

## Lesson Two — How to Understand the Bible

*Day One — First Things First*

*Day Two — The Old and New Testaments*

*Day Three — The Central Person of Scripture*

*Days Four and Five — The Law of First Mention*

Last week we began to lay a foundation which will continue to be built upon as we make our way through this Biblical Survey. As you study, please note how many Scripture passages are used. Take a moment to peruse the pages of this workbook, noticing how many bold sections there are. As you have seen, these sections are the Scripture passages used for observation and study.

God's Word is the focus to which our attention is called. Man's word is of no moment when set alongside God's Word. One has life, the other doesn't! The *best* commentary on Scripture is Scripture! The best way to study Scripture is *to study Scripture*. (Does that even need to be stated?) Then the youngest babe can grow into a greater understanding of God's Word! Look carefully at what Isaiah says about how God gives His Word, and to whom He gives knowledge and understanding —

**Isaiah 28:9 Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. 10 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little... (KJV)**

Observe what the passage says. Notice *to whom* God will teach knowledge — to those weaned from milk (those who desire to progress to solid food). Also, notice *how* He will teach it — He will draw from passages of Scripture, a little from here and a little from there, until the whole picture is complete; a bit from this book and a bit from that book, making the overall picture more and more detailed. (Of course, the various passages drawn from various places must each be understood within the context from which they came, and that context from the larger context.) That's why a survey of the whole Bible is foundational to understanding its individual pieces. The better one understands how the whole is made up, the more apt one will be to understand the individual passages correctly, thus moving from milk to solid food, and then from solid food to strong meat.

Please continue to pray that the Lord will give you more and more understanding, and that His Holy Spirit will be active in your life as your Teacher.

## Day One — First Things First

Last week we had a small glimpse into the heart of Moses, and how he sought to know God better. Seeking God is the first step and is an important element in grasping and understanding Scripture. Another important element in understanding is knowing *how* God laid out Scripture, and then to compare Scripture with Scripture. (Again, Scripture is its own best commentary.)

God says of His Word —

### II Timothy 3

**16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**

How much of Scripture is described in this verse?

From this passage, describe what all of Scripture is good for.

What does the Word of God do for the man of God?

Go back and circle the word *profitable*. What do you think it means that something is *profitable*?

First, the basics must be covered. In order for something to be *profitable*, it must first have a *foundation* or a base upon which profit can accrue. Paul tells us in I Corinthians what the foundation is, and how a person is to build upon it. We went through this passage in last week's lecture, but let's look at it again.

### I Corinthians 3

**11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.**

What is the foundation that must be laid first (v.11)?

Then what is to be built upon that foundation?

What will become evident in *the day*?

In a very real sense in this passage, Paul tells us about profit and loss being built upon a previously laid foundation. What is profit and how is it accrued?

What is loss and how does it occur?

In the previous passage from II Timothy chapter three, Paul deals with the fact that Scripture is inspired by God. Inspired means *God-breathed*. *Breath* and *spirit* are translated from the same Greek word *pneuma*. In I Corinthians, Paul tells us that the Scriptures are spiritual thoughts put into spiritual words. Scriptures are *God-breathed* — *spiritual* thoughts, put into *spiritual* words (I Cor. 2:13).

From these passages it must be concluded that unless a person possesses a living spirit, he cannot understand Scripture, for the Scriptures are spiritually discerned!

All people are born spiritually dead (Eph. 2:5). In order for a person to be able to understand Scripture, that person must be *born again*, which is a spiritual birth, or a birth from above. This is brought about through faith in the death of Jesus Christ, with the Spirit of God breathing life into that individual who had heretofore been spiritually dead. This life is brought about through that individual exercising faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, thereby bringing about a *spiritual birth*. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit (John 3:6). And since Scriptures are *spiritual thoughts put into spiritual words*, only when a person has *spiritual life* breathed into him by the Holy Spirit (through faith in Jesus Christ) can he begin to understand spiritual thoughts, as they are put into spiritual words.

With spiritual life in place, where does one begin to grasp the large picture of Scripture? While many Christians begin their spiritual journey in God's Word in a place other than the beginning — Genesis — it is actually necessary to be continually going back to the beginning and drawing the big picture from there! This is what we will do in this study. Next week we will begin in Genesis chapter one, laying the foundation for all of Scripture. Then in succeeding weeks we will journey through the different portions of God's Word seeking to grasp the overall scope, ending in the Book of Revelation, all the while we will be building upon the foundation.

In order to come into a greater understanding of the Bible, there are some important keys of interpretation that one must have. One key is to understand the overall scope of Scripture — the big picture — if you will. One must study to see where the Scriptures *begin*, and why they begin there. Then study to see *where they end*, and *why they end there*. Then study to see *what are all the pieces between those two points*, and *how these pieces fit together* to make up one cohesive Body of Truth.

Again, it is important to know where God begins His revelation to man, and why He begins there. It is also important to know where He ends His revelation. We must strive to see *how God gave His Word*, for only then can we properly interpret it.

One helpful tool used in this process is a Biblical timeline. There should be a ledger-size timeline in the back of your workbook. (If for some reason it is missing from your book, you can draw one for yourself. It is quite easy. There is a small picture of the timeline on page 10 which you can use to copy your own. Simply draw it out on a large sheet [ledger size] of paper in a "landscape" format.) You can use this timeline throughout your study, filling in information as you come to it along the way. Then in the lecture of Lesson Seventeen we will fill in the details.

Today we will begin to fill in the basic points on the timeline. Notice the broken line with an arrow on the left side of the sheet. This broken line represents "Eternity Past." Mark that now.

Then on the right side of the sheet, there is another broken line and an arrow. This represents "Eternity Future." Mark that now.

The timeline is divided into sections by the use of vertical lines. The first vertical line on the left represents *the end of eternity past* and *the beginning of time*. (Time as opposed to eternity. The two are distinct from each other, and this distinction must be understood.) This point in time, represented by the first vertical line, would be found in Genesis 1:2b ff. Though eternity past is mentioned in Genesis 1:1, 2a, it is only mentioned briefly. Time, as we know it, begins in v. 2b. (More detail is given about eternity past in subsequent Scriptures. We will get more of the details about this in Lesson Four of our study.)

This first vertical line represents the six days in Genesis chapter one. However, for practical purposes, you will want to mark this line by writing “Adam” underneath it, for it is at this *time* that God created Adam.

The second vertical line represents the call of Abraham. Mark that line by writing the name “Abraham” underneath it. There is a two thousand year period between Adam and Abraham, so you may want to make note of that in the space between these two vertical lines.

Moving to the right along the timeline, you see the cross. Of course, this represents the first coming of Jesus Christ. Mark this as such. There is a two thousand year period of time between Abraham and Christ’s first coming. So mark the space accordingly.

During the lecture, I will explain the next break in the line, the empty space, and the next vertical line. So don’t mark anything there right now.

Now go to the last vertical line, just before the right arrow. This last vertical line represents *the end of time*, and *the beginning of eternity future*. At this point in the timeline, the present heavens and earth pass away and a new heavens and new earth come into existence. Mark that line with the words “present heaven and earth pass away; new heaven and earth come into existence.”

Now look at what you have. You can see the distinction between time and eternity. You can see that time is broken into certain segments, by major events in history. The thing to be grasped at this point in our study is that the Bible mostly deals with *time*, not eternity. While there is a little information given to us about eternity whether past or future, it is just that — *little* information! And it serves the student of Scripture well to make the distinction between time and eternity when studying any portion of Scripture, *especially when it comes to the area of prophecy*.

If you have any thoughts or questions at this point, you may want to write them below or on your Q. and A. sheet in the Appendix (pg. 287). Otherwise, we’ll see you tomorrow.

## Day Two — The Old and New Testaments

Yesterday we looked at the fact that there needs to be a distinction made between time and eternity. The need for this distinction will become more apparent as we continue studying. In fact, the need for any of these keys of interpretation will become more apparent as you move forward.

Along with making the distinction between time and eternity, it is also important to see how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament, allowing each to shed light on the other. God’s Word is given *progressively* and with purpose. It comprises one large Body of Truth, with every part fitting into the whole, and every part needing to be understood in light of the whole. And the revelation of the Word is progressive. With just a few keys for interpretation, one can begin in Genesis and work his way through the Bible progressively, and a lifetime of learning can ensue! In fact, a person could literally study for a lifetime, and never stop learning, since there is so much for one to learn!

As stated before, and will be stated again, every single verse has a context — the passage; and every passage has a context — the chapter; and every chapter has a context — the book; every book has a context — the Bible. Again, the Bible is one Body of Truth with an untold number of facets, the sum of which cannot possibly be fully learned and understood in a lifetime.

If a person begins in the New Testament and pays no attention to the Old, he would miss the main message and the significance of Scripture as a whole. For example, the first book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, begins with the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the names of whom appear in the Old Testament.

### **Matthew 1**

**1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. 2 To Abraham was born Isaac...**

Why would it be important for the names to appear like this? Again, it is not happenstance. The Holy Spirit is telling us something. These names are not there just for the historical value they bring to genealogy. The names of these men are fraught with significance and meaning, as they relate to Jesus Christ. And if a person doesn't study these men (and many others) within the context of the Old Testament, he stands to misunderstand God's intent, thereby standing to misinterpret the big picture of Scripture.

As we look at a few passages in today's lesson, we have a specific goal in mind. This week we are striving to understand the importance of seeing the New Testament in the light of the Old, and vice versa. So today's passages will serve as an example of this. Let's look at our example passages.

Preceding Christ's public appearance, a man named John came baptizing for the forgiveness of sin. John was the one spoken of by Isaiah the prophet saying that he, John, would prepare the way of the Lord. At some point, Jesus appeared on the scene to be baptized by John. Read about it.

### **Matthew 3**

**13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. 16 And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."**

One of the things to be noted here is what the voice from heaven said (v. 17). Write out the exact words.

Christians today seem to think little about these words, having heard them so frequently, and having not understood these words in light of the Old Testament. But because of the Old Testament implication of these words, this would have been startling to a Jew! These words point right back to a very specific text in the Old Testament where God sent a very specific message to King David through Nathan the prophet, concerning David's descendant and his kingdom. On the following page is a portion of what God said to David. (We'll study the extended passage in more detail in coming weeks.) God spoke to David, saying:

**II Samuel 7**

**12 “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me...”**

It is v. 14 that relates to what the *voice out of heaven* said on the day John baptized Jesus. How are the two statements related?

After hearing this prophecy, David went in before the Lord, and thanked Him for what He had promised him. David made this statement in the midst of his prayer of thanksgiving —

**II Samuel 7:19b ...for Thou hast spoken also of the house of Thy servant concerning the distant future.**

According to this statement, what did David understand concerning the timing of this prophecy?

With this information, don't you find it interesting to note that David's name is mentioned first in Christ's genealogy in the opening sentence of the whole New Testament? What do you think could be the implication here?

If you didn't know the background of the prophecy made to David in the Old Testament, then this statement made from heaven would have little meaning. What meaning does this Old Testament passage bring to the New Testament passage in Matthew 3:17?

All of this would have been/should have been of great interest to the Jew. They knew the context of the statement made from heaven. Through the prophet Nathan, God said that He (God) would be a Father to a descendant of David, and this Descendant would be God's Own Son; and this Descendant would sit on David's throne, which would be established forever. Any Jew hearing the voice from heaven that day would have understood what the implications were — the One spoken of by the voice which came out of heaven that day, is the Holy One of Israel, the Greater Son of David, the Expected One, the One to be the anointed King!

There was another time God spoke audibly from heaven. It was the day that Jesus took three of His disciples to a mountain and was transfigured before them into His kingdom and glory. The three disciples — Peter, James and John — heard a voice from heaven that day as well. The words were very similar to what had been heard the day Jesus was baptized.

**Matthew 17**

**5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”**

Here again, God calls Jesus His Son, referring back to what Nathan told David about his future descendant and throne. Have you noticed that Jesus being God's Son has something to do with His being King? (You can see it when comparing II Sam. 7 to Mt. 3:17; 17:5.) Sonship implies rulership. (Did you get that? **Sonship implies rulership!** Do you see the connection made here?) And in studying the Bible, that is a point that needs to be seen and understood. The Jews understood it because they knew the Old Testament Scriptures, and when we come to the New Testament, we must see and hear these things through Jewish eyes and ears if we are to understand what is being said and done. (This event later served as a proving point for Peter when he wrote his second epistle, dealing with prophecy concerning Christ's kingdom [II Pe. 1:17], giving us a classic example of Scripture interpreting Scripture, using both the Old and New Testaments.)

If there is a lack of understanding in relating the New with the Old Testament, then much is missed. But the Jews would not have missed it! In fact, this is the one specific reason that the Jews wanted to crucify Jesus. When Jesus stood before the chief priests and the Council just prior to His crucifixion, the high priest questioned Him, **"I adjure you by the Living God, that you tell us that you are the Christ, the Son of the God"** (Mt. 26:63, 64; cf. Mk. 14:61). From the eyes and ears of the onlookers, His answer served as His death sentence.

Also, if one studied *the context* of this statement about the Son of God in II Samuel chapter seven, and compared it to *the context* of Matthew 3:17; 17:5, along with *the context* of any other passage wherein the phrase "the Son of God" is used, one could learn very much about the phrase *the Son of God*, and the implications thereof. Understanding takes place by comparing Scripture with Scripture. And that is the way it must be done. That is the only way learning takes place.

Again, the purpose of our passages today is to give us one example (from innumerable examples) of how the New Testament relates to the Old. It might be put this way — the New Testament is *enfolded* in the Old, and the Old Testament is *unfolded* in the New. True enough!

As we close today, write out a brief summary of what you learned today. (These summaries will be reviewed on Day Five.)

See you tomorrow.

## Day Three — The Central Person of Scripture

The Bible tells a story. It has one main plot, with innumerable subplots, and each and every subplot plays into the overall plot. The story has several main characters: God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and His angels, God's arch enemy (Satan and his angels), and man. The setting is the earth and the heavens surrounding the earth. The story opens in conflict and ends in the resolution of that very same conflict. But the overall main Character in the overall story is God's Son, Jesus Christ. Everything has to do with Him. Everything!

All of that which is written in God's Word is written about the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' Own Words, the whole Old Testament is about Him. (That is quite a statement to make, but the

truth of it is born out in the passages we will study today.) And it is evident that the whole New Testament is about Him as well. And all Scriptures should be viewed with this in mind.

Yesterday we saw an example of how the New Testament relates to the Old — revealing the Father/Son relationship. Yesterday's example was only one of innumerable examples we could have looked at. I hope you picked up that key. It is very important to see the connection between the two Testaments.

Actually, Jesus Himself connects the two Testaments in a way that would be good for us to comprehend and follow as a guide to interpretation. His very words reveal that a good grasp of the Old Testament is paramount to understanding.

Jesus spent three years in public ministry. Even at the end of that period, after His death and resurrection, He needed to teach His disciples something about the way they viewed the Old Testament Scriptures. We would do well to learn the same lesson they did.

This particular event happened on Resurrection Day. There were two disciples who were setting out on a seven-mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Their hearts were downcast because of the previous days' events, i.e. the crucifixion of the One they had hoped would redeem Israel, and the report that He had been seen alive. Without their knowing Who He was, Jesus began walking and talking with them. He questioned them as to their thoughts and conversation. Their response to these events revealed a very definite lack of understanding of the way the Old Testament was put together. This lack of understanding (something which should not have been the case for these disciples), evoked this response from Jesus:

**Luke 24**

**25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.**

What descriptive term did Jesus use in describing these two disciples?

According to Jesus' Own words, why did Jesus call them this?

Write out what the disciples had missed, and how Jesus corrected their mistake.

According to this passage, how much of the Old Testament is about Him?

What portion of the Old Testament did Moses write?

According to this passage, how pervasively should we see Jesus in these books, and in the books of the Prophets?

The events of that day continued. The threesome arrived at their destination, and the two men asked Jesus to stay with them. He complied. Even yet, they did not recognize Him. Then, as they sat down to eat —

**Luke 24**

**30 And it came about that when He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31 And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 And they said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”**

At what moment did they recognize Who He was?

Why do you think they recognized Him at that moment?

Drawing from this whole story, and seeing the Scriptures the way Jesus taught them, what effect did it have on them (v. 32)?

Once Jesus broke bread with them, they recognized Who He was, and then He disappeared from their sight. The two had come to realize the key to understanding Old Testament truths — that the whole of the Old Testament is about some facet or revelation of Jesus Christ. And the result of grasping this key had a result in their hearts concerning Scripture — it caused their hearts to burn within them!

At once, the disciples made their way back to Jerusalem to let the other disciples know that they had seen Jesus alive. Once there, while the two disciples were relating their encounter with Jesus to this larger group, Jesus appeared in their midst, and spoke with them. Here is how He ended His discourse with them:

**Luke 24**

**44 Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...**

According to this passage, where did Jesus say one could go to find all things that are written about Him?

In showing them that this is the way to view Scripture, what did He do for them (v. 45)?

We have just seen the positive side of grasping this key of interpretation — two disciples moving from a place of foolishness to a place wherein their hearts burned within them. But let's look at a picture on the negative side. Let's look at a group of people who refused to accept that the entire Old Testament was about Jesus. And the result was that they remained in ignorant foolishness.

Notice the reprimand Jesus gave to the Pharisees, who had the same Old Testament Scriptures as did the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and who claimed to be Moses' disciples (John 9:28). This is what He said to them after a fairly lengthy discourse with them in John chapter five. Pay close attention to vv. 46 and 47. (I think I would rather be reprimanded as foolish and learn, than have this statement said to me by Jesus.)

**John 5**

**45 “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”**

Rephrase the scope of what Jesus said.

Remember that these men saw themselves as disciples of Moses (John 9:28). So these Pharisees knew what Jesus was saying. He was being so specific with them, that they could not have missed it! He may have been specifically referring to a passage from the Book of Deuteronomy. (Though any part of Moses' writings would have been referring to Jesus, as seen previously, these Pharisees should have at least seen that Jesus was referring to the following passage in Deuteronomy.)

The Book of Deuteronomy is a book wherein Moses told the second generation the same things he told the first generation some thirty-eight to forty years prior. Moses makes a very interesting statement in chapter eighteen:

**Deuteronomy 18**

**15 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. 16 This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, lest I die.’ 17 And the LORD said to me, ‘They have spoken well. 18 I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him...”**

What does Moses say God will do (v. 15)?

Then what did he say that the people must do (v. 15b)?

What had God told Moses that He would do through the promised Prophet (v. 18)?

And what would happen to the one who doesn't listen to the Words of that Prophet?

Again, today we are not looking so much at what these passages teach (as interesting as they are!). We are striving to grasp an important key in understanding how Jesus teaches that we are to interpret Scripture. As we close for the day, would you summarize what you have learned along these lines?

See you tomorrow.

## **Days Four and Five — The Law of First-Mention**

Today and tomorrow will be spent reading an article written by Roel Velema who lives in the Netherlands. You can take two days to read through this material, then at the end of Day Five, you will be asked to summarize this reading, as well as your week's summaries. So please give yourself time today and tomorrow to do a thorough job. It will be so helpful. Have a good couple of days reading.

## The Law of First-Mention

by **Roel Velema**  
Hattem, The Netherlands

Scripture reveals certain principles needed for the proper and faithful interpretation of that book. These principles have to be recognized as Bible students seek to properly understand the Word.

One of these principles is called “the law of first-mention.” It is a principle that has received hardly any attention in books written on hermeneutics, and one can only come to the conclusion that this principle has fallen into disuse.

What is this “Law of First-Mention” or “First-Occurrence Principle”?

The “law of first-mention” is the principle in the interpretation of Scripture which states that the first mention or occurrence of a subject in Scripture establishes an unchangeable pattern, with that subject remaining unchanged in the mind of God throughout Scripture.

Down through the years this important principle has been recognized by able commentators of the Bible. *A. T. Pierson* called it “the Divine Law of Firsts.”

*Benjamin Willis Newton* (Brethren movement, 19th century), wrote about this principle:

*“I find in Scripture a principle of interpretation, which I believe, if conscientiously adopted, will serve as an unfailling guide as to the mind of God as contained therein. **The first mention of a thing, the very first words of any subject of which the Holy Spirit is going to treat, is the keystone of the whole matter.**”*

*Arthur Pink* wrote in his book “Interpretation of the Scriptures”:

**The law of first-mention.** Very frequently this is of great help in arriving at the meaning of a word or expression. Since there be but one Speaker throughout the entire Word, and He knew from the beginning all that He was going to say, He has so ordered His utterances as to forecast from the outset whatever was to follow. Thus, by noting its setting and associations, the initial occurrence of anything in the Scriptures usually intimates to us how it subsequently will be employed. In other words, the earliest pronouncement of the Holy Spirit on a subject very frequently indicates, substantially, what is found in the later references thereto. This is of real assistance to the expositor, supplying him with a kind of key to what follows. So far as we are aware, attention was originally directed to this canon of exegesis by Lord Bacon (1600), and for more than forty years this writer has made use of the same, putting it to the test in scores of instances, and while he has found a few cases where the first mention of a term failed to intimate clearly its future scope, he has never met with one that was out of harmony therewith; the vast majority of them were invaluable in serving to define their significance and scope. This will appear from the illustrations which follow.

The first prophecy recorded in Scripture supplies the key to the whole subject of Messianic prediction, furnishing a remarkable outline and forecast of all that was to follow. Said the Lord God to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

First, it is to be noted that those words were not addressed to Adam and Eve, implying that man was not the immediate party in the covenant of recovery; that it depended not upon anything of, by, or from him.

Second, that this Divine pronouncement was made after the fall, and from this point onwards prophecy is always consequent upon human failure, not coming in during the normal state of affairs, but only when ruin has begun and judgment is impending — the next prophecy was through Enoch (Jude 14, 15) just before the Flood! In the prophecy of Genesis 3: 15, it was revealed that all human hope was to center in a Coming One. It made known that the Coming One should be man, the woman's "seed," and therefore of supernatural birth. It announced that He would be the object of Satan's enmity. It foretold that He should be temporarily humiliated — bruised in His heel. It also proclaimed His ultimate victory, for He should bruise the serpent's head, and therefore must be more than man. It intimated the age-long strife there would be between the two seeds: the children of the Devil and those united unto Christ.

And the Lord said unto Cain, "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10).

That is the first time that all-important word "blood" is mentioned in the Scriptures, and like all the initial occurrences of fundamental terms it well re-pays the most careful attention and meditation. Profoundly important is this reference, foreshadowing as it does some of the most essential and outstanding features of the atonement of Christ.

Abel was a shepherd (Gen. 4:2) and was hated, though without cause, by his brother (I John 3: 12, 13). He did not die a natural death, but met with a violent end: as the good Shepherd was crucified and slain by wicked hands (Acts 2:23). In the light of those facts, how deeply significant are the words "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me." That is the all-important but inexpressibly blessed thing in connection with the blood of Christ: it is vocal Godwards! It is "the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:24), for it satisfied every demand of God and procured inestimable blessing for His people.

The next mention of "blood" is in Genesis 9:4, where we learn that life is in the blood.

The third reference is Exodus 12:13, where it delivers from the avenging angel. Put the three together and we have a complete outline of all the subsequent teaching of Scripture upon the blood. They treat, respectively, of death, life, salvation.

The law of first-mention opens up Scripture in a way God has not treasured up in any of His other principles of Biblical interpretation. Scripture passages that are otherwise unknown to the Bible student, present Biblical truths of utter beauty and serve as a basis to open up other passages in Scripture.

*Arlen Chitwood* presented some of these beautiful truths in his writings:

**There is a law of "first-mention" in Scriptural interpretation which states that the first time a subject is mentioned, the subject remains unchanged throughout Scripture.**

Exodus chapter seventeen presents the first mention following the Exodus of Satan's move against Israel, along with God's attitude toward this move. Thus, the pattern is set in this chapter for Satan's strategy in his efforts to destroy Israel through the use of Gentile national powers, and the pattern is also set (based on previously revealed principles) concerning God's attitude toward a Gentile nation which would allow itself to be so used. The basic principles governing God's attitude toward and treatment of individuals or nations participating in anti-Semitism were established during the days of Abraham (Gen. 12:3), and these principles, as the principles governing the law of first mention in Exodus chapter seventeen, remain unchanged throughout Scripture (*Arlen Chitwood: By Faith*).

Two cities figure prominently in events on earth during the 2,600-year period covering "the times of the Gentiles": Jerusalem, and Babylon. And these two cities, both mentioned very early in

Scripture (Gen. 14:18; 10:10), stand in complete contrast to one another at every point. Babylon is **first mentioned** in connection with Nimrod (the name means “rebel,” “one who revolts”), and Jerusalem is first mentioned in connection with Melchizedek (meaning, “King of peace” [Heb. 7:2]), **establishing first-mention principles which hold constant throughout Scripture** (Arlen Chitwood: *Focus on the Middle East*).

The “cherubim” (singular, “cherub”) are **first mentioned in Scripture** in connection with the earth’s government, **establishing an unchangeable way** — a first-mention principle — in which angels designated by this name are seen throughout Scripture. They are first seen in Scripture guarding the entrance to the garden in Eden following man being driven from the garden because of sin. They were placed as guardians to prevent man from reentering the garden, in his fallen state, and eating of the tree of life — the tree which would have provided (and will yet future provide) the wisdom and knowledge for man to rule and reign over the earth.

And a “mountain” in Scripture signifies a kingdom. Satan, in his unfallen state, was given a kingdom (this earth), and he was placed, by God, in the position of the messianic angel (the ruling angel) over this “mountain,” this kingdom (Ezek. 28:14) (Arlen Chitwood: *From Acts to the Epistles*).

Genesis 14:18, 19 provides the first mention of heavenly blessings associated with Abraham and his seed, though such was in view within God’s original promise to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, as recorded in Gen. 12:1-3. And this first mention of heavenly promises and blessings appears in a Messianic type.

Melchizedek, one of two central figures forming the Messianic type (Abraham being the other) is also presented in Scripture for the first time in this passage. The type surrounds that day when Christ will come forth in the antitype of Melchizedek, as the great King-Priest in Jerusalem, with bread and wine (cf. Matt. 26:29), and bless Abraham and his descendants — both heavenly and earthly.

Thus, **more than one first-mention principle is established in Gen. 14:18, 19**, and that which is established in this passage remains constant throughout Scripture. Heavenly and earthly blessings reside only in the seed of Abraham (something which never changes in Scripture), and these blessings will be realized during that coming day when Christ exercises the Melchizedek priesthood (Arlen Chitwood: *From Egypt to Canaan*).

The connection of “God’s breath” with life (the connection between II Tim. 3:16 and Heb. 4:12) is given in Gen. 2:7. Man was not created alive. Rather, man was formed from the dust of the ground as an inanimate, lifeless being. Then God, through breathing into His lifeless new creation, imparted life. God “breathed into his [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

This is the first mention in Scripture of life in relation to man, **establishing a first-mention principle which can never change throughout Scripture**. Any time beyond this point in Scripture when one finds life in relation to man, this life must always be effected by means of “the breath of God.” There must always be a breathing in on God’s part in order for life to exist (cf. Ezek. 37:1-10; Luke 8:54, 55) (Arlen Chitwood: *From Egypt to Canaan*).

The context of Rev. 1:10 and central message of the book clearly reveal that the writer, through the use of the expression, “the Lord’s day,” could have had only one thing in mind — the future “day of the Lord.” John was not only removed from the Isle of Patmos and taken to heaven but he was also moved forward in time to the end of the present dispensation. He was transported to a place and time where he saw Christ occupying His future position as Judge in the midst of His

Church (Rev. 1:11-20). And from that point forward, the Book of Revelation has to do with things either anticipating judgment (chs. 2, 3, 5), with judgment itself (chs. 1, 6-20, or with things resulting from judgment (chs. 4, 19, 21, 22) during “the Lord’s day,” “the day of the Lord.”

The first reference to the Day of the Lord in Scripture **forms a first-mention principle, establishing a meaning and usage for this day which holds constant throughout Scripture.** The Day of the Lord is first mentioned in Isa. 2:12 as a day when the “lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted” (Isa. 2:11-17). To bring the latter to pass (the Lord’s exaltation), the Day of the Lord is always associated in Scripture with God’s judgment, both upon man and the material creation. Judgment during this day falls first upon the Church (cf. Rev. 1:10-20; I Thess. 5:2-4), then upon Israel and the Gentile nations (cf. Rev. 6:1ff; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 2, 11, 31; 3:14), and then upon the material creation (cf. Rev. 21:1; II Peter 3:10). This is the way the Book of Revelation is structured (Arlen Chitwood: *In the Lord’s Day*).

When Christ exercises the Melchizedek priesthood, He will have a dual reign. He will sit on His Own throne in the heavenly Jerusalem, ruling over the earth with His co-heirs, His consort queen; and He will also sit on David’s throne in the earthly Jerusalem in the midst of His people, Israel (the nation which will look upon the Pierced One and be saved at His second advent). Occupying a dual reign of this nature, Christ will thus be a King-Priest in both the heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly Jerusalem.

This will be in perfect keeping with both heavenly and earthly promises associated with Abraham and his seed, first brought to light in connection with the first mention of Melchizedek in Scripture (Gen. 14:18, 19). Melchizedek blessed Abraham as “possessor of heaven and earth”; and the seed of Abraham, both heavenly and earthly, are to “possess the gate of [rule over] his enemies” (Gen. 22:17, 18) (Arlen Chitwood: *Let Us Go On*).

A first-mention principle has been established in Gen. 2:7, and life which man derives from God must always be acquired through the same means set forth in this verse. God alone initially “imparts” and subsequently “continues” and “sustains” life; and this is always accomplished, in its entirety, through the *Neshamah* of God (Arlen Chitwood: *The Neshamah*).

Now, the question: Why is the Word of God “alive,” “powerful,” and “sharper than any two-edged sword”? The answer: Because of its origin. The Word is “*Theopneustos*”; The Word is “God-breathed.”

But, what does that mean? And why is the Word “alive” because of its origin? This is where one has to go back to beginning points in the Old Testament and find the first mention in Scripture of God bringing a matter to pass through the use of His breath.

This is necessary not only because of the need to compare Scripture with Scripture but also because of a principle of Biblical interpretation, called, “**the first-mention principle.**” **This principle has to do with unchangeableness, and it centers around an unchangeable structure of the Word given by the unchangeable God. Because of the inherent nature of the Word, the first time a subject is mentioned in Scripture, a pattern, a mold is established at that point which remains unchanged throughout the remainder of Scripture.**

Remaining within this principle, the first time one finds the breath of God mentioned in Scripture is in Gen. 2:7, in connection with life imparted to man; and, consequently, at this beginning point, this verse connects life with the breath of God after an unchangeable fashion. God formed and fashioned man from the dust of the ground, but man was not created alive. Life was subsequently imparted through God breathing into man’s “nostrils the breath of life,” resulting in man becoming “a living soul.”

Thus, at this point in Scripture the unchangeable connection between God's breath and life is established and set. Only God can produce life, and any time life is produced beyond this point it must always be through the one means set forth at the beginning, revealed in Gen. 2:7 (Arlen Chitwood: *Theopneustos*).

Thus, the law of first-mention unlocks many treasures in the Word of God, for the principle is always completely consistent throughout Scripture.

This can be seen quite clearly in the first mention of the word "**sword**" in Scripture. The word is first mentioned in Gen 3:24: "*So he drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.*" The first mention of the word "sword" had to do with access or denial to the tree of life.

In Ephesians 6:17 we read: "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The principle in Gen. 3:24 shows what is mentioned here in Eph. 6:17. The Word of God here has to do with access or denial to the tree of life. This perfectly agrees with the context, which had to do with the Word of the Kingdom, not with the gospel of God's grace.

It can also be seen in the word "**trumpet**" in Scripture. The first mention is in Exodus 19:13: "When the trumpet (ram's horn) sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mount." The trumpet has to do with a gathering, whether for blessing, for war, or for judgment.

Note Matt. 24:31 and I Thess. 4:16 how this principle remains unchanged in Scripture. However, the law of first-mention is not only limited to words, but can be applied also to concepts which appear for the first time in Scripture. For example, words such as "polygamy" and "monogamy" don't appear in Scripture, but the first mention of this concept in Genesis 1 and 2, shows that monogamy — one man, one woman, with the union of the two forming one flesh — is the form for marriage in the mind of God, etc..

The law of first-mention shows that God's truth doesn't fluctuate, but that His truth is an evidence of His own steadfastness. This greatly challenges us as we press on to reach the end-goal of our faith (1 Peter 1:9), which necessitates our coming into a mature knowledge of His Word. And the principle of first-mention is therefore a principle which Christians do well to heed in their study of the Word as they move toward that goal.

The End.

As we close for the day, please summarize what you have learned from this reading.

As we close for the week, briefly summarize your week's summaries.