

# Finer Grounds

## How to Study the Bible Lesson 4: Author and Audience

Once we have established the historical context of a book or account, the next determinations we should make are about the author and the audience. If we would like to gain a clear understanding of a passage, it is extremely important to know about who wrote it and who it was written to. Knowing these two things can help us to comprehend why something was written and why certain emphasis was placed on specific subject matter. This allows us to come to a more full understanding of a passage.

Let us first examine the importance of an author to a passage. Writers will typically bring out subject matter that they feel particularly compelled about. The Holy Spirit uses the authors of the Bible in the same fashion. He uses their personal experience and expertise to shine a light on certain areas for others. One of the most unique facets of the Bible is the fact that so many different men wrote in so many different styles and never contradicted each other. It is intriguing to realize how much each writer's own personality shines through even when his actual words have been guided by the Holy Spirit.

Finding background on authors can be a very tedious task; however, it is extremely important. Sometimes an author will identify himself but sometimes it will take some investigation to discover who wrote a book. If no author is evident, a Bible encyclopedia or dictionary can tell you who has written the book according to historical tradition. Keep in mind that this information, though probably well studied, can be fallible. Once you have discovered an author, a great place to start is with your concordance. Read each scripture that pertains to the author and keep a list of facts and personality traits you discover.

Also, be sure to read any book that this writer has penned and list anything he says about himself. A great secondary resource is a Bible encyclopedia or dictionary; you may find some interesting cultural details. Make a list of as much useful information as you can about the author.

For our example we will examine the book of Hosea. The author is Hosea as stated in 1:1.

*"The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel."*

Upon examining the Strong's Concordance we can see that the name of Hosea is used only once outside of the book of Hosea, in Romans 9:25.

*"As He says also in Hosea, 'I will call those who were not my people, 'My people,' and her who was not, 'beloved.'"*

This verse is a quotation regarding the inclusion of the gentiles in the new covenant. While it may give us insight into what Hosea said, it doesn't necessarily tell us much about the man himself.

The next step will be to examine the book of Hosea and determine what it says about him as a man. When reading through, especially the first three chapters, you will learn a lot about Hosea and the hardships he faced. God asked him to marry a prostitute and then, when she left him, he had to go and buy her back. This adds a new perspective when God tells him to go speak to the people about their spiritual adultery. Do you think he may have felt strongly about this issue after

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having experienced what he did? Do you think the people he was speaking to, if they knew his personal story, would have paid a little more attention when he started to speak on the subject? It is necessary to understand what he went through to understand the power his words could have had on the people and to fully understand their implications for us today.

Knowing an author's perspective can add great depth, insight and power to a passage of scriptures.

Of equal importance as knowing about the writer, is learning what we can about the intended audience. The recipients of these writings were going through very specific struggles that the author may address. It is helpful to know, not only what historical circumstances these people were in, but what they struggled with spiritually. The research for this portion can be treated very similarly to that of the writer. If a specific audience is given a great first place to look is in a concordance. Then examine the text itself for anything the author says about the people themselves or the state of their spiritual condition. A glance at a Bible encyclopedia or dictionary may give additional clues to help you understand their culture.

Let's look again at the book of Hosea. Here we can use a little bit of the historical information we would have learned to determine to whom the book was written. Again, some important information is listed in the first verse:

*"The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel."*

It is important to notice here that the kings of Judah and the king of Israel are listed separately. If you have studied through the books of Old Testament History (which I highly recommend before you start a study of

the prophets) then you will remember that the northern tribes and southern tribes of Israel split. Because of the two separate king lists we can infer that this was written after that split. So who is Hosea writing to? Is it the Northern Kingdom or the Southern Kingdom? Read through the text one more time. Let's look at Hosea 5:3:

*I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me; For now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot, Israel has defiled itself.*

We see here (and in many other places throughout Hosea) that the audience is referred to as Ephraim and Israel. When you look up the tribe of Ephraim up in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia here is what you will find: "...and from the day of the disruption till the fall of the Northern Kingdom there was none to dispute the supremacy of Ephraim, the names Ephraim and Israel being synonymous." Now we have a good idea that Hosea is speaking to the Northern Kingdom.

When we do a little reading and research about this nation and time, we can see that one of their main struggles was idolatry. Upon reading through the book, we can plainly see that this is also Hosea's main concern for the people. He sees the spiritual adultery taking place and tries to warn them of their impending judgment.

Once we have identified information about the audience, the next step is to begin to personalize it. What are the similarities between us and the intended audience? In what way do we share the same struggles, in this case spiritual adultery? Knowing about the people can help us to truly understand their battles and really relate to the things they went through; also, it assists us in seeing what the Holy Spirit's answers are to the similar situations we are facing.

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*Your homework this week may be a little more time consuming, simply because of the amount of scripture you will have to read. I will continue to encourage you to do your best to complete it. The more you practice your study skills, the faster and easier studying will become. As you retain knowledge on different books of the Bible this process will become much simpler and quicker. Don't be discouraged if you can't learn EVERYTHING at once, simply knowing a few key facts can greatly increase your understanding.*

## Chapter 3: Homework

### Exercise 1:

*In our first exercise we will look at the book of 1 Peter. Begin by reading all of the information you learn about Peter from the gospels and the book of Acts. List any facts and personality traits you learn here:*

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*How do you think that these things affected what Peter said and/or how he said it?*

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*Read through 1 Peter again and list who Peter's target audience was and any interesting information you learn about them:*

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*Use some of the techniques we talked about in Chapter 2 to determine what is occurring historically at this time. How does understanding what is happening historically help you to more fully understand the struggle of the people Peter is writing to?*

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*What similarities can you draw between the audience of 1 Peter and you personally?*

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## Exercise 2:

Now let's take a look at the book of Galatians. Identify the author and list some background information on him. Remember, don't get overwhelmed by needing to know EVERYTHING, look for some important facts that you didn't know before that will help you better understand what he is writing.

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Identify the audience and any historical information that may be useful.

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In what ways can you personally relate to the audience of the book of Galatians?

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## Exercise 3:

Read the book of 1 John. Write an outline of information you learn of the historical context, author and audience. Be sure to identify similarities between you and the audience addressed.

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