

Finer Grounds

How to Study the Bible Lesson 7: Characterization

Once we have broken down our text into specific pericopes and have identified the general tone and theme of the pericope we should begin to look at the characters. In Chapter 3 we discussed author and audience; if you have been following this process then you will have plenty of information on them by now. In this lesson we will focus on all other characters including: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, anyone speaking, anyone spoken to, anyone involved in the narrative in anyway, and anyone spoken about. Recognizing characters and their actions will help set the scene for what is taking place in the pericope you have selected. Remember that you might have to go outside your pericope to find the information you are looking for.

When reading your pericope, pay attention to any time you see dialogue. These sections can give us insight into why a person does something and a better look into their personality traits. Some, depending on who is speaking, can give us spiritual truths and specific doctrine. Once you have identified a dialogue, there are several observations that will help you. First, determine who is speaking and to whom they are speaking. Pay attention to the setting and who is listening. What kind of dialogue is it: argument, discussion, or lecture? Determine the main point the speaker is making. Finally apply these things and conclude what this means in reference to the speaker and his nature or actions. When you have completed these steps, you should have a fairly thorough analysis of this section.

Read Genesis 18:22-33. Let's take a closer look and examine the dialogue taking place. In this

pericope, we see Abraham speaking to God. Already, we should take special notice, because it is God speaking here. Anything he says can give us insight to His nature and will. They are to be having a discussion about the destruction of Sodom. Abraham knows that his nephew Lot is there and wishes for God to spare the city. Notice, even though he is petitioning for something, Abraham still speaks with great respect and acknowledges God's ultimate deciding factor in the situation. We see Abraham asking God to spare the city for 50 righteous people and finally drops down to only 10. God agrees that if there are 10 righteous to be found in Sodom He will spare the city.

What does this dialogue tell us about the nature of Abraham? Well, for one, he cared for his nephew Lot enough to petition God on his behalf. Also, he had such an incredibly close relationship that he could approach God in conversation. Even when he did this though, he was very respectful. What does it tell us about God? First of all, God welcomes the petitions of His people. Also through this dialogue we see God's patience in a few ways. Even though He knows that there are not 10 righteous people in Sodom, He still allows Abraham to make his petition. It also shows His boundless patience with His people. He would have spared the city for only 10 faithful people! In the scope of an entire city, 10 is a VERY small percentage. God wants to take care of His own and loves those who stand up for Him in the face of adversity, even if they are in the minority.

This dialogue, though only a small part of the book of Genesis gives us a great look at the character of Abraham and that of God. It also plays a very

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important role in understanding the significance when God actually does decide to judge an entire nation or city; it is not something He takes lightly!

The next thing we need to look at are questions asked and answered by God and the inspired writers! If God says something, it is. Period. We should pay attention to the initial question: Who was it posed by? Who is it answered by? Is there any clarification given? Many times authors pose questions and answer them themselves. Next we should pay attention to the audience it was meant for and also the tone. Once we have determined these factors, it is time to ask: what significance does this question/answer have to me?

For our example, turn to Acts 2:37-42. The question posed in this pericope is in verse 37: "Brethren, what shall we do?" If you read the previous section you can see that they were asking the apostles what their response should be to murdering Jesus. Peter gives the response: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Because Peter is saying this as a witness by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), we can assume these words are inspired. Not only did he answer their question, he went on to tell them they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now let's look at the significance of this answer to us. Peter is referring to people with sins in their past and how to have them forgiven; we all fall into this category. He gives us specific steps: repent and be baptized. He then goes on to say what will happen; we will be forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Recognizing questions and answers can help us answer some of the most pertinent questions to our faith.

Not only is it imperative that we understand what people are saying in scripture, we must observe what they are doing and why they are doing it. Because we are to be imitators of God, we need to pay particular attention to actions that involve him. We also need to pay attention to actions of people and God's response. In some instances actions are commended by the authors of scripture, these are occurrences to take note of. We should be sure to ask things like: Why are they doing this? What affect does this have on others? Is this something that should serve as an example to me in some way?

Turn to Acts 6:1-6. In these verses, the main action we see taking place is the appointment of servants for a specific cause. They did this because the apostles couldn't do every little thing by themselves, they needed help. They chose seven men and gave them a very specific job: to take care of the widows. So does this passage apply to us? Absolutely! First of all, our spiritual leaders shouldn't have to be responsible for every little task that comes along. This is why we appoint servants or deacons. Also, when they are appointed, they should be given a specific task. From this section we can also see that every person doesn't have to do everything. Each task is equally important to furthering the kingdom. Because these men were taking care of the widows, the apostles had time to spread the word of God as they were called to do.

As you can see, understanding the dialogue and actions within the pericope you are studying can show us why we do things as a church. It can also give us insight into the nature of God and tell us about the personality of specific people. As always, continue to do your homework. Investing your time now will pay dividends in your future Bible study.

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Chapter 6: Homework

Exercise 1:

Turn to John 13:1-20 and read it thoroughly paying specific attention to the dialogue taking place. Who is speaking?

How does what is being said give us insight into the attitudes and personalities of those involved?

Now identify any questions posed and answers given, list them here:

Explain the significance of these questions:

List the specific actions that take place in this pericope:

What significance do these actions have?

Based on all of this information, how can we apply this pericope to our lives today?

Exercise 2:

Read Ruth 1:1-18. Identify any dialogue (including questions and answers). How does the dialogue help you understand the people involved?

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What actions take place and what is their significance?

What applications can we make to our own lives based on the actions and dialogue of this pericope?

Exercise 3:

For your final exercise, read Mark 2:1-3:6. Don't forget to do your background research on this section! Identify dialogue, questions, answers and actions. Write an outline or paragraph on this section and its significance based on the things you have studied.
