

Thursday, April 16th, 2009 | Author: Skip Moen

One of the biggest problems in Christian practice is the lack of a proper understanding of Biblical exegesis. More theological mistakes occur due to a lack of proper exegesis than any other methodological errors. Why? Because a great number of believers treat the Bible as though it has no cultural bias and was written in its entirety last month. Neither of these assumptions are true. Just like any other document, the Bible comes to us set in a cultural context (in fact, in several cultural contexts) and it is the progressive revelation of God over the course of thousands of years. These facts must become part of any attempt to interpret the text.

Imagine trying to understand the meaning of The Iliad without any reference to Greek history, mythology or culture. Imagine using The Iliad as if it were written last week, applying its declarations to today's issues without any attempt to understand what the original audience perceived. That would be equivalent to how most Christians treat the Bible. We have this tendency to pull a verse from some book, make a direct application to our lives and act as though God's Word was written for us and no one else.

Since this is such a big problem, it might be helpful to outline the proper method of exegesis. Here are some of the steps that need to be taken.

1. Place the text in its historical context. Psalms wasn't written for contemporary American society. It was written 3000 years ago in a very different world. Place the text in the historical events when the writing was produced. When Paul wrote to Timothy, certain events were happening in the Roman empire that contributed to the issues Paul addresses. Unless we know the historical context, we can't understand what he has to say.
2. Recognize that revelation is progressive. Galatians was not written after John. Therefore, concepts found in John cannot be used to interpret Paul's statements in Galatians. Paul wrote Romans after he wrote 1 Thessalonians (in spite of the incorrect chronological order of the books in the New Testament). Therefore, what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians cannot be interpreted as if he already said everything

that is found in Romans. The same principle holds for the Old Testament (which is also not in chronological order). This is perhaps the biggest exegetical mistake we make. We treat the Bible as though it was all written at the same time. We forget that God revealed His plan over a long period and that what was happening in the historical sequence has a direct bearing on what the text says.

3. Understand the language of the people who first heard the message. Moses wrote the Pentateuch, even though the story reaches back to the beginning. That means that the language, and the meanings of the words Moses uses, are set in the culture of Israel after the exodus from Egypt. What the words mean to that audience is what the words mean. We are not allowed to redefine the words from another culture, time or place.

4. Relate the text to the culture of its origin. When Paul writes the letter to the believers in Corinth, there is a specific culture woven into the letter. Paul did not write for First Baptist of Middletown, New Jersey. He wrote to specific people in a specific place at a specific time about specific issues that they had. Unless we know the who, where, when and what of his audience, we will not understand his meaning.

5. Pay attention to the literary style and type. Poetry is not prose. Words have a lot more flexibility in poetry. Narrative is not the same as letter writing. Apocalyptic literature has a certain pattern and style all its own. Proper exegesis recognizes these differences and treats the subject accordingly. Not everything David says in the psalms has the same theological weight as Moses' declarations in Deuteronomy.

6. Apply principles, not propositions. Since every statement in the Bible comes with a cultural bias, any contemporary application must first discover the principle involved, not necessarily the specific words written to the first audience. Head covering involves a particular cultural problem. The principle might be applicable today but it does not automatically follow that the same cultural issues are in play today.

7. Know the language of the text. No one can be a theologian unless he is first a grammarian. Exegesis starts with Hebrew and Greek, not English. There is no

substitute for proper linguistic analysis. That means that if you want to know what's happening in Matthew, you will have to find a way to get at the Hebrew expressions that have been translated into Greek. Of course, you will also have to know how to handle the Greek. This requires a lot of work. Exegesis is a translation process, moving from the original language to contemporary explanation. There is simply no way around this.

8. Listen to the Spirit. In the end, exegesis is not simply technical expertise with language, culture and history. It is about hearing what God is saying. Actually, I hate to even include this step, as important as it is, because some people jump right here and ignore all the rest. These are the ones who proclaim that they have "a word from the Lord" on such-and-such a verse. Avoid them like the plague. Exegesis does not arrive by direct messenger from God (unless you are Hosea or Isaiah). Exegesis takes long, hard work. You might have a flash of insight, but you can't get the meaning of a text by simply "hearing" what the Lord told me about this.

Well, this will get us started. The reason understanding the Bible is so much fun is that it takes you into another world - AND you get to see what God has been doing all along. It is a goldmine. There are incredible treasures here. But you have to DIG!

As Greek As It Gets

Sunday, September 06th, 2009 | Author: Skip Moen

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

Handling Accurately - Some days I just want to throw up my hands in frustration. Here's a perfectly good Hebrew instruction, but when it gets translated, it takes on a completely different life. Suddenly it's changed to something about accuracy instead of intricacy. Oh, orthotomeo is a Greek verb that means "to handle correctly or skillfully," but the King James captures the Hebrew idiom much better - rightly

dividing. What's the difference between "rightly dividing" and "handling accurately?" Let's think about it.

What comes to mind when you think about accuracy? If you're a well-trained Greek thinker, accuracy will lead to concepts like correct, exact, error-free and precise. The processes of accuracy include meticulous care, conscientiousness, attention to detail and work without errors. In other words, one right way, one correct answer, one perfect interpretation. The Greek-trained mind wants the Truth (with a capital T) and that means no mistakes, no debate and no "opinions." But is this what Paul has in mind? Does Paul instruct Timothy to get to the one right answer through exhaustive exegetical methods? I doubt it.

Sha'ul (Paul) is a Hebrew thinker. That means he employs the seven principles of Hebrew-rabbinic interpretation. To "rightly divide" is to understand the intricacies of the text at all of its different levels. And some of those levels are filled with opinion, debate and tension. That's part of what it means to "divide" the text. I have to be able to cut it apart in ways that help me see everything that's there. I simply cannot come up with one right answer. That's impossible. God's Word is far more complex, far deeper and far too mysterious to allow me to discover one answer. Only Greeks want everything neatly tied down. The Hebrew people are too busy reveling in the magnificence of God to worry about tying everything down. They have a much better appreciation for human finitude.

OK, so Sha'ul wasn't Greek. So what? Well, it might help if we understood the seven principles of rabbinic interpretation that he used before we start plowing through the words he wrote. After all, if we really want to understand Paul, we need to read him as Sha'ul, the Jewish theologian.

So, what are the seven principles? They are nothing like the kind of principles that you will find in most seminary classes on proper exegesis. Those classes are almost universally based on a Greek epistemology (how we know things). Hebrew doesn't work that way. Here are the seven rabbinic principles:

1. Kal va-chomer (simple and complex, literally “light and heavy”) – reasoning from something known to something less known, from something obvious to something less obvious. This principle often employs the phrase “how much more.” You can see this principle at work in Yeshua’s statements about a father who gives to his son (Matthew 7:9-11) If an earthly father knows how to give good gifts, how much more will your heavenly Father know what to give.

2. Gezerah shavah (“equally cut”) – reasoning from an analogy of inference from one verse to another. A similarity in one passage is connected to the similarity in another passage.

3. Binyan av mikatuv echad (“building a teaching principle based on a verse”) – reasoning from a verse to a main proposition. In other words, finding a larger principle on the basis of a verse.

4. Binyan av mishnaic ketuvim (“building a teaching principle based on two verses”) – reasoning from two verses to a larger principle.

5. Kelal uferat-perat vekelal (“general and specific-specific and general”) – teaching from a general principle to a specific application, or from a specific application to a general principle.

6. Keyotza bo bamakom acher (“as comes from it in another place”) – teaching based on what is similar in another passage.

7. Devar halamed meinyano (“a word that is learned from its own issue”) – something that is learned from its own subject.

When Sha’ul instructed Timothy to “rightly divide”, what do you think he had in mind? Was it Greek logic, contextual historical-tradition analysis, form or source criticism? Hardly! Sha’ul wanted Timothy, a Greek proselyte, to learn the Hebrew way of thinking, to know how to use the seven principles through the four levels of Scripture (the PaRDeS – Pashat (simple), Remez (hint), D’rash (search) and Sod (hidden)).

What has happened to us? We are so Greek that we think Scriptural interpretation is about clinical exegesis.

Boy, do we have a lot to learn.

Now you have a little hint (remez), so let's look at these during the next week.

Principle #1

Monday, September 07th, 2009 | Author: Skip Moen

If they call the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more those of His household. Matthew 10:25

How Much More – The first principle of rabbinic interpretation is common in Yeshua's teaching. This is but one example from Matthew. That principle, kal va-chomer (simple and complex, literally "light and heavy") is reasoning from something known to something less known, from something obvious to something less obvious. So, Yeshua observes that if it is appropriate to call the Master of the house of hasatan by the demonic name, how much more obvious is it to call the servants in his house by the same name. In other words, those who serve the devil are of the same character as the devil. And those who serve God will be of the same character as God. In this interchange with His detractors, Yeshua employs a rabbinic principle to demonstrate the fallacy in their argument that He is from the devil. How can that be possible when He does good works? These detractors all knew the principle. Yeshua merely used it against them.

But if we don't understand this principle was commonly accepted exegetical practice, we will not see how sharply Yeshua employs it. We will miss the entirely Jewish character of His debate. We will go right on thinking Yeshua is really "Jesus", the founder of Christianity. Moreover, we won't see the principle in action in Paul, Peter or John. They used rabbinic methods too. If we are going to really think like they

thought, if we really want to understand what they said, then we will have to change the way we “rightly divide” Scripture.

Most Christians have some inkling of proper exegetical processes. That is to say, they have learned (usually by osmosis) what it means to give a sermon, prepare a Bible study or a devotional or teach a Sunday school lesson. They have aids and books and commentaries. All of these are very helpful. I use many similar resources (as you can probably tell). But I also know the Hebrew approach to Scripture is very, very different than the typical, Greek-based exegetical exercises we go through. We who are Greek-trained are looking for answers. I suspect most Hebrew thinkers are really looking for questions. God has the answers, but most of us don't really understand the questions. My guess is that as we dig deeper into rabbinic thought we will discover deeper questions. Sometimes really knowing life is nothing more than knowing what the question is. Of course, discovering the question is often much more difficult than coming up with an answer.

Can I ask you to take a deep breath and allow yourself the luxury of not knowing the answer? Would you be just as secure, just as joyful, just as comforted in the arms of the Lord if you only knew the questions? This is not a facetious inquiry. So much of our distress and anxiety comes from the constant pursuit of answers.

Principle No. 1 – “how much more.” If your heavenly Father knows how to care for the birds of the air, how much more will He know how to care for you? It's a question, isn't it?

Principle #2

Tuesday, September 08th, 2009 | Author: Skip Moen

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself. Hebrews 6:13

By Himself – The second principle of rabbinic interpretation is a bit complicated, but once you understand it, you will see why many biblical passages seem to “wander” from one idea to the next. The principle of Gezerah Shavah (“equal category”) is based on the idea that similar words in different passages are connected in some way. Behind this principle is the thought that every word has been chosen by God so there are no accidental constructions. So, if God chose to use ‘ezer in Genesis 2, there must be some connection to the use of the same word in other passages of Scripture. After all, all the words come from God.

Let’s see how this principle is applied in the letter to the Hebrews. (You can find the entire section here). <http://www.abu.nb.ca/courses/NTIntro/OTinNT.htm>

“In Heb 6:13-14, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews explains that, in his promising to Abraham, God swore by himself, because there was none greater by whom to swear. In fact, God made a three-fold promise to Abraham after his successful testing, when he showed himself willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. The author cites only one of these three promises: “I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you” (Gen 22:17) (6:14). He explains in Heb 6:16 that only God swears by himself, unlike human beings, who swear by something or someone greater than themselves. The author’s interest in the fact of God’s oath to Abraham stems from his interest in Ps 110:4, which he interprets messianically, of Christ, in Heb 5:5-10 in tandem with Ps 2:7: “Yahweh has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’” Implicitly, the author is appealing to the exegetical principle known to the early rabbis as gezerah shavah (“an equal category”). What is common to both passages is God’s swearing of an oath: “By myself I have sworn (ômasa)” (Gen 22:16) and “Yahweh has sworn (ômesen) and will not change his mind” (Ps 110:4). The author believes that what he can determine about God’s oath-taking from Gen 22:16-17 may be transferred to Ps 110:4 and used to interpret Yahweh’s oath to the son that he is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek in Ps 110:4. In particular, he holds that in Ps 110:4, even though this passage does not say so explicitly, Yahweh must have sworn by himself, as he did when he swore to Abraham, because there is no one greater by whom God could swear. Since God swore by himself it follows that the oath made to Christ in Ps

110:4 is certain. Thus, in Heb 6:16-17, the author's point is that the character of God's promise to the readers is certain insofar as Yahweh swore by himself when he swore that Christ would be a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Some of the most difficult arguments to follow in Hebrew thinking involve this principle. They are difficult to follow because this is not the way Greeks think. Our Greek view of biblical interpretation usually begins with context. We believe if one passage does not share the same contextual environment as another passage, the two are not related. We think there is no necessary connection between a verse in the Tanakh about the blessing that comes with forgiveness and righteousness imputed to Abraham. But this is exactly the connection Paul makes in Romans 4:6-8. Paul uses a concept in Psalm 32 to justify his interpretation of Genesis 15. The key words ("take into account") are connected with Gezerah Shavah. As Greek thinkers, we might see this as unfounded and forced, but for a Hebrew rabbi, it was absolutely brilliant.

What lesson do we learn? Reading Scripture requires understanding the mind of the author, not applying criteria we assume to be the only way to interpret the text. Most theological argument over interpretation begins by not appreciating the different thought patterns of the authors. Loosen up. Reconsider. Look again. Maybe the "one right answer" method just isn't part of the plan.

Principle #3

Wednesday, September 09th, 2009 | Author: Skip Moen

by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, [which is] the Law of commandments [contained] in ordinances, that in Himself he might make the two into one new man, [thus] establishing peace. Ephesians 2:15

Two Into One – There are a host of issues with this verse, none of which are easily resolved without understanding principle #3 - binyan av mikatuv echad ("building a teaching principle based on a verse"). You will notice all of the words in brackets in the

NASB translation. Most English translations will have to add words to try to make sense of Sha'ul's interpretation because there is a prior commitment to replacement theology (the idea that grace replaces the Torah) which makes it necessary to read this verse in a way that is not Jewish. But these translations ignore Sha'ul's rabbinic exegesis. In this verse, Sha'ul is arguing from a particular verse to a larger principle. He is building on one thought in order to draw a greater conclusion. In other words, he says that same thing twice, once in particular and the second time in general.

Let's see how he does this. First Sha'ul says Yeshua broke down the wall that separated us from peace with God (v. 14). How did He do that? He did it by bearing the enmity between God and Man in His own flesh. Now here's the telling point. What was the enmity? Was it the Law (as the NASB translation suggests), or was it something else? Notice the introduction of the bracketed phrase [which is] actually implies that the enmity is the Torah. But this ignores the third principle. The principle suggests that Sha'ul is really repeating one idea with a larger, more general idea. So, abolishing the enmity is the same as making the two into one. Sha'ul tells us Yeshua removed the thing that separated us from God and restored peace. What separates us from God? It simply cannot be the Law. Sha'ul himself tells us the Law is good and holy. God gives the Law in order that men might know His will for living. No; what separates us from God is our disobedience of the Law. Yeshua takes the results of this disobedience on Himself in order that the two opposing parties might be at peace. The new man is once again restored to a place where he can find peace with the Law of God because now he is able to obey it. Sha'ul argues from the single case of Yeshua taking on the punishment due sinners to the general case that we are now at peace with God. This verse has nothing at all to do with removing the Law from a believer's life. It is about the result of sin and the relief of forgiveness found in the blood of the Lamb.

Many Christians misunderstand this verse simply because they fail to apply rabbinic interpretative principles. They treat the rabbi Sha'ul as if he were a Greek named Paul. Applying Greek exegetical categories leads us to terrible dilemmas: 1) the Law is good but somehow also bad, 2) the Law was for Jews but not for Christians, and 3) the Law was replaced by grace and now we are left with "spiritual" guidance based on our own views about love. Worst of all, we just can't make any sense of Yeshua's

practice of Torah. We need new eyes, my friends. And God will give them to us – if we look.

Principle #4

Thursday, September 10th, 2009 | Author: Skip Moen

Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.
Matthew 26:64

Two Into One - Binyan av mishnaic ketuvim (“building a teaching principle based on two verses”) is reasoning from two verses to a larger principle. It happens all the time in the New Testament. In this verse, Yeshua takes part of a verse in Psalm 110:1 and inserts it into a verse from Daniel 7:13. Here are the two verses:

“The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’” Psalm 110:1

“I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, one like a Son of Man was coming. And He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.” Daniel 7:13

Notice the changes Yeshua makes. He alters the verse in the Psalms so that it reads “sitting at my right hand.” Then He combines it with Daniel’s vision so there is no doubt His application of Psalm 110 to Himself implies He is the Son of Man who is presented victoriously to the Ancient of Days. But the implication goes further. Yeshua suggests that He is the one “coming on the clouds,” a role ascribed to God alone. In this use of principle #4, Yeshua combines two verses to reach a larger conclusion. What is that conclusion? He is God!

Read the story again. Did you notice no one shouted, “That’s terrible exegesis!”? No one questioned His scholarship. They all knew exactly what He was doing, and it was proper procedure. It wasn’t the hermeneutics that made them furious. It was the conclusion.

Yeshua was a rabbi too. If we read His words from the perspective of a rabbi, we see more clearly how He handles Scripture, how He interprets the Word and what techniques He employs to draw out its meaning. Perhaps we need a course in rabbinic thought before we run around proclaiming the teachings of Jesus. Our approach is like using the dialogue from *West Side Story* as if it were the words of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

What do we learn today? We learn to be careful. Maybe all that Yeshua says isn’t quite as obvious as the translations make it seem. Maybe we need to pay a lot more attention to the culture before we start drawing conclusions about contemporary applications. Maybe there’s room for dialogue rather than dogma.

Principle #5

Friday, September 11th, 2009 | Author: Skip Moen

For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, **YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF**. Galatians 5:14

One Word – From the general to the specific. The principle of *Kelal uferat-perat vekelal* teaches from a general principle to a specific application, or from a specific application to a general principle. Rabbi Sha’ul uses it all the time; no more so than in this section in the letter to the Galatians. First, he quotes the general principle: Love your neighbor. Then he draws out specific implications of this general principle in negative (works of the flesh) and positive (fruit of the Spirit) examples.

This is a rabbinic principle we can get our arms around. Almost every sermon you hear will use some application of this rabbinic principle. Pastors love to start with a biblical

passage, explain its general sense and then apply it to dozens of real-life examples. In fact, the “application” sermon has become a staple of pulpit oratory. You hardly expect to go to church without hearing something like this.

But often familiarity breeds inattention. We know the application model, so we stop thinking about the general principle behind the specifics. We limit ourselves to the specific applications, thinking we have exhausted the general principle. How does this show up in our lives? Well, there’s a general principle about ownership: God owns everything. We are simply leaseholders. But we often apply the general principle to our money, thinking His ownership is only about our financial assets. So, we tithe and walk away; believing we have fulfilled the terms of the lease because we have taken care of the financial application. You have undoubtedly already filled in the rest of the lesson. The general principle of ownership is about everything, not just finances. God owns your life, your body and even your time. What you do with all those things is also part of the lease agreement. But it’s so easy to forget the general principle by concentrating only on the specific applications, isn’t it?

One more example might help. God loves His creation. That’s the general principle. This general principle implies that God loves me. But in this application is another general principle. God loves me no matter what I do or who I am, where I go or how I feel. God just loves me. The specific applications of this general principle are very, very important. We often espouse the general principle and then turn right around and act as though the principle doesn’t apply when I am sinful, angry, discouraged, running away from my troubles or any number of other “less than spiritual” activities. Wrong! The general principle still applies. We just have to stop ignoring its full implications. Open the Bible to your favorite Psalm. I’ll bet you will very quickly read a general principle followed by specific applications. David was a rabbi too. Now, enjoy # 5, kelal uferat-perat vekelal.

Principle #6

Saturday, September 12th, 2009 | Author: Skip Moen

For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 1 Corinthians 9:9

Is He? – Does God care about oxen? Of course He does! Doesn't the general principle (remember #5) apply here? God loves His creation, therefore He cares about oxen. So, why does Sha'ul ask the question? Because Sha'ul is about to apply the sixth principle of rabbinic interpretation; keyotza bo bamakom acher ("as comes from it in another place"), that is, a teaching based on what is similar in another passage. This is exegetical analogy. It isn't oxen Sha'ul wants us to notice. What he wants us to notice is that just as God cares about oxen, so He also cares about those who labor on behalf of others. Oxen are fed in their labor. So should the servants of the Lord be fed and cared for by those whom they serve. Sha'ul draws an analogy based on the similarity of circumstance, that is, reward for laboring.

Frankly, a verse about feeding oxen has nothing to do with paying ministers. The context isn't the same. The historical period isn't the same. The language isn't the same (unless your pastor is like a bull). One verse doesn't seem to be connected to another verse, except by this process of rabbinic analogy. Then it makes sense. But if you were asked to find biblical support for rewarding pastors, I'll bet you would never have thought of a verse about oxen - unless you were a brilliant rabbi like Sha'ul.

Sometimes this principle is used in even more mysterious ways. Rabbinic thought connected many apparently unrelated verses because they shared the same letters or words. The actual context or meaning of the individual verses had little to do with the rabbinic insight. Consider this example:

Lamentations 3:41 says, "Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens." Deuteronomy 10:13 tells us "to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart." From these two verses, the rabbis connect the word "heart" and

conclude that serving God with all your heart means praying. Do you see the principle at work here? Taken independently, you might never conclude that serving the Lord was the work of prayer, but when principle #6 is employed, the two verses share something in common (the word *lev*) and that means they must somehow be related.

As Greek thinkers, we resist this principle. We want a logical connection. Otherwise, we complain the verse is taken “out of context.” But of course it’s taken out of context. Context doesn’t matter here. It is the analogy or the similarity that matters. Maybe we need to put our nice, neat, logical criteria on the shelf for awhile and listen to the sages. Maybe we would learn something important.

Principle #7

Sunday, September 13th, 2009 | Author: Skip Moen

“and if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” Genesis 4:7

At The Door – “The exact moment when the human being becomes endowed with the evil impulse was discussed by Antoninus and R. Judah the Prince, and the decision was as stated above, viz., the urge comes into existence at the time of birth. ‘Antoninus asked R. Judah, “From what time does the evil impulse exercise its power in the human being – from the time of the embryo’s formation or its emergence from the body?” He answered, “From the time of its formation.” The other retorted, “In that case it ought to kick about in the womb and come out of its own accord! Surely it is from the time of its emergence!” R. Judah said, “Antoninus has taught me something which is corroborated by a Scriptural text, viz., ‘Sin coucheth at the door’ (Gen. iv. 7) – i.e. the opening of the mother’s body”

This little discussion illustrates principle #7, *devar halamed meinyano* (“a word that is learned from its own issue”). Something is learned from its own subject. Here the subject is the *yetzer ha’ra*. Its connection to Genesis 4:7 allowed Rabbi Judah to see

that the human being comes under the power of the evil inclination at birth, not at conception.

Of course, modern, Greek-thinking, scientific Man might object to this entire argument as mythological nonsense. There is nothing “spiritual” going on in the birth of a child. It is all simply a matter of anatomy and reproduction. What’s the difference between the birth of a rabbit and the birth of a human being? Not much, really. But the objections of the Greek-thinking modern Man won’t have much effect on the rabbi. He doesn’t share the mechanistic worldview. His world is filled with mystery, awe, reverence and discovering principles from within the very words God uses.

Remember PaRDeS, the four levels of Scriptural meaning. This principle seems most likely to lead us to Sod, the level of mystery. The twists and turns of Hebrew mystical thought are often tied to intricacies within the words themselves. For Greek thinkers, it is a strange – and sometimes wonderful – world, and it takes a great deal of getting used to.

We have reached the end of the rabbinic principles of Scriptural interpretation. Have we learned anything really important? I hope we have learned at least this much. The Bible is not quite the so-familiar territory we thought it was. We will have to be much more careful and patient as we continue to explore the Book of all books. God is at work here. May His name be blessed.

Beginning Again

by Skip Moen, D. Phil. 01/01/2012

As we start a new Roman calendar year of exploration, it might be useful to give a short summary of what we have learned so far. A few critical points emerge:

1. Any approach to understanding the writings of the New Testament must recognize the thorough saturation of the Tanakh and first century Jewish beliefs in the background of the authors.
2. With the death of the last of the prophets, Judaism encountered and embraced in varying degrees the powerful influence of the Hellenistic world. By the first century, some schools of rabbinic Judaism and some areas of Jewish life were already exhibiting Hellenistic ideas and patterns in contrast with the ancient ways of Israel. This influence is part of the background for understanding the text of the New Testament.
3. Yeshua was a product of the conflicting cultures of ancient Hebrew thought and the first century Jewish involvement with and reaction to rabbinic and Hellenistic thinking.
4. Yeshua was a reformer, calling the people of Israel to return to Torah obedience as understood by a conservative view of the Tanakh. This aligned Him with some schools of the Pharisees but put Him in direct conflict with other Jewish schools and thinkers.
5. The Torah and its authority over all life is the fundamental belief of ancient Israel and is the foundation of Yeshua's teaching. The idea that Yeshua nullified the Torah or rendered it no longer applicable to followers of YHWH is the unsupportable claim of Replacement Theology. Torah is God's expectation for the code of conduct of His followers.
6. A careful examination of the life of Yeshua and the disciples including Paul demonstrates that Torah observance was a vital part of the early believing Messianic

community and remained so until the 4th Century. The Roman Church and its replacement theology began a systematic separation of Christianity from its original Hebrew origins in the 2nd Century, eventually creating the existing chasm between Judaism and Christianity by the end of the 4th Century.

7. Understanding the history of Jewish and Christian thinking and interaction between 400BC and 500AD is the most important single factor in determining the political, social and religious influences that led to today's theological divide between Christians and Jews.

8. Just as Christianity is dominated by a significant number of doctrinal variations and denominations, so Judaism between 400BC and 400AD is a story of competing theological positions. There was no single Judaism during the time of Yeshua and the early Messianic community.

9. Exegesis of the New Testament must account for these various "Judaisms" since the arguments and theological statements in the New Testament are often directly connected with one or more of the schools of Jewish thought prevalent in the first century. No New Testament text can be understood in its own *sitz im laben* without this historical perspective.

10. The Hebrew language spoken in the first century by the authors of the New Testament is the key to understanding the meanings of New Testament passages. Relying on the Greek text alone cannot produce a satisfying explanation of the thought of the authors since their cultural and linguistic bias is Hebraic.

11. No English translation of the Bible adequately expresses the thought patterns of the authors of either the Tanakh or the New Testament. In order to satisfactorily understand what these men meant, we must examine with as much rigor as possible the original languages, both Greek and Hebrew, paying attention to the transition in meaning between these two languages, recognizing that often the fundamental differences in the thought patterns between these two languages will require us to reformulate the Greek text from an Hebraic perspective. This transitional effort is true of the authors of the New Testament as well since the evidence suggests that

they modified their Greek constructions in order to capture as best they could the underlying Hebrew worldview.

Given the above points, our objective in the coming year will be to examine even more verses and words with a careful methodology. That means things won't happen quickly. Most of the time we will discover how little we actually know or thought we knew, but this is real progress since it will help us draw closer to the meaning of the text. Doctrinal issues will most likely fade in relevance as they are overshadowed by linguistic and historical issues. This is not an enterprise that one man or woman can hope to accomplish. It will require debate and interaction – in other words, the learning process of the Hebrew worldview. Determining the questions will most likely be a more important task than arriving at answers. But as long as the Lord tarries, we will have time.

Let us therefore be diligent in our search, seeking to know Him as He was known by those who shared His world.

After almost 4000 word studies, I find that I know even less now than I thought I knew when I began all those years ago. In fact, I feel completely inadequate for this task, often wondering how it is possible to continue with so much ignorance. **That's when I need to be reminded that the purpose of these studies is not information. The purpose is to draw closer to the God we desire to serve.** Fortunately, He is not asking us to "know it all" before we can worship and serve Him. Each step forward, even the faltering ones, are a joy to Him. **This is truly a life-time journey. So, in spite of our need to correct what we thought we knew, to press on into matters we never knew and to search diligently for clues to the Kingdom, we also know that today's simple obedience concerning the things we hear is sufficient for this hour.**