

Review Questions on Principle III: Determine the Historical Setting

Sharing Questions If you could enter a time machine and travel back through time, where would you visit? Why?

Determine the Historical Setting

The diligent interpreter of Scripture will use whatever information may be of help in determining the historical setting of a book or statement in Scripture. This may involve using reference tools like Bible Handbooks, Dictionaries, and Encyclopedia, as well as atlases, historical works, and other sources. But much of the historical setting can be reconstructed from a careful reading of the Bible itself. Hone your "detecting skills" by completing the following exercise.

One of the most interesting and powerful books in the New Testament is the epistle to the Hebrews. It contains some of the most potent warning passages (see, for example, 5:11-6:20 or 10:26-31) in all of the New Testament. Yet this great word of exhortation (13:22) nowhere names either its author or its readers. In spite of this, careful reading yields many clues to the historical setting of this book. Unearth these by (1) reading the entire letter at one sitting, and then (2) looking up the following references in Hebrews and jotting down the information you learn concerning the recipients of this letter.

2:1-3

10:32-34 (12:4)

6:10

5:11,12

13:7

13:19

13:23

There are 86 different references to the Old Testament (see, for instance 1:5-13); what does this suggest about the readers?

Based on the following five passages, were the readers Christians?

5:12

6:9,10

3:1

10:32

13:3

Why was the letter written (5:11-6:3)?

The task of separating that which is merely cultural, and thus temporary, from that which is supra-cultural and permanent is important. And Challenging! The following exercise, adapted from some material by Mont Smith, a former missionary in Ethiopia, contains fifty practices and commands that appear in the New Testament. In that sense, all are "scriptural." But are all meant to be permanent? Or, are some merely temporary? Look up the reference and think about each one. Then classify it as "P" (permanent) or "T" (temporary), adding a word of explanation as to why you so regarded it.

-1- greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16)

- 2- abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:29)
- 3- be baptized (Acts 2:38)
- 4- a woman ought to have a veil on her head (I Corinthians 11:10)
- 5- wash one another's feet (John 13:14)
- 6- extend the right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:9)
- 7- ordain by the laying on of hands (Acts 13:3)
- 8- it is improper for a woman to speak in church (I Corinthians 14:35)
- 9- observe fixed hours of prayer (Acts 3:1)
- 10- sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16)
- 11- abstain from eating blood (Acts 15:29)
- 12- observe festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths (Colossians 2:16)
- 13- observe the Lord Supper (I Corinthians 11:24)
- 14- remember the poor (Galatians 2:10)
- 15- elders are to anoint the sick with oil (James 5:14-16)
- 16- do not allow a woman to teach (I Timothy 2:12)

- 17- preach two by two (Mark 6:7)
- 18- shake the dust off one's feet (Acts 13:51)
- 19- eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions (I Corinthians 10:27)
- 20- women are not to wear braided hair, gold, pearls, or costly garments (I Timothy 2:9)
- 21- abstain from fornication (Acts 15:29)
- 22- do not seek a wife (I Corinthians 7:27)
- 23- be circumcised (Acts 15:5)
- 24- refuse to eat reptiles and birds (Acts 10:12)
- 25- drink communion from single cup (Mark 14:23)
- 26- take formal religious vows (Acts 18:18)
- 27- refrain from public prayer (Matthew 6:5,6)
- 28- I wish that you all spoke in tongues (I Corinthians 14:5)
- 29- churches meet in homes (Colossians 4:15)
- 30- work with your hands (I Thessalonians 4:11)
- 31- lift your hands when praying (I Timothy 2:8)

- 32- give to him who asks of you (Matthew 5:42)
- 33- pray before meals (Luke 24:30)
- 34- don't put widows under 60 years of age on the list (I Timothy 5:9)
- 35- say "amen" at the conclusion of prayers (I Corinthians 14:16)
- 36- fast in connection with commissioning to service (Acts 13:3)
- 37- beware of the dogs (Philippians 3:2)
- 38- wives, be subject to your husbands (Colossians 3:18)
- 39- do not pay special attention to the rich (James 2:1-7)
- 40- use unleavened bread for communion (Luke 22:13,19)
- 41- cast lots ("draw straws") for church officers (Acts 1:26)
- 42- owe no man anything (Romans 13:8)
- 43- appoint seven deacons in the church (Acts 6:1-6)
- 44- abstain from the meat of animals killed by strangulation (Acts 15:29)
- 45- if anyone will not work, neither let him eat (II Thessalonians 3:10)
- 46- worship on Saturday (Acts 13:14,42,44)

-47- sell one's property upon becoming a Christian and give the proceeds to the church (Acts 4:32-37)

-48- use self-employed ministers (II Thessalonians 3:7,8)

-49- take collections in church for the poor (I Corinthians 16:1)

-50- refuse to take oaths (Matthew 5:33-37)

Now, ask yourself what principle(s) you used to distinguish that which is permanent and essential from that which is temporary and cultural. Try to write out your principle(s). You might put it in this format: "All commands or practices which _____ are permanent, and all those which _____ are temporary."

Ask a friend to listen to your principle(s) for distinguishing the merely cultural from that which is supra-cultural and permanent. After explaining this, ask your friend to look at the list of 50 practices above and give you a "second opinion" on how well you applied your principle(s).

Matching: Place the letter of the item on the right below in the blank in front of the appropriate term on the left.

____ Application

T F A word usually has no fixed meaning except in a context.

T F Figurative language often gives a statement greater vividness or intensity.

T F Word meanings are clarified by the words which surround them.

T F Different dispensations have different ways to get saved.

T F Figures of speech often drop their hints in the context.

T F All the promises in the Bible are mine.

T F Bible students should look for figurative-literal statements first in interpreting the Bible.

T F Usage is the key factor in determining what a word means.

Select (by circling the appropriate letters) three necessary prerequisites for one who would interpret the Bible.

- a. must be saved
- b. exceptional intelligence
- c. taken a comprehensive class in hermeneutics
- d. a desire to know God's Word
- e. completed an in-depth course in Bible doctrine
- f. reverent dependence on the Holy Spirit

State the "golden rule" of interpretation.

What is "hermeneutics"?

Explain the statement "All Scripture is for me, but not all Scripture is to me."

What are the three contexts of any statement in the Bible?

What is a "dispensation"?

List the three principles for interpreting the Bible.

-1-

-2-

-3-

Why are there so many different interpretations of the Bible?

Give an example of a plain-literal statement and a figurative-literal statement that both mean the same thing.

P-L

F-L

What is "literal" interpretation?

Explain the difference between the possible meanings of a word and a precise meaning of that same word.

Special Project

The epistle to the Galatians is one of Paul's most important epistles. It was probably composed in the spring of 52 A.D. while Paul was in Corinth on his second missionary journey. The churches addressed include those at Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (all cities in the province of Galatia). Read through Galatians seeking to learn more about the historical setting of the book. Organize what you learn into the categories that follow and be sure to include appropriate references.

The readers:

Paul's "frame of mind":

The occasion which prompted the writing of Galatians:

The purpose(s) of Galatians:

Other observations: