

## Session 1 – Preparation before we meet:

When we get together, we use the first part just to make sure that everyone's initial questions about the text we have read are dealt with and that this preparation material is understood.

In the second part of the class I shall look at the list of topics indicated as the main themes to not miss.

## Part A: Readings 1-21 in the Reading Guide.

**1. Bible is “our” book before it is “my” book.** As we shall see when we look at the gospel and our understanding of salvation, the corporate nature of God's work for Israel and through them the whole world means that we first must approach the written revelation as addressed to the covenant people of God – among whom each of us has a share in that life – before I look for something personal here for myself.

**2. Reading the text first,** before you read anything else in this course. This is your most important task for the week and is the basis for your fluency in the primary document. As you read, there will be things that are brought to your focus.

[a] Matters you don't know much about. This registers as lack of knowledge and sometimes puzzlement. We can sort this through research and activity.

[b] Things about which you do already have some knowledge.

It is these matters that the Holy Spirit often causes us to think about and focus upon something which is germane to his theme over the whole of the gospel message. This is the most basic openness you have to the Holy Spirit to allow you to be soft, and to let Him direct you to matters He wants to highlight for you. He is capable of highlighting something. Don't miss that – pursue it!

## **3. The division of the text into small sections [‘pericopes’ is the trade name].**

I have followed a synopsis of the Gospels and also taken care to look at the UBS4 Greek text to see how the small sections are cross-related to one another in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This is the best way to make sure that you have read the relevant record of the three writers, and also that you can make comparisons as to where they differ from one another.

We are reading about 25 sections a week, which is not a lot for volume of text, but quite enough for thinking about each happening. Follow the Guide in the reading order and using your A4 page technique make your notes and also your questions. These are our focus in the first section of our time together.

**4. Noting a page a section:** I want to encourage you to set aside an A4 page for each small section that we read in the Reading Guide. I know that this will grow to 300 or so pages in the Gospels alone, but it is worth it.

Doing this is powerful over the long term, even if it seems wasteful of paper at the beginning. Loose-leaf is better because you can slip new material, maps etc, into the order easily. It saves you re-duplicating your work as new information comes along and makes for a sound resource base to teach others.

You need to make this for yourself; it becomes the source of your contribution to the class and also a powerful record of your first readings through the NT. If we do it well on the first time through, then we are in a place to really appreciate the things the Lord shows us in later times as we read sections for the second, third and many times.

**5. This course is going to be life changing** – because any consecutive reading of the Old or New Testament begins to open large themes of God's dealings with us. It begins to give us a more objective understanding and so a more corporate perspective of the people of God. It makes clear that it is not all about ‘me’ but really about Him in relation to ‘us’.

**6. Be sensible about academic writers.** These are, most often, past or present brothers and sisters. Not everyone should be a scholar for the church; but a church bereft of scholars soon

falls into error. They do not impart life to us – only the Spirit does that – but they can hold a rational plumb-line up for us so that we don't go astray under the pressure of the thinking of our particular time. Where they have done faithful work they will benefit us. They have spent a lot of time looking into the Scriptures and their primary benefit to us is clarity about the nature, the meaning and interpretation of the text of Scripture. However, they are humans, we do not 'parrot' them, we read them after we have read the text and we think about their methods of working and also the way they expressed themselves for their day.

## 7. Historical, contextual and grammatical, meaning of the text.

There have been many differing approaches to the reading of the text before us. Some of these seemed exotic and strange to us today; but being aware of them alerts us to the fact that people draw from the Bible many different emphases. Some of these originate in people shamelessly looking for what they want to find; bringing their questions to the text rather than letting the text question them. Others are more submissive to the text; their minds are more pliable to the original documents before us and desire to let the text speak to them what it's writer wants to bring.

The modern scholar's method comes with some presupposed ways of approaching the text as well. Over this course, almost as an aside, we shall become aware of the major discussions about how text should be approached will come to light.

But, as a starting point, it will benefit us as we come to approach the text we are reading with a due sense of its **history**. Our text has a setting and we must recognise when it was written and into what mind-set it was addressed.

We shall see that the readings we are following have a **context** in the historical development of what God is doing with Israel and, in Christ Jesus, the world.

We find that again and again, we need to pay attention to **grammar**. Because this is the basic code of any written document. If we are to be faithful to what the writers have written we must be sure of what they meant and why they used the grammatical constructions they did. As various grammatical forms are used in the sentences we read, we have to begin to consider the **syntax** of the document which reflects the writer who wrote it.

We are involved in understanding what the writer meant, so that we can then think through what we are reading in the **version** that we are reading. Versions are important, because they are the text we are reading in our native language. Sometimes then, we must look back to the language from which the version was made - to the common Greek of the New Testament era.

8. Practice the **simple check-list for reading** any historical document contextually. Satisfy yourself that you have a clear answer to each of these questions:

[a] **Who?** Do I understand all the persons mentioned in this text. Who they are, and where do they fit: both internally within the story line, and externally in other contemporary historical sources I could consult. Where are they mentioned else where in the body of information I am presented with?

[b] **What?** Am I clear about what is being reported as to what is happening here? Have I picked up on the exchanges that are taking place? Are there nuances here that I am missing?

[c] **Where?** Do I know where every place that is mentioned is, relative to the other places mentioned? Am I fluent with the terrain enough to understand the issues of movement that is reported to be taking place here? Have I got a good mental picture of the described situations? Search out maps and outlines of geography, the journeys and the routes taken.

[d] **When?** Have I got the sequences clear? What happened before what? Can I see what are results or what are causes?

[e] **Why?** What are the reasons that I am seeing in this writing before me as to why people act or speak? Can I grasp the motives that underlie what people are doing and saying? Do I understand what the author of the document I am reading intends me to understand? Are his motives transparent to me?

Can I distinguish the events that make up the report of my author from his interpretation of the report that he is presenting?

9. Our **Tool-box** – collections of scholarly information.

Introduce here the main reference works which we have. Atlases, Dictionaries: Hastings, Interpreters, lexicons, word dictionaries and usage dictionaries.

The internet needs to be carefully used as its often a statement of bias without protecting you through giving the sources and verifications for what is said.

10. Reading a text and reading an author. Use that material prepared.

### 11. **Synoptic observations about the works of Matthew, Mark and Luke.**

Reading three authors at once, who are using the same oral tradition and who are presenting the Lord in his words and works. The introduction to the synoptic problem – what it is and how it affects the reading of the texts we have. We introduce this question here but take it up later.

To arrange the narrative in chronological order has value, it gives us the historical ‘pegs’ so as to grasp the story line. It also shows us what each Gospel has in common with the others and underscores what they all consider essential. This leads to theological highlights that we must not miss. However, it is important that in making the Reading Guide we have blurred the distinctive contributions of each author. We address that lack as we go along.

### 12. **The New Testament use of the Old Testament:**

The apostolic preaching and teaching, as its recorded for us in the NT tells us of the apostle’s approach to the Old Testament.

[a] They first saw how Christ had brought the OT to its fulfilment through His life and work. They understood that this was that to which the Old Testament was always looking forward. This was its grand Christological application and meaning; they read the Old Testament christologically – seeing its meaning in the light of the Christ who had now come to them.

[b] Having found that God had dealt with all men and women, and now themselves in Christ, they knew that they had received the life of the resurrected Christ by the Holy Spirit. In this way a powerful experience was theirs, their life was united with Christ.

[c] Out of this union they were constantly experiencing the communion of life with Christ and so with one another.

[d] So, when they saw that Christ had fulfilled the Old Testament material, and in particular, the way of His own pattern of doing so, they often applied that way of life as something they could expect would be entering their own experience. So they exhorted one another to live this way.

[e] By the use of the OT we often see the underlying themes [motifs] of the author being displayed; and therefore, we are getting an underlying basis of how he understands the Gospel to be ‘good news’.

### 13. **Citations and Allusions**

In trying to understand the use that the NT makes of the OT in any given setting we distinguish between citations and allusions. Matthew is very often making clear citations and introduces them with a formula; whereas Revelation and Colossians avoid direct quotation yet pack a lot of OT allusions into the texts.

#### 1. **Citations.**

The Masoretes were medieval Jewish scholars who made an extensive textual analysis of the Hebrew Bible and in particular the Tiberian pointing system, a written way of expressing the vowel sounds in Hebrew.

The textual tradition passed down from these scholars is called the **Masoretic Text [MT for short]**. There was a medieval recension of the Hebrew text attributed to the ben Asher family. This family was responsible for producing Codex Cairensis, the Aleppo Codex and the Codex Leningradensis. These codices are the underlying text of the MT.

The Jews of the dispersion [diaspora], located all over the Mediterranean, lost their fluency in Hebrew. The Greek translation of the Bible, made in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC, was used by these folks and became their canonical text in place of the Hebrew Bible. The **Septuagint** [LXX for short] as it was called, due to a legend that 70 scholars translated it over a short time, became the Bible of the early church as well – for they were Greek speaking people.

Whenever we have a citation in the New Testament, we need to be asking:  
**[a] What is cited, the Masoretic text of the Hebrew [MT] or the Septuagint Greek [LXX] of the Old Testament?** Often the NT writer makes a selection from MT or the LXX according to how it supports or advances his argument.

**[b] Is the OT text changed or manipulated in some way?** Often such changes, or substitutions, that are made in the quoted text of the OT declare the mind of the NT writer as to how he sees what is happening in his report is somehow related to, or fulfils, what is written in the OT.

## 2. Allusions.

Does the NT writer simply allude to an OT theme, event, or prophecy?  
In this way, without going into the detail of particularly how a quotation is used, an allusion sets the scene, or brings to mind a flow of thought which is assumed as known to the readers of the NT. Such usage of allusions is often multilayered as brought forward by the author.

Concerning these Citations and allusions:

[1] use your **cross reference system** in the English Version you are using. This is the place to start, but beware of study Bibles; distinguish when they are not always simply referring you to citation or allusion, but to a presentation of a theology. There is nothing wrong with that, but they are two different uses.

It is vital to have read the Preface to the English Version that you are using. This is where the producers of that version tell you information about the Greek text back of their translation, whether they are presenting a fresh translation or a revision of a past English version. They also tell you why they made this current version.

[2] recognise that there is a reference system which is **one step further back** than that – it is where the Greek text, its phrases, citations, allusions and parallels are available as well. We see how to get at that material.

In reading the NT, we have to ask about these citations and allusions:

**[a] How used in the NT?** As we read the Gospels, and the rest of the New Testament, we shall often see that the NT writer directly cites a portion of the OT scripture. These direct quotations are made in the course of what the NT writer is currently saying or arguing. So, the first question about these citations is how are they used in the New Testament passage in which they are quoted?

**[b] How are they used in the OT** from which they come? Do they come from a particular passage only; or are they a theme [motif] which is re-worked by another part of the OT – for example, the way the Exodus theme is filtered through Isaiah - before it is cited or alluded to by the NT Writer.

**[c] How is the OT quotation or source understood by the contemporary Judaism of the time?** This is important because

[i] sometimes the NT trajectory of ideas mirrors the contemporary Judaism of the time.

[ii] Often the Jewish authorities are divided as to how they understand an OT matter or theme.

[iii] Sometimes the NT writers are quite dependent on the Judaism of the day.

## **TIW1 Part B:**

Presents the large themes, the theology and some special studies.

1. Jesus is the Gospel – and his pre-existent life as the Word of God, and the Incarnation prepare us for a series of words and works that He will do, all of which are the working of our salvation out for us – in our place [Substitute] and in our stead [Representative].
2. The active and passive work of the Saviour. Its division in the synoptic Gospels.

### Session 1 – Rdgs 1-21

- Introduction
- Gospels are post-resurrection writings
- The 'gospel' is Jesus: central to the Gospels
- Review of the whole before we begin
- The main large moves/themes of our opening section for this week's readings
- The Birth [including presentation and circumcision] – prophetic voices]
- The Cousin – the preparation of Israel for the coming of Jesus
- The Baptism – the decisive step
- The Temptation.