clarification in Genesis 17:7-8—the contract implicitly asserts God's sovereign control. Where the Noahic contract showed God's sovereign control of the world of nature, this contract shows God's sovereign control over all of geopolitical history.

### The Red Sea Crossing

We don't really have time to spend on this passage except just to note that it's here. In Exodus 14, God brings Israel across the Red Sea. In chapter 15, Israel spontaneously pours out praise to the Lord for delivering them from the armies of Egypt. We will look at songs of praise in more detail in the next session, but note that this celebration establishes the precedent for a lot of what happens later with David.

### The Law, Part 1: Sinai

#### **The Giving of the Law (Exodus 19-20)**

As God prepares Israel to hear the Law, He first has Moses charge the people with obeying all His Law—which, let us not forget, they haven't heard yet—and they agree. Then God warns them to purify themselves, and not to touch the mountain, because it is holy. On the appointed day, God descends to the top of the mountain. When Moses ascends the mountain to speak with God, the first thing God does is send him back down the mountain to warn them again not to touch the mountain. Then God speaks to Israel, audibly, from the mountain. Although God is speaking to Moses, who will speak to Israel, the people can hear God's voice as He gives the ten commandments from the mountain (compare Deuteronomy 5:45-, 24-26).

As we thought about contracts, now we need to think about law. In order for law to work *at all*, the law has to refer to something in the real world, people have to know about it, and they must understand exactly what the law means practically. All these things are exemplified wonderfully in the Law. The people all hear the voice of God Himself declaring the law. The law is clear enough; “don't work on the Sabbath” and “don't steal” are not particularly murky concepts.

#### **An Example**

In Numbers 15:32-36, they caught a man gathering sticks for firewood on the Sabbath day. Clearly this is work, and at God's instruction, they executed him. At risk of belaboring the point, the verbal communication from God had a clear referent in the real world, and when someone's behavior violated the law, the people recognized it and acted accordingly.

### The Law, Part 2: Deuteronomy

In the book of Deuteronomy, Israel is poised to enter the land of Canaan under Joshua's leadership and conquer the land. Moses' last act before he dies is to instruct this generation of Israel in the Law of God. Most of the book is taken up with this task. Since it largely repeats the earlier Law, we won't go into it here. However, we want to focus on the closing instructions.

#### **Initial Propagation (Deuteronomy 27:1-26)**

Moses gives Israel two initial tasks to do when they have crossed into the land. The first is to raise standing stones on which they will carve the law of God. This makes the Law publicly accessible for anyone who cares to read it. Second, Moses divides the nation by tribes and instructs them to stand on opposing mountains, while the Levites read out the curses associated with breaking the Law,

and the people cry out “Amen!” to each curse. No one in Israel would be able to say that he was unaware of the Law.

### **Specific Consequences (Deuteronomy 28:1-30:10)**

Chapter 28 gives highly specific blessings for obedience to the Law, and even more specific curses for disobedience. Chapter 29 gives a historical review of all that God has done for Israel, culminating with a curse/prophecy of what the Lord will do when they disobey. In 30:1-10, God explains the blessings of the restoration when Israel has been disciplined and has turned her heart to the Lord again.

### **Accessibility of the Law (Deuteronomy 30:11-20)**

Finally, Moses closes the instruction with an exhortation that none of this Law is too hard to understand, but it is “near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.” The choice before them is not some complex moral dilemma; rather, it is very simple. Obey and live or rebel and die. All they need to do is choose correctly. And so that the choice remains simple, they are to read the Law publicly every seven years (31:9-13)

## **3. THIS WEEK’S CHALLENGES**

### *Your Daily Walk*

As you go about your week, meditate on the following key points:

- God’s promises are understandable and stable. Best of all, He keeps them!
- God’s Law is verbal, propositional revelation.
- God’s Law—His requirements for a life pleasing to Him—is understandable and attainable.

When an Israelite was in doubt as to what God’s Law said, he could go to the standing stones and read the Law for himself. When you are in doubt about what God’s Word says about a difficult situation in your life, what do you do?

### *Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)*

This week, as you study the psalm, continue to note your observations. In addition, develop questions about the psalm. It was written roughly 3000 years ago, in a preindustrial, agricultural society, in a different language. What gaps are there between you and the original audience, and how might these gaps of language, culture, history, etc. influence the way in which they read the psalm? Note the gaps, and ask questions about the differences between the original audience and yourself.

### *Reading (1-2 hrs.)*

Read chapters 8-18 of Howard Hendricks’ *Living by the Book*. If you read Hendricks first, it will help your work in Psalm 139.

### *Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)*

This week we looked at God’s promises to Abraham. God also commanded Abram that he would be a blessing. Trace the theme of blessing and cursing through

Genesis 12-50. Keep in mind that you're not only looking for those words, but those concepts. When were Abraham and his family a blessing, and to whom? When were they a curse, and to whom? Does this give some coherence to the overall account as we have it in Genesis 12?

### For Further Study

Think back over last week's *Enuma Elish* assignment. For just a moment, assume for the sake of argument that *Enuma Elish* is the true creation story. On that basis, could any of the gods credibly make the promises Yahweh made to Noah? Could any of them be counted on to keep promises like those made to Abraham, even if they wanted to? Why or why not?

## **4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### Your Daily Walk

What trial or perplexing situation did you encounter last week in which you asked yourself, "What does God have to say about this?"

Did you have an answer, or know how to find one?

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

What things did you observe in Psalm 139?

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

What did you learn from your reading?

What did you think of the introduction to the subject in the first four chapters? Was it new material to you, or have you heard this before?

Were you surprised by the amount of information Hendricks was able to pull out of just one verse in chapter 6? Do you think you could do the same?

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

I asked you to read the text of *Enuma Elish*, a pagan creation epic, and notice similarities and differences between it and the Genesis account. I also asked you to think about the possible implications of those differences. To set the stage, remember that *Enuma Elish* is older than Genesis; it and other stories like it were part of the backdrop against which Moses wrote. However, we also have to remember that although *Enuma Elish* was written down before Genesis, the events of Genesis happened first. When Noah and his family got off the boat, they all knew who Yahweh was and what He had done. In the next few generations, however, it seems that many people abandoned the truth and rebelled against Yahweh. Pagan creation epics would be a necessary result of that rebellion, a propaganda tool to justify their pagan conduct. With that in kind, let's look at some specific details.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For those present in person at this session, we provided a handout with the following excerpts from *Enuma Elish*: I.1-40, IV.91-110, 131-146, V.45-66, VI.1-40. Copyright restrictions do not permit us unlimited distribution; however, you may look it up in a reference work or find it online at <http://www.crivoice.org/enumaelish.html>.

1. Who are the primeval beings, the very first? How many are they, and what is their nature?
2. How do the gods come into existence?
3. How does the world come into existence?
4. How does humanity come into existence?
5. Where does sin first come into the account?

In summary, in *Enuma Elish* the ground of all being is primeval chaos. Chaos gives birth to the forces of order, but order only arises out of chaos by struggle and murderous force of will, and the very chaos that gives birth to order always threatens its existence. The generating powers are chaos, sex and death. So tell me: what did Charles Darwin really contribute to human thought that the rebels on the plains of Shinar hadn't already figured out millennia before? Darwin gives us random mutation and natural selection as generative mechanisms, but this is just another way of saying "chaos, sex and death" without being laughed at in a "scientific" society.

Contrast that to the biblical view, in which conflict is not a normal part of the world-order. Man has a high calling to rule and cultivate the earth, but he rebels against God, thus introducing sin and death into the whole of creation. Chaos and death are not normal and necessary to creation, but abnormal and destructive (and will ultimately be quarantined in the lake of fire). Sex is not an eternal creative force as it is in pagan thought; it is *created* by God. God does not create by means of sexual reproduction; there is a firm distinction of kind between creature and Creator.



**LIVING THE LIVING WORD**  
**Bible-Based Bible Study and Application**

**Fellowship Community Chapel**  
**Hemet, CA**

**Mr. Timothy R. Nichols**  
**Spring 2008**

## **DAVID**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Over the last two weeks, we have seen some foundational truths about God's Word:

- it corresponds to reality ("Let there be light")
- its meaning is stable (contract) and accessible to us (law)
- only by starting with what God has told us can we hope to understand our world and live lives pleasing to God (Adam and Eve in the Garden)

Those foundational truths are necessary to show us why we *ought* to reflect on God's Word. In this session, we will begin to engage the question of *how* we should go about reflecting on God's Word. As with all other pursuits, if we want to really understand it, we need to start with God's Word. In the inspired works of David, we find sample reflections on Scripture that we can use as a model.

### **2. DAVID'S POETIC REFLECTION AND WORSHIP**

#### *The Setting*

#### **Historical Backdrop (1 Samuel 4-7, 1 Chronicles 13)**

In the days of Eli the high priest, when Samuel was a young man, Israel went out to battle the Philistines. On this occasion, God did not fight for them, and they were soundly defeated, losing about 4,000 men on the first day of the battle. In an attempt to force God to fight for them, they brought the ark of the covenant from Shiloh to the battleground. The next day, God still did not fight for Israel. The Philistines routed the Israelite army, killed 30,000 men, and captured the ark.

The Philistines took the ark back to their pagan temple, but discovered that they could not keep it there. Every city they sent the ark to was struck with plague. Finally, they simply put it in a cart, hitched two milk cows to it, and let them go wherever they would go. The cows took the road back to Israel, and brought the ark to Beth Shemesh, an Israelite city along the border of Judah in the western lowlands. However, the men of Beth Shemesh looked into the ark, and God attacked them, killing 50,070. In their fear, the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh sent to the nearby city of Kirjath Jearim, asking them to come and take the ark.

Kirjath Jearim did come and take the ark, consecrated someone to care for it. The ark remained there until David was ready to bring it up to Jerusalem. However, when David first tried to bring up the ark, he did not observe the proper protocols. The ark was to be carried by the Levites, but David put it in an oxcart. When the oxen stumbled, one of the men, Uzza, touched the ark to stabilize it, and God killed him. David was afraid to continue his project of bringing the ark up to Jerusalem, so he left it at the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite (i.e., a Gentile) for three months.

### **The Davidic Tabernacle (1 Chronicles 15:1-16:6, 16:37-34, 23:27-32)**

David did finally bring the ark up to Jerusalem, and installs it in a tabernacle (tent) in Jerusalem. Bear in mind that the Tabernacle itself is still in Shiloh, but as we learn in 1 Chronicles 17, David had ambitions of building the temple in Jerusalem, and apparently was planning to reunite the Tabernacle furniture with the ark at that time.

In the meantime, however, David would not allow the ark to just languish in a tent. He designed a musical service “to commemorate, to thank and to praise the Lord God of Israel.” It is worth noting that there is nothing about such a musical service in the Law; the closest the Law gets to music is blowing a trumpet every 50 years (Leviticus 25:8-10).

However, the story of the Red Sea crossing gives a precedent for musical worship (Exodus 14-15). When Israel had passed through the Red Sea, the whole congregation worshipped the Lord. They composed a song for the occasion, and Moses and the men sang the verses of the song, while Miriam and the women played timbrels and danced and sang the refrain. To summarize, while the legal portions of the Torah neither command nor regulate musical worship, the historical portion of the Torah clearly teaches that there is a place for it.

David was a talented musician, and the king of Israel, so he took it upon himself to organize musical worship in the tabernacle of the ark. This raises an interesting question: in the absence of any kind of guidance in the Law about how to organize musical worship, how did David do it? Briefly, he designed the musical service to parallel the sacrificial service, and the language of 1 Chronicles 16 is designed to show the parallels. We don’t have time to go into all the details of it, but here are a few notable points of comparison:

- The Hebrew word used for the “musical instruments of God” in 1 Chronicles 16:42 is the same word used for the “utensils” of sacrifice at the Tabernacle in Exodus 25:9, 39, 27:3, 19, etc.
- The musical service occurred “regularly,” “as every day’s work required” (1 Chronicles 16:6, 37); the sacrificial service occurred “regularly, morning and evening, and according to all that is written in the Law” (1 Chronicles 16:40).
- The musical service is performed by “Asaph and his brothers before the ark of the covenant of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 16:37) and the sacrificial service is performed by “Zadok the priest and his brothers the priests, before the tabernacle of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 16:39).

All this music also raises another interesting question: what did they sing? Happily, we don't have to guess. The chronicler has recorded for us a song that David wrote especially for the day that the ark was installed in its tabernacle in Jerusalem.

### The Songs

#### **The Tabernacle Psalm (1 Chronicles 16:7-36)**

The psalm is worth a sermon or two all by itself, but let's hit some of the key themes.

- Notice that the psalm opens with a call to thank the Lord and proclaim His deeds—which is exactly what the psalm does. It not only calls us to worship, it also presents us with a model for worship.
- It really does call *us* to worship; notice the prominence of Gentiles in the psalm (vv. 8, 24, 28-30). This is not an accident; Israel was always intended to be a missionary nation, and there were a number of Gentiles who served David.
- Notice the prominence of history in the psalm. David reflects on what God has done, and brings Him praise. The moral reasoning from God's act to a need to praise Him is particularly evident in vv. 25-26.
- Not only does the psalm present a vision of the past, it also presents a vision of the future (v. 33) and a prayer appropriate to that vision (v. 35).

Considered overall, David is praising the Lord, drawing on creation, Israel's history, God's future return to judge the earth, Israel's mission to the Gentiles, and so on. A key question you need to consider here: *what has David said in this psalm that has not been previously revealed in the Scripture that he has (i.e., Torah, almost certainly Job, probably Joshua, and possibly Ruth)?* Answer: nothing. Not one thing in this psalm is new.

So, since this is a course in how to study and use the Bible, let's consider what is happening in this passage from that angle. How does David know the history that he refers to in the psalm? From the Torah. David is reflecting on previous revelation. By the way, notice that he interprets it all quite literally. (Ask yourself: how much sense would it make to thank God for all these things if they never *really* happened?) The history of the world is in this psalm: Creation, the call of Abraham, confirmation of the covenants to Isaac and Jacob, Israel's nomadic years from the patriarchs to the conquest of Canaan (which just about brings it up to current with the time of writing), and God's future return and judgment.

But David doesn't stop with the history lesson. It is personally relevant, and he explores that relevance. If this is what God is doing in history, what does it mean, ethically? What should we *do* about it? This is particularly visible in the reasoning chain in vv. 25-26: God created the universe, but all the gods of the nations are idols, therefore the Lord is great, therefore we should greatly praise Him.

This should give us some sense of what good reflection on Scripture looks like. In a little less than a page, David has summarized Scripture's account of human history, explored the personal, ethical relevance of that for himself and his people, *and shown the reasoning that connects the facts with the ethical conclusions*. If we learned nothing else in this course, we could spend the rest of our lives trying to catch up to his example here.

### **Other Psalms (Psalm 19, Psalm 139)**

There are other things to reflect upon besides history. Psalm 19 reflects on the created world, specifically the sky. A famous section of Psalm 139 reflects on the intricacies of the human body. In both cases, David glorifies God and thanks Him for these things. For an enlightening contrast, compare David's thoughts in these two psalms with the pagan's thought pattern in Romans 1:18-23. The moral reasoning that we see in 1 Chronicles 16:25-26, and in Psalms 19 and 139 is precisely what the pagan does not do, and God holds him accountable for it.

## **3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### *Your Daily Walk*

Two weeks ago, I challenged you to start asking yourself a question about everything in your life, especially the trials and perplexing situations: what does God have to say about this? It's the question that Eve didn't keep in the front of her mind, and if we want to stay out of trouble, we need to avoid that mistake. Of course, you don't always know what God has to say. As we saw last week, God gave the Law to Israel so they would know what He had to say, and God had them propagate the Law so it would always be available. We have God's Word as well, and last week, I challenged you to go and look in Scripture to see what God has to say if you don't know.

This week, let me challenge you to reflect on the facts of Scripture that you do know. You can't just say "Hey, that's a really interesting concept; let me write it down in my notebook." It's not okay to stop there; all this is personally relevant and very relational. If you haven't worked out how it should impact your life and the way you relate to God, *you're not done yet*.

Any time you read Scripture, whether it's the genealogy in Genesis 5, the story of Deborah, or a psalm, reflect on what you have read. In its own halting way, your reflection should resemble what David did in 1 Chronicles 16:25-26—that is, acknowledge the truth, figure out what you should do on that basis, and clearly see the reasoning from the one to the other. Of course, the psalm in 1 Chronicles 16 is inspired, so it's unlikely that you'll generate that caliber of reflection on your very first try. That's okay; it's a lifetime endeavor. The sooner you get started, the better you'll get. Keep practicing.

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

Begin to memorize Psalm 139. Yeah, I know, it's a *lot* of verses. That's okay. Don't try to learn it all word for word at this point; the goal right now is familiarity with the overall structure and content of the psalm. Try to get it into your head at the level of the thoughts. Go ahead and talk through it in your own words, but try not to leave out anything bigger than a verse.

I suggest that you don't cram. Concentrated time helps for some people, but most of us do memory work best in small doses spread throughout the day. If you're like most people, a few minutes morning and evening all week long will do wonders.

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Try to complete the section on observation. Continue to use the insights Hendricks provides in your work with Psalm 139.

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

This week, we're going to study the topic of meditation. Don't jump to conclusions about what the word means. The way our culture uses "meditation" isn't necessarily the way the Bible uses it.

Using a concordance (electronic is easier),<sup>2</sup> locate all the passages you can that bear on the subject of meditation. A concordance is nearly always a good starting point for a topical study: just look up the word and see what you find. You won't have time to interpret every passage in depth, but at least answer these questions: What is meditation? Who should meditate? On what? When? Where? For what purpose? In case you don't have a concordance, the passages below will make a good start.

Gen. 24:63	Ps. 104:34	Phil. 4:8
Jos. 1:8	Ps. 119:15	1 Tim. 4:15
1 Ki. 18:27	Ps. 119:23	
Ps. 1:2	Ps. 119:27	
Ps. 4:4	Ps. 119:48	
Ps. 5:1	Ps. 119:78	
Ps. 7:1	Ps. 119:97	
Ps. 9:16	Ps. 119:99	
Ps. 19:14	Ps. 119:148	
Ps. 49:3	Ps. 143:5	
Ps. 63:6	Ps. 145:5	
Ps. 64:1	Isa. 33:18	
Ps. 77:6	Mal. 3:16	
Ps. 77:12	Lk. 21:14	

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.biblegateway.com> for an easy-access online concordance. With electronic concordances, you can use wildcard searches, which also helps. (Search on "medit\*" rather than "meditate" and it will also get you "meditates," "meditating," "meditation," etc.)

## 4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES

### *Your Daily Walk*

What should you do when you don't know what God has to say about something? Go and look, right? That was last week's challenge. Did anything arise last week where you needed to know what God thought, and you had to look it up?

### *Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)*

What gaps did you identify between yourself and the original audience of the psalm? What questions do you have about the psalm?

### *Reading (1-2 hrs.)*

What did you learn from your reading? Did it help to approach the text from different angles, as Hendricks suggests? How did your reading help you to grapple with Psalm 139?

### *Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)*

You traced the theme of blessing and cursing through Genesis 12-50. When were Abraham and his family a blessing, and to whom? When were they a curse, and to whom? Does this give some coherence to the overall account as we have it in Genesis? If so, then why are the rape of Dinah (Genesis 34) and the infamous Tamar incident (Genesis 38) in the account? What purpose do these two subplots serve within the story as a whole?

## **SOLOMON**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Last week, we considered David's reflection on the Lord and His Word. For the most part, we concerned ourselves with the implications for worship. In a nutshell, when you look at God's Word, or his acts in history, or the creation, if you are not drawn into worship, then you are not looking hard enough. More than that, you are missing the most obvious, foundational point about God's Word and His world: that we should glorify Him and be thankful.

This week, we will continue our study of reflection on God's Word and His world with the works of Solomon. Where David's work tends to focus on our individual and corporate relationship to God, Solomon emphasizes how we should relate to each other. In order to consider Solomon's works in context, we will begin by looking at the historical and legal background of Solomon's life, and then move into a consideration of Solomon's works.

### **2. SOLOMON'S PERSONAL HISTORY AND WORKS**

#### *Solomon's Background*

##### **The Israelite Kings and the Torah (Deuteronomy 17:14-20)**

Back when the Law was first established under Moses, God gave certain laws to govern Israel's future kings. If you look at those laws, you'll notice that the Israelite kings didn't do a very good job of keeping them. The important law for our purposes today, though, is in vv. 18-20. If you recall from two weeks ago, the nation as a whole was supposed to hear the Law read every seven years, and they put the Law on standing stones on Mount Ebal so it would be accessible to everyone. For the king, it was even more important that he know the Law, so God instructed him to hand-copy it for himself, and read it continually.

There is no direct record that Solomon obeyed this command, but it is a good surmise that he did, at least in his early years. David would have known about the command, and probably obeyed it himself. As 1 Kings 1:13, 17 show, David had already chosen Solomon to reign in his place, so David would have been preparing him for the role. Furthermore, Solomon was placed on the throne while David was still alive (1 Kings 2:1-4), so even after he took the throne, David would have been able to encourage him in the right direction. Finally, there is Solomon's own

character to consider, and as we'll see below, he pleased God greatly as a young man.

### **Solomon's Character (2 Chronicles 1:1-13)**

Very early in Solomon's reign, after a day of worship, God came to Solomon in a dream and asked him what he wanted. Notice that it was a very open-ended question; God didn't offer any suggestions. The thing Solomon wanted most was the wisdom to govern the people wisely. God agreed to give him wisdom and knowledge, but God was so pleased with the request that He also promised Solomon riches, wealth, and honor.

Solomon didn't remain true to the wisdom that God gave him. He multiplied horses, wives, and gold to himself in defiance of the commands in the Law, and ultimately he turned away from the Lord to worship the idols of his foreign wives. (1 Kings 11:1-10). At the last, he was not the man he could have, and should have, been. But God was pleased to give us three books of Scripture through this fallen king, and as we'll see, in spite of his failings, he was a great man.

### **Solomon's Accomplishments (1 Kings 4:21-34)**

Of course, God knew what Solomon would become. Nonetheless, He performed all that He had promised to Solomon, and the results were spectacular. Solomon's kingdom had tremendous power and political influence, and the people were wealthy and prosperous. Solomon himself was a prodigy, so renowned for his literary, musical, and scientific genius that from wherever news about him spread, people would come to hear him. He was the man that Leonardo da Vinci dreamt of becoming—and Solomon did it all in his spare time, while running an empire.

Can you imagine what a treasure trove we might have if we were to dig up a palace somewhere and find inside the complete works of Solomon? We only have one of his songs—and it's amazing—but he wrote 1005. Ever wonder what the other 1004 sound like? Can you imagine having Solomon's complete scientific works? The rest of his proverbs? Wouldn't that be amazing?

### **Solomon's Reflections**

Well, we don't have all of Solomon's works. But we do have three books, and the way they reflect on the Law of God is a lesson for us all. We don't have time to do any sort of justice to the works as a whole, but I want to take particular notice of the way they clothe the basic commands of the Torah in flesh and blood, making them memorable and motivational.

### **Work vs. Laziness (Proverbs 12:24,27, 15:19, 21:25-26, 24:30-34, 26:13-16, 27:23-27)**

God worked six days in the creation, and rested on the seventh day. God made man in His image, and He made man to work also. Even before the Fall, Adam was working, continuing God's work of naming the creation and tending the Garden God had planted. After the Fall, the only thing that changed is it all got harder to do; the basic commands remain the same.

When we think of the ten commandments, we don't usually think of work; "Thou shalt work" is not one of the ten. However, the ten commandments forcefully reflect the command to work. In the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), God



commands them not to work on the seventh day, and in the process explains that's what the other six days are for. In the eighth commandment, God forbids stealing. If we have to eat, wear clothes, and receive shelter from the elements, and we can't steal, well, what does that leave us?

Solomon gives us some very explicit word pictures about work. As we read through the passages listed above, note the mental pictures and the predictions of consequences. In terms of knowing what to do, there's nothing here that isn't already present in the Torah. But here, Solomon makes the instruction as vivid as he can, so that his readers will remember.

### **Faithfulness in Marriage (Proverbs 5)**

As with laziness, notice the vividness of the imagery. Solomon knows that when his son meets sexual temptation, it will be vivid, immediate, and, well, *tempting*. "Do not commit adultery" is pretty abstract by comparison, so Solomon makes his treatment as vivid as he can. I want to draw your attention to some of the features of his instructions:

- He involves the senses of taste and touch (vv. 3-4).
- He warns that the dangers are unpredictable (v. 6)
- He gives a vision of the future, if they give in to temptation (vv. 8-14)
- He gives a positive command: what to do instead (vv. 15-19)

There are other treatments of this subject in Solomon's works as well. Proverbs 7 treats the same subject similarly, with another series of vivid images. Song of Solomon gives considerable instructions for maintaining healthy sexual relations in marriage. Ecclesiastes teaches us how to enjoy the pleasures of this life (including sex) without worshipping them.

## **3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### *Your Daily Walk*

Is there a particular command that you struggle with, something you know you should (or should not) do, but you continue to find yourself drawn away by the temptation? Why not take a lesson from Solomon and begin to build a well-rounded view of that sin? Describe the consequences of the sin in painstaking detail (be sure to involve the senses). Consider what your future will look like, if you continue to yield to this sin. Think through what God wants you to do instead, and develop a detailed mental picture of what obedience looks like. It will help to write all this up and go over it a few times a day for a while.

### *Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)*

This week, your job is to give a preliminary interpretation of Psalm 139. You have already begun interpreting; you can't help it. Of course the big question in interpretation is always "What does it mean?" but we need to discuss what constitutes an acceptable answer to this question.

There is a tendency to treat each individual verse or statement as a free-standing unit and find the appropriate doctrinal pigeonhole for it, e.g., coming to vv. 7-10 and saying “This is talking about the doctrine of omnipresence.”<sup>3</sup> Then, confident that we know what it’s talking about, we move on to the next one. The end product is an “interpretation” that is nothing but a list of doctrinal terms.<sup>4</sup> This is totally unacceptable; Psalm 139 is not a “doctrine smoothie” David made by dumping a systematic theology book into a blender and pushing “frappé.”

The psalm is a *unity*, a continuous flow of thought from beginning to end. It is true, of course, that David states or alludes to certain key ideas about God and the world in the course of the psalm, and there is nothing wrong with noticing that. However, what makes the psalm more than just a list is the way in which all these ideas are tied together into an organic whole.

This may be easier to understand if we look at a few verses, so let’s look at verses 19-22, which trouble many readers. The common complaint is that we know we’re supposed to love our enemies, and yet this seems to directly contradict that. The usual response to that complaint is to marshal a vast array of evidence from other passages and come up with a systematic teaching on handling enemies. I have nothing bad to say about doing a systematic study on how to handle your enemies; I think it’s a great idea, and often people do resolve their difficulties with this passage in the course of such a study.

However, they usually walk straight into the teeth of the exegetical problem, because as we interpret the psalm, it’s not enough to be able to say “oh, yeah, this is part x of doctrine y.” It’s not enough to know how these verses fit into the doctrine of enemies; *we need to know how these verses fit into the psalm*. The doctrinal problem is “What are these verses doing in *the Bible*?”; the exegetical problem is “What are these verses doing *here*?” Our goal is not just to be able to rip these verses out of their context and explain how they fit into the systematic theology books. Our goal is to *understand Psalm 139*.

So as you formulate an interpretation of the psalm this week, go ahead and notice the key concepts David discusses, but keep in mind that your goal is to understand how it all fits together in the psalm.

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<sup>3</sup> Which, by the way, it is not. Take another look at the verses: does it actually *say* that God is everywhere?

<sup>4</sup> Just for the record, I need to add a disclaimer here. Those of you who hail from the doctrinal movement may feel that I’m picking on you here, and you’re right, I am. But hear me out, because there’s more to it than that. While it is certainly true that doctrinal pastors have elevated this deplorable practice to an art form, the practice itself is much, much older than the doctrinal movement. You can find many examples of it in the works of Lewis Sperry Chafer, C. I. Scofield, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and even further back in church history. (The devil does it with Psalm 91:11-12 when he’s tempting Jesus in Matthew 4:6. We’ll look at that passage in more detail when we get to Jesus in a few weeks.)

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Read Hendricks chapters 27-34.

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

Most of what we have from Solomon is written up in poetic form, and there's a tendency to dismiss some of what's in the poetry as overblown—just poetic license. In order to get a sense for how poetry and prose map onto each other, read Exodus 14:1-15:21. Compare the historical account of the events to the poetic reflection on them afterward. How are the two alike? How are they different? If all you had was the song in chapter 15, how well could you reconstruct the historical account in chapter 14?

### For Further Study

Read through Exodus 20, and take careful note of the ten commandments. Then begin reading the works of Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon). As you read, notice how much of what Solomon has to say is actually a more vivid repetition of the ten commandments.

## **4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### Your Daily Walk

Last week, I challenged you to carry your reflection on God's Word, His acts in history, and His world all the way to its logical conclusion in worshipping the Lord. How has that worked out this week? Did something happen in your life this week that you praised the Lord for? (Did you praise Him because you could see His hand in the events, or just because you liked what happened?)

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

Okay, so you've worked on memorizing Psalm 139. Not word-for-word or anything so drastic, but remembering the contours of the psalm, the shape of it, the flow of thought. Can you talk your way through the whole psalm without looking? I hope so, but if not, keep at it. You'll get there.

How have your efforts at memorizing the psalm affected your reflection on the psalm this week? Do you find yourself thinking of it more often than in past weeks? Have you seen new things that you missed before?

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

You've finished the section on observation. Congratulations! How has it helped your work in Psalm 139? Think back to the first time you read the psalm for this class, three weeks ago, and compare to how you read it now. What about your other Bible reading? Has your study of observation changed the way you read the Bible?

*Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)*

Last week I asked you to consider some basic questions about meditation, and suggested that perhaps our culture's concept of meditation is not the same thing as the Bible's concept. Let's take another look at those questions:

- What is meditation?
- Who should meditate?
- On what?
- When?
- Where?
- For what purpose?

Now that you know what the Bible says about meditation, let's come back to our culture's concept of meditation. What are the differences? What are the implications of those differences?

## **MALACHI**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This week, we are going to learn nothing new. We are going to watch as Malachi does something very similar to things that Moses, David, and Solomon did before him. After seeing another instance of this pattern, we are going to focus on how to replicate it in our own work with Psalm 139, both in interpretation and in application.

### **2. MALACHI AND THE PERILS OF PARTIAL COMPLIANCE**

Let's take a quick look at a couple of sample sacrificial passages in Leviticus 4. Notice that in vv. 3, 23, 28, and 32, the sacrifices are supposed to be "without blemish." We could multiply references on this, but these four will do for a representative sample.

Now notice what Israel is actually doing, as recorded in Malachi 1:6-14. They are bringing God sheep so bad off that they wouldn't serve them to their governor. How insulting! Predictably, God is insulted. He would rather they just nail the temple doors shut than keep offering diseased sheep on His altar.

Some people might say "Hey, at least they didn't stop altogether; you've got to give them credit for putting forth *some* effort." But that isn't how God sees it; He wants their best, and nothing else will do. He made that clear in the Law, and even though it is now centuries later, He still holds them to that same standard.

### **3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

#### *Your Daily Walk*

We will discuss application in the next section, below, but before we do, let me encourage you to think about Malachi as you struggle this week to do the right thing. Think about the crooked priest putting a diseased, lame sheep on the altar as a sacrifice, and how insulting that is to God. As you set out to apply Scripture to your life this week, put forth the necessary effort to really think it through, and then follow through on it. Don't give God any diseased sheep.

#### *Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)*

This week we begin working on application. As you've seen, application is integral to Scripture—right from the Garden of Eden the Word of God requires us to

*do* something. How should your life change because of what you've learned in Psalm 139? Be specific, and think through it in some detail. By way of example, as I seek to apply v. 14, I might think to myself, "The body really is a marvelous invention. I enjoy having one, and I should praise the Lord more for that." That's fine, as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough. That's the forgettable sort of thought that I'll, well, *forget* by the time I've left the building.

Remember last week, when we looked at how Solomon made vivid applications of the Law? Let's do as he did; let's make it more specific. When and where should I praise the Lord more for the marvels of the body? I work out at various times in the week; perhaps I should begin and end my workouts with a prayer of praise. What other bodily experiences do I enjoy? What about eating? After all, God could have made the sense of taste to just tell me, in objective, detached fashion, what the chemical constituents of the food are. But He didn't; instead, he so wired my nervous system that I experience pleasure at the taste of certain foods. Fearfully and wonderfully made—I should praise God for the ability to enjoy food. And so on.

So instead of a generic 'I should praise God more,' I now have a set of experiential hooks, places in my life that are praise-deficient. When I feel that spreading warmth in my muscles and connective tissue, the pleasurable tingle that tells me my body is beginning to wake up, I should praise God. When I feel the relaxed-but-energetic glow that follows a workout, I should praise God. When I revel in the taste of homemade chicken soup, the peppery finish of a good Shiraz, or the tang of an orange, I should praise God.

Now, what form should my praise take? Well, what form does David's praise take in v. 14? He acknowledges the quality of the workmanship and the identity of the craftsman: "Marvelous are Your works..." The praise could be as simple as a mental note, a "popcorn" prayer: "Wow, God. Good going!"

You see the difference? Instead of "I should praise God more," I have now come to "When I experience physical pleasure (e.g., limbering up, after working out, when enjoying food), I should tell God what a great job He did." This is important because a specific application becomes something I can track. I can ask myself at the end of the day: (1) What happened that I enjoyed? and (2) Did I remember to praise God when it happened? In this way I can track my progress and begin to see real changes in my patterns of living and thinking.

Like Solomon did, we might also think through the consequences of failure. What do I look like if I fail to make this application? Well, then I go through my life enjoying God's good gifts, but thinking that they're "just there," taking them for granted, rather like an ungrateful teenager who takes his parent's provision for granted. That's not a flattering picture—spending my whole spiritual life stuck in "clueless teenager" mode. Let's take it further: if I stay in "clueless teenager" mode, what happens? Then I cultivate a habit of ingratitude; I become incapable of seeing the grace that is given to me for what it is. I don't honor these pleasurable moments as gifts from God; I don't attend to them at all. So in fact, I enjoy them *less* than I would if I really took the time to notice them. Of course, eventually God will break

through, even if it's at the Bema. And then, suddenly, the light dawns, and I realize that God gave me a rich life packed to the brim with little graces, and *I never even noticed*.<sup>5</sup>

Two cautions in closing: First, the specific application is *only one of many*. There are other ways to apply v. 14 as well; I shouldn't think that I've got v. 14 down just because this one application becomes part of my life. Second, real spiritual development comes from God. There's nothing you can do to please Him apart from His strength, so an integral part of this process is calling on the Lord to help you *actually* change. His promise is that as you meditate on His Word, He will work the necessary miracle to allow you to live a life that pleases Him.<sup>6</sup>

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

We're going to skip ahead in Hendricks a little this week. Because of the time constraints of this series, we needed to start working on application in Psalm 139 at this point. You'll find it helpful to read chapters 39-41 of Hendricks this week (don't worry; we'll come back for the chapters we skipped).

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

The era of the prophets was punctuated by many judgments, returns to the Lord, and apostasies away from the Lord. To many people, that period of Israel's history seems like a historical spaghetti bowl, with very little overall coherence. But God always has a plan in history, and sometimes, He shows us what it is. In order to have a look at the history of the prophetic period, build a horizontal chart of 2 Chronicles. Is there an underlying pattern to the book? If so, what is it? You'll find an example attached to this handout.<sup>7</sup>

## **4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### Your Daily Walk

Did anybody follow through on the suggestion to think through a pet sin in the way that Solomon thinks in Proverbs? Is it helping?

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

This is the point in the series where group study begins to get really uncomfortable. I am going to ask you to tell us what you think the psalm means. Probably you won't be entirely right, and that's okay. That's what the rest of us are here for. The goal here is to fellowship, to pool our observations and come closer to the text together than we could on our own.

A quick note about what we're *not* doing: we are not sharing "what the text means to me," as though it can mean many different things to many different people.

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<sup>5</sup> If you've ever seen or read Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, the ending presents a very vivid—albeit totally secularized—picture of what this is going to be like.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 6-8

<sup>7</sup> Similar examples available at <http://www.dankatie.com/hermeneutics/bookchart.php>.

As we've seen throughout our study thus far, God's Word means something definite, and we're here to submit to that meaning—together.

*Reading (1-2 hrs.)*

How did your reading in Hendricks help you grasp the meaning of Psalm 139?

*Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)*

How did the poetry of Exodus 15 match up with the history of Exodus 14? Did you notice that the poetry essentially said the same things? That it makes reference to the same literal events *as* literal events? This gives us a way of gauging our interpretation of predictive poetry. When Proverbs says "The companion of fools will be destroyed," it is not poetic hyperbole; he really means that such a person will get destroyed.



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**Mr. Timothy R. Nichols**  
**Spring 2008**

## **JESUS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

We have looked at the utter necessity of beginning with God's word. We have seen how starting with God's word profits us, and what happens when we fail to do this. We have explored how David, Solomon and Malachi applied the Scriptures to themselves and others. And now, in our continuing study of how to live the Bible out in our lives, we have come to the life of Jesus. Jesus is our first and best example of how to live in accord with the Scriptures—He wrote them.

### **2. JESUS AND THE LAW**

#### *The Temptation of Jesus*

When Jesus faces temptation from the Devil himself, He responds by quoting Scripture. In fact, all three Scriptures He quotes come from the book of Deuteronomy. A number of Christian preachers like to ask their congregations at this point: "If your ability to resist temptation rested entirely on your grasp of the book of Deuteronomy, how would you do?" Go back and look at the quotes Jesus uses in their original contexts.<sup>8</sup> Take a lesson in how to apply based on Jesus' application.

#### *The Sermon on the Mount*

For more extended meditation on the commands of God, take a look at the Sermon on the Mount. The thinking here is much like the thinking in Matthew 4:7; there is more depth and thought in the extended application. See, for example, Matthew 5:21-30. Note that this is *not* the same thing as building a legalistic fence around the Law. Rather than building up a hedge of outward observances, Jesus is urging his hearers to be shaped by God's word in their hearts.

#### *Detailed Attention to the Whole Text*

The next portion of the Sermon on the Mount moves on to discuss marriage, but there is another passage that explains Jesus' thinking on the subject more fully: Matthew 19:3-9. Notice that here Jesus actually calls for more than the Law of Moses requires, but where does He go for precedent? To Genesis—which is part of the Law of Moses. The creation account demonstrates God's design for marriage,

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 4:4 and Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:7 and Deuteronomy 6:16, Matthew 4:10 and Deuteronomy 6:13. Satan in Matthew 4:6 is quoting Psalm 91:11-12.

and Jesus calls on His audience to fulfill that design. When they balk, He explains the reason why the Mosaic command is somewhat lax by comparison, but He doesn't give them any ground. Just in passing, note that Jesus treats the Creation account as a real, historical event.

Probably the best demonstration of the sort of attention Jesus paid to the text is in Matthew 22:31-33. In Exodus 3:6, God introduces Himself to Moses as the "God of Abraham." Abraham died some 400+ years earlier. If God is *still* the God of Abraham, Jesus reasons, then Abraham is *still* alive.

### **3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

#### *Your Daily Walk*

In your own Bible reading, do you give the kind of attention to the text that Jesus shows us in Matthew? Do you give the sort of deep reflection to the commands that Jesus gives to the Law in the Sermon on the Mount? Over the coming week, take a particular command, and ask yourself: what sort of person is it who keeps this command with his whole heart? Seek to become that person.

#### *Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)*

Since our first attempt at memorizing the psalm, we've struggled through a preliminary interpretation and some personal applications. Now we need to come back around for a second pass at memorizing the psalm. Again, it is not necessary at this point to memorize the entire thing word-for-word, but try to learn it thought-by-thought. Challenge yourself to be able to give the psalm in your own words so that someone who listens to you will hear every verse.

#### *Reading (1-2 hrs.)*

This week we go back and pick up the chapters we skipped last week. Read chapters 35-38 in Hendricks.

#### *Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)*

We've looked this week at Jesus' interpretation of the Law. Another common sticking point for interpreters is the parables of Jesus. Matthew 13 is the tutorial on interpreting parables: here, Jesus gives a number of parables, but He also gives interpretations for two of them, so a reader will be able to get started. Taking Jesus' own interpretation of the parables of the sower and the wheat and tares as your template, interpret the other parables in Matthew 13.

### **4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

#### *Your Daily Walk*

Last week I encouraged you to form a mental picture based on Malachi's depiction of a crooked priest offering diseased sheep on God's altar, and to use that mental picture to remind yourself to offer God your best—including your best effort at applying His Word. Did that mental picture help you?

*Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)*

So what applications did you generate from the psalm? Which parts did you find most applicable?

*Reading (1-2 hrs.)*

How did Hendricks help you to form applications of Psalm 139?

*Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)*

If you took the time to chart out 2 Chronicles, what patterns did you see in the history?

## ACTS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

We have looked at the utter necessity of beginning with God's word. We have seen how starting with God's word profits us, and what happens when we fail to do this. We have explored how David, Solomon and Malachi applied the Scriptures to themselves and others. And now, in our continuing study of how to live the Bible out in our lives, we have come to the life of Jesus. Jesus is our first and best example of how to live in accord with the Scriptures—He wrote them.

### 2. ACTS

#### *Pentecost and the Gentile Mission (Acts 2, 10:1-11:18, 15:1-35)*

You may remember that we briefly touched on the confusion of languages at the tower of Babel. Moses recording the covenant with Noah demonstrates that translation is possible, but at Pentecost we have an even more stunning vindication of translation. When the Spirit descends on them, there is a sound “as of a mighty rushing wind,” and a crowd gathers. Since it's festival-time, Jews have come to Jerusalem from every corner of the globe, and so the crowd is multilingual and multiethnic. The Spirit-filled believers spill out into the streets, speaking to these people, and each one hears the wonderful works of God in his own birth-language. If ever there was a vindication of the idea of translation, there it is. The wonderful works of God can be declared in any language.

The point of the event, however, is not to vindicate translation. The point is to present a sign to Israel—Gentile tongues praising God in Jerusalem. Israel was always meant to take the good news to the Gentiles, and at her better moments, she did a decent job of it.<sup>9</sup> God is calling her once again to fulfill her destiny.

The sign gets even more pointed in Peter's vision, where God instructs him not to call anything God made unclean or common. Emboldened by the vision, Peter goes to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, to preach the gospel. While he is still speaking, the Holy Spirit comes upon those who hear him, just as He came upon the Jerusalem believers at Pentecost, and the first Gentiles enter the church. The rest of the book of Acts focuses on the gospel going forth among the Gentile nations.

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<sup>9</sup> Remember the Gentiles David had a ministry with?

The final clarification comes in Acts 15, where the church declares, once and for all, that a Gentile does not need to keep the Law of Moses, but must abide by the covenant with Noah. (This makes sense, because a Gentile is not a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but is a descendant of Noah.)

### *Stephen before the Jews (Acts 6:8-7:60)*

It is this milieu that Stephen ministers to Jews and proselytes in Jerusalem. He is a forceful witness—so effective, in fact, that his enemies falsely accuse him of crimes to shut him up. On trial before the Sanhedrin, he delivers a stunning sermon. He gives them a long history lesson, and they have no idea where he's going with it until the end. What he does is simply explain the history of Israel starting with Abraham, subtly highlighting how, beginning with Moses, the people rebelled against the prophets. By the time he shows them the point that he's making, Stephen has laid the groundwork so effectively that there is no escaping it. They are “cut to the heart.” Of course, while effective preaching always induces conviction, how people respond to conviction is up to them. Sometimes it doesn't work out so happily for the preacher.

### *Paul before the Gentiles (Acts 17:16-34)*

Called upon to explain teaching Jesus and the resurrection, Paul too uses biblical history. In this case, however, he doesn't draw on the history of Israel, but on the universal history taught for us in Genesis 1-11, that is, the history of the Gentile nations. Beginning by establishing their ignorance of God, Paul preaches against idolatry, starting from creation and moving into God's sovereign control of history. Paul shows that even without exposure to Old Testament law, the Greeks knew better than to worship idols, and challenges them to repent because there will one day be a reckoning for their behavior. Here Paul jumps right over everything from Abraham to Malachi, and presents the resurrection of Jesus as a sign of God's coming judgment.

### *Summary*

In both cases, God's servants presented the truth to people who needed to hear it. There was no cookie-cutter approach; they were speaking to different audiences, and selected the historical material they presented accordingly. However, they have some noteworthy things in common. Both accused their respective audiences of evil; moreover, both argued that the audience knew better. Both delivered rebukes meant to call the audience to repentance, and both grounded their accusations and calls to repentance in real history.

## **3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### *Your Daily Walk*

In the coming week, consider the pattern laid out by Stephen and Paul. When you think of the things God is calling you to do, do you ground your understanding of those commands in the history that God has given to us? Try it. What historical events are relevant to your struggles this week?

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

Two weeks ago, you spent some time developing applications for yourself from Psalm 139. It has now been two weeks since you first considered those applications. How are you doing with them? Have you improved in those areas? There are three key things to consider when looking at your progress in application.

First, how do you know you're doing better or worse? If you're having trouble here, it's probably because you didn't think the application through well enough initially. A clearly-defined application should be fairly easy to assess. (Sometimes it helps to check with someone else, e.g., "Honey, have I been less irritable over the last week?")

Second, in those areas where you're doing better, why are you doing better? What, specifically, is making the difference? Are you avoiding temptations that you would have faced? Are you resisting temptations you would have surrendered to? Both? Why? What are you doing or thinking differently?

Third, consider the areas where you're not doing better. What is different about your experience in these areas from the ones where you're improving? How can you change so that you will successfully follow the Lord in these areas too?

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

We're caught up to where we were, so this week we'll resume our reading in the applications section with chapters 42-45 in Hendricks.

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

In the lecture we've principally looked at Acts in terms of three characters: Peter, Stephen, and Paul. However, there are a number of other characters whose lives have lessons to teach us. This week, take a closer look at John Mark. Based on the references we have to him, try to reconstruct his life.<sup>10</sup> Who was he? What were his failures and successes? What can we learn from him?

## **4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### Your Daily Walk

Has your reflection on applying the Word deepened over the past week as you sought to understand the *internal* changes of your outward application?

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<sup>10</sup> The list below contains all the New Testament passages that refer to John Mark by name. They are listed in chronological order, following Hoehner's chronology.

- a. Ac. 12:12-17 (Before 36)
- b. Ac. 12:25 (late 47)
- c. Ac. 13:5 (spring 48)
- d. Ac. 13:13 (summer 48)
- e. Ac. 15:36-41 (~51)
- f. Col. 4:10 (summer 58)
- g. Phm.1:24 (summer 58)
- h. 2Tim.4:11 (late 58)
- i. 1Pe.5:13 (spring 65)

*Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)*

How has your memory work progressed? Does it help you to have more of the psalm memorized?

*Reading (1-2 hrs.)*

How has your reading in Hendricks helped your reading in Psalm 139?

*Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)*

The first thing to notice about the parables is their purpose. They are designed to reveal the truth to Jesus' disciples, and to conceal it from everyone else. Therefore, we should expect that parables will require some work to interpret, and require some basic Christian beliefs as a basis for their interpretation.

As you examine the first two parables, with their interpretations, notice that every element of the parable has an analogue in the interpretation. It has often been said, "You can't make a parable walk on all fours," but this clearly isn't true. If the element is in the parable, it means something. Also notice, however, that the big point that each parable seeks to make is pretty plain. The parables are not complicated doctrinal arguments; the doctrinal content is fairly straightforward.

## **PAUL**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Last week we saw how Paul and Stephen both applied biblical history in their interactions with unbelievers. This week, we will look at how Paul applies both biblical meditations (in Psalms) and biblical history to the daily lives of believers.

### **2. PAUL'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: EPHESIANS 4:26**

#### *Ephesians 4:26*

Read Ephesians 4:26. Now hold your finger there and turn back to Psalm 4. It is easy to see where Paul got “Be angry, and do not sin”—it’s right there in Psalm 4:4. But where did he get “Do not let the sun go down on your anger”?

Re-read Psalm 4:5-8. What do you see?

A second issue in Ephesians 4:26 is the pragmatic one: how can it be okay to be mad a minute before sunset, and two minutes later, the same emotion becomes sin? It does seem strange, doesn’t it? Here again, we turn for answers to Psalm 4. What motivates David’s anger in Psalm 4? How does he handle his anger? He is hurt, but notice that he takes the situation directly to God. He calls on God to be deal with his enemies’ unrighteous conduct.

Would it be possible for him to handle his situation differently? Sure. He could leave God out of it, and try to take revenge himself. Would this be okay, as long as he resolved the matter before sunset? Of course not.

Paul is not trying to tell us that astronomy has something to do with anger, but that the anger which does not sin is anger that *God’s* standards have been violated, and such an anger takes the situation to God and leaves it in His hands, confident that He will stand up for Himself. Therefore, it is resolved before evening. The righteously angry man confidently trusts the Lord, and is glad. He falls asleep with a contented smile on his face.

In light of what we learn in Psalm 4, Paul is giving us an artful summary, a proverbial expression that gives us an “indicator light” to watch out for. If your “brake” light comes on in your car, the problem is not that the light is on; the light indicates a deeper problem. If you’re going to bed angry, there’s a deeper problem; righteous anger doesn’t “hold on” like that.



### Romans 6:1-14

Paul begins the book of Romans by telling his audience, a group of mature, productive believers, that he would like to preach the gospel to them. He then explains that there are two basic kinds of people: those who knowingly sin, and encourage others to do the same, and those who knowingly sin, and scold others for doing the same. In either case, they sin, which means that they are condemned before God. But Paul goes on to explain that righteousness can be obtained through faith in Christ rather than by human works, and proves this point from the lives of David and Abraham. He then begins to explore the ramifications of this fact. What does everyday life look like, when you have righteousness that is a gift from God, and not from your own works? Among the obvious implications is that no matter how much sin you commit, there is always even more grace.

That raises the question, why not sin a lot, then? Paul immediately disagrees with this, but on what grounds? To what does he appeal? He goes straight to the cross of Christ. Follow the logic, Paul says: If you have all this grace because you're identified with Christ, then doesn't that mean that you're identified with His death and resurrection? And if that's true, then you're identified with His death *to sin*—which means you are also dead to sin—and with his resurrection *to new life*—which means you're also raised to a new life. If that's true, then why go back to living like you did *before* you were identified with Christ? What's the point?

In other words, Paul considers the practical, ethical question of why we shouldn't sin. In order to get a clear, compelling answer, Paul goes back to our history, and our history shows very clearly what we should and should not do.

Paul doesn't just leave it there, notice. Insight does not equal change, and Paul doesn't just want them to have insight. He actually wants them to live in a way that pleases God. So he follows the insight with a command to think about it, to *consider* yourselves dead to sin and alive to God.

This is the furthest thing from sticking a note card on your mirror that says "I am thin" in an effort to lose 20 pounds. That can actually work, because God really did design us to live the way we think. But that sort of lying affirmation is a perversion of what God intended us to use that faculty for, and it's a pale, sickly imitation of what Paul is doing. See, meditating on affirmations that are not true is lying to yourself in order to make it true. Paul, on the other hand, is challenging us to tell ourselves the truth, so that we'll stop living a lie.

## **3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### Your Daily Walk

The kind of applications and implications we see Paul making come from a lifestyle of thinking about the Word of God. You, too, should be thinking about the Word of God. Whether you're doing the Psalm 139 assignments or not, read the section below for its suggestions on how to start a lifestyle of constant thought about God's Word. If you've other passages you should be thinking about instead of Psalm

139, that's fine. Studying Psalm 139 right now is optional. A lifestyle of thinking about God's Word is not.

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

Over the preceding several weeks, we have seen several examples of reflection on Scripture. In fact, we've seen Paul's example in the church epistles this week. In Psalm 139 this week, your assignment is simply to reflect on the psalm. Make a concentrated effort to think of it regularly, multiple times throughout the day. Writing down a few key verses on a note card and keeping the card in your purse or pocket might be one way of reminding yourself. Perhaps you will find it helpful to write "Psalm 139" on five sticky notes and put them at your desk, in your car, or around the house, in places where you spend time. You may be worried that you'll forget to do this by tomorrow morning—a valid concern. So do it tonight. Too tired? Take just 30 seconds tonight to start by putting one note somewhere prominent where you'll see it tomorrow morning, and remember to complete the job.

Of course maybe none of these suggestions will work for you. That's okay; the index cards and sticky notes aren't the point. Find ways of reminding yourself that work for you, and use them. But do *something*. Don't just say, "That won't work for me," and wind up doing nothing at all. This week, make reflection on Psalm 139 a part of your lifestyle.

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Congratulations! If you've been keeping up with the reading in *Living by the Book*, you've finished it. This means that over the last few weeks you've read over 300 pages in your quest for better understanding of the Word of God. That's quite an accomplishment.

In the last two weeks of our time together, I want to get you started in another book that will greatly deepen your ability to enjoy God's Word. I am talking about Leland Ryken's *Words of Delight*.<sup>11</sup> Ryken is an English professor, and at times he writes like one. This is definitely a harder read than Hendricks, but it is well worth the effort. It is one of the two<sup>12</sup> most useful books I've found for introducing people to how stories work. As with all other non-biblical reading, Ryken has to be measured by Scripture. He's not perfect, and he won't be right about everything, but his work is very useful. For this week, I would suggest reading the introduction and chapters 1-2.

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

In the following table, you'll find references for the Old Testament quotes in Romans 1-3. Consider the Old Testament passage carefully in its context, then bring that into Paul's argument in Romans. What is Paul's point in each case? What does the quote add to his argument?

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<sup>11</sup> If at all possible, get the second edition; the author added a lot of new material.

<sup>12</sup> The other one is *Deep Comedy* by Peter J. Leithart. If you read *Deep Comedy*—which I heartily recommend—be aware that it's easy to get bogged down in the middle (part 2). If that happens, skip to part 3, which will still make sense without the philosophical backdrop. Once you've read part 3, it may be much easier for you to understand part 2.

Romans	Old Testament Reference
1:17	Habakkuk 2:4
2:6	Psalms 62:12; Proverbs 24:12
2:24	Isaiah 52:5, Ezekiel 36:22
3:4	Psalms 15:4
3:10-12	Psalms 14:1-3, Psalm 53:1-3
3:13	Psalms 5:9, Psalm 140:3
3:14	Psalms 10:7
3:15-17	Isaiah 59:7-8
3:18	Psalms 36:1

## 4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES

### Your Daily Walk

What historical events did you reflect on this week to help you live in a way that pleases God? Did it help to do this?

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

Over the last week we revisited the applications you had developed earlier in our study, to see how you're doing. As you examined those areas of your life, did you see improvement, or does it seem to be getting worse?

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Congratulations! You've finished Hendricks. As you revisited your applications of Psalm 139 this past week, did your reading in Hendricks help to clarify your thinking about formulating and implementing sound application?

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

As you looked at the life of John Mark, what did you see?

Here are some additional questions to consider:

- When Mark left the mission field, was it his fault? Was it a sin? How do you know?
- When Mark left, where did he go? Who did he associate with?
- After his initial bad experience, did Mark give up on missionary work?

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**PETER**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

As we continue looking at New Testament study and application of the Bible, we come to Peter. Peter is especially helpful to us today, because today we are surrounded by people who want to de-historicize the Bible, claiming that it is just a set of stories meant to make a moral point. Peter is at some pains to deny this, and explain the importance of understanding the Bible on its own terms—as actual history.

**2. PETER’S USE OF THE BIBLE**

Peter begins his epistle by making it clear that he’s addressing all believers and reminding them of the resources God has given them to enable them to live the Christian life. Because God has given them such wealth, Peter challenges them to grow in Christian character. In order to do this, they must meditate on the provision God has made for them, and the result of doing so will be abundant reward.

Because of the great reward at stake, Peter continues to remind them of these things even though he knows that they already know. In fact, he intends to make sure they continue to receive reminders after he’s died (this is one of the purposes of the book).

It is important that they remember the Christian message because of where it comes from. Peter and the other apostles didn’t just cobble together a religion by stitching together some old stories; they *saw* Jesus for themselves. In fact, three of them saw Him in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, and heard God Himself give testimony to who Jesus is, confirming the prophetic word by acting in history. Peter wants them to give careful attention to Scripture, because no prophecy of Scripture can be interpreted however some human wants—it’s not from men, but from God. The prophets themselves said what the Holy Spirit moved them to say.

**2 Peter 2**

Unfortunately, there were, and are, also false prophets, and Peter has a few things to say about such people.

Notice the point of the first series of historical examples in vv. 4-8. Peter states his premise at the end of verse 3, and then begins verse 4 with “if,” followed by “and...and...and...” The other shoe doesn’t drop until verse 9, confirming the premise: God will judge the unjust and preserve the godly. He always has.

Peter continues his discussion of these people with a vivid description of their corruption, and reminds his readers of a historical pattern, another person like this: Balaam. These are the sorts of people, says Peter, that a talking donkey can correct. Believers who are enticed away by such a person wind up in miserable condition, Peter says, much more corrupt than if they were unbelievers.

## 2 Peter 3

Peter writes to remind them again to heed the Scriptures. He warns them that there will always be people who have willfully forgotten the past, and therefore deny God's future judgment. This is no small thing. The world of Noah's day was preserved by the word of God, and then destroyed at God's command. The same thing is true today: our world is preserved by the word of God, and will one day be destroyed by it. We ought not to forget. The people of Noah's day did not think there was a coming judgment either, and look what happened to them.

Peter wants his readers to remember, though, that the Lord will always make good, and that the coming judgment will destroy the earth, and to conduct themselves accordingly, looking toward the new heavens and the new earth. He closes by urging them to heed his warning and grow in the Lord.

## Summary

Ask yourself: how does the argument of 2 Peter work if the stories he refers to never actually happened? If they're just stories designed to teach a moral point, does the book still make sense?

It does not. Peter has been very careful to say that they "did not follow cunningly devised fables." He has accused those who do not remember God's past actions of *willfully* forgetting. This is not simple amnesia; it's amnesia with an agenda, Peter says. The people who say that these stories are just clever stories designed to make a moral point are *exactly* the people Peter is writing against.

Peter is not merely offering an interpretation of some ancient texts. He also gives us eyewitness testimony of Jesus' glory and the Father's voice on the mountain, saying "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Peter tells us that his eyewitness testimony is of a piece with the vision of history he is setting forth. These stories really happened, and the God who promised the Flood will perform the future judgments He has promised as well.

## **3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### Your Daily Walk

This week, make an effort to make the Bible stories you know a part of your lifestyle of reflection on Scripture. Look for parallels between Bible stories and life.

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

As you continue your lifestyle of reflection on Scripture, try to reflect on the psalm sometimes when you're not actually looking at it. See if you can reconstruct

the thought process of the psalm in your head. As you do this, think over what you might say to someone if they ask you what Psalm 139 is about.

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Read chapters 3-6 in Ryken. This will complete his section on narrative. If you're feeling a little dizzy after the first couple of chapters, the next few may help by giving some more specifics.

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

We've just looked at how Peter used the story of the Flood to make a very practical point for the Christian lives of his readers. What other biblical authors refer to the Flood, and what points are they making? If you have access to a concordance (or the internet), you can search for words like "Noah" or "flood." Below you'll find a list of references to get you started. Don't forget to read around these references for their context.

Genesis 6:1-9:17

Isaiah 54:9

Luke 17:26-27

1 Chronicles 1:4

Ezekiel 14:14, 20

Hebrews 11:7

Psalms 29:10

Matthew 24:37-39

## **4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### Your Daily Walk

Last week, I challenged you to make reflection on Scripture a part of your daily life. How's that going?

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

For those of you who are working with Psalm 139, what did you do to make reflecting on it a part of your lifestyle? Note cards? Sticky notes? Record yourself reading it, and play it back? Something else entirely? Share your ideas.

Did it work?

What difference did it make?

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Tough reading, wasn't it? The wealth of specific (and familiar) biblical examples helps, but even so, it can be difficult. What did you learn? How do you think it might help you?

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

What did you find in your examination of the Old Testament backdrop of Romans 1-3?

- What does "the just shall live by faith" mean (1:17)?
- What is the context of the passages in Romans 3:10-18?

## **HEBREWS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Last week, we saw that Peter was dealing with false teachers who seduced people away from the truth and back into their own lusts. Peter warns his readers against this by using history to assure them of coming judgment on the teachers and those who follow them. He also challenges his readers not to be drawn away by earthly lusts, knowing that all these things will be burned up one day, when “the elements melt with a fervent heat.”

Like Peter, the author of Hebrews wants his readers to remember the past in order to understand the future. However, his emphasis is quite different. Although he does touch on judgment—in fact, he makes a series of dire threats—he also lays a heavy emphasis on reward.

### **2. SEEING THE FUTURE THROUGH THE PAST**

Hebrews addresses a Jewish community of believers who have been faithful in the past, and suffered persecution for it—although not yet to the point of bloodshed. They are getting tired, and are in danger of abandoning the faith. The author writes in order to encourage them to endure.

#### *Hebrews 11:1-12:17*

We often miss the transition into 11:1 because of our English vocabulary. “Faith” and “belief” are interchangeable—at least in biblical terms—so we might translate 10:39-11:1 in this way:

Now we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. Now belief is the substance of things expected, the evidence of things not seen.

In other words, it is precisely the belief of 10:39 that is under discussion all the way through chapter 11 and into chapter 12.

In Hebrews 11 the author carries us from creation through Noah in 5 verses. Another 15 are devoted to Abraham and the patriarchs, 7 more to Moses, 2 to the conquest of Canaan. The last 9 verses carry us, in sweeping generalities, from the judges through the prophets. This is not simple historical review, however. Note the commentary in the end of verse 4 and verses 10, 13, 16, 39-40. What is his agenda

here? Is it not to draw our attention to the good company we're keeping when we endure hardship for the sake of the reward?

But he's not finished. As we move into 12:1-2, we see that we're also keeping company with Jesus, who did the very same thing. This history then forms the basis for the exhortation to a particular attitude toward chastening (12:3-11) and a particular set of attitudes for daily conduct (12:12-17).

### Summary

Notice that Hebrews uses some of the same events that Peter did, but emphasizes a completely different theme. This is an important point for us to understand. Neither of these writers is giving a "fair and balanced" view of the history – nor are they trying to. They are, however, giving an accurate picture of the history. They are deliberately drawing out their respective themes, and emphasizing those themes over other legitimate themes in the stories. It is perfectly all right to do this, *as long as the theme you're emphasizing is actually there.*

## **3. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES**

### Your Daily Walk

I challenged you to take the Bible stories you know and make them a part of your daily reflection on Scripture. Which stories have you found most helpful?

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

**DO NOT** turn to Psalm 139 in your Bible.

Let me ask you, what is Psalm 139 actually about? What does it all mean? What are the implications of that for daily life? Why should I care?

Now, after you've explained all that to me without looking at your Bible, tell me—have you memorized Psalm 139? No?

...are you sure?

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Ryken is operating on a fairly conventional understanding of literature. Because of this, not everything he has to say will transfer well to Scripture. The Bible is genius communication; God is just better at this than anyone else. Because of that, it regularly transcends the genre expectations that we bring to it.

That said, the Bible is written in human languages, using human literary conventions to communicate to human beings. A solid understanding of literature (such as what Ryken gives us) is a valuable part of coming to understand what the Bible is about.

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

What other lessons did the Bible use the Flood to teach?



## 4. A CONCLUDING CHALLENGE

This week concludes our time together in this series. I hope you've absorbed quite a bit of information about the way that Scripture communicates about itself, and the way that Scripture uses other Scripture.

More important than the information, though, is the skill set. As we've studied how later biblical authors reflect on and apply Scripture by earlier authors, I've tried to help you develop those same skills in your application of the Bible stories and psalms you know, especially Psalm 139.

Most important of all, I hope the time you've devoted to reflecting on Scripture for this series has been a time of sweet fellowship with the Lord. Remember, there's lots more Scripture where these bits came from; we've barely scratched the surface. I pray that you'll continue to grow in a lifestyle of reflection on Scripture in the coming weeks and months.

As you grow, always, always remember that very important lesson from the Garden of Eden: the *first* thing to think about, in any situation, is "What does God have to say about this?" Map your world with the Word of God; let all of your thinking about all of life also be meditation on Scripture. You'll be amazed at what you see.