

Understanding Challenging Scriptures

#1 Categories of Scripture

- It is essential to understand genre distinctions and stylistic rules of a text.

General Genres of Scripture:

- **Historical Narrative** - Scripture that gives factual retellings of real events.
 - This genre comprises 43% of the Bible.
 - OT Examples: **Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther**
 - NT Examples: **Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts**
- **Covenantal Law** - Scripture that outlines God's commands to His covenanted people.
 - Intended for immediate application for the children of Israel.
 - OT Examples: Parts of **Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy**
 - NT Examples: None
- **Poetic Language** - Scripture written in stylistic verse and meter.
 - These may be non-literal statements, symbolic language, metaphors, word pictures, and expressions of feeling/praises.
 - OT Examples: Several **Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations**, and several songs, prayers, and poems in OT narratives
 - NT Examples: Parables, figures, and doxologies
- **Wisdom Literature** - Scripture of general wisdom from generations of godly people.
 - Invites us to consider the complexity of godly living with general rules for life.
 - OT Examples: **Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes**
- **Prophetic** - Scripture that declares specific messages from God about the future.
 - Some have only a more immediate future fulfillment, some have a more distant future fulfillment, and some have several layers of fulfillment.
 - Major Prophets: **Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel**
 - Minor Prophets: **Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi**
- **Epistles** - Scriptures written as a letter to a church(s), a specific person(s), or a people.
 - These letters take up half of the New Testament.
 - The NT epistles, by writer:
 - Paul: **Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon**
 - Peter: **1-2 Peter**
 - James: **James**
 - John: **1-3 John**
 - Jude: **Jude**
 - Unknown: **Hebrews**
- **Apocalyptic Literature** - Scripture that describes what the end times will be like.
 - Intended to be heightened, dense, and highly figurative.
 - OT Examples: Parts of **Isaiah**, parts of **Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Zechariah** and **Daniel**
 - NT Examples: **Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation**



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Challenging Categorical Examples:

- **Historical Narrative**
 - These are factual retellings of what actually happened. It is not meant to be taken up as doctrine. They are to be read with discernment.
 - **Genesis 12:10 - 13, Genesis 20:1 - 5** – Was this cowardice and deception to say “she is my sister” about his wife a good thing in Abraham’s life?
 - **1st Samuel 17** – Am I to read this as applicable today for “my goliaths?”
 - **Daniel 1** – Should we all adopt the “Daniel Diet?”
 - **Luke 8:22 - 25** – is this a pattern for us to “name and claim” if we are in a storm at sea?
- **Covenantal Law**
 - These were 613 direct commands for Israel for their land, their worship, and under their Israelite King. We need to recognize principles and not a direct application.
 - See #2 Covenantal Differences for challenging examples.
- **Poetic Language**
 - Intended to convey profound emotion, not meant to be taken as literally true.
 - **Lamentations 3:10 - 12** He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding; he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces; he has made me desolate; he bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow.
 - The number of caught fish in **John 21:11** is 153. We take that literally.
 - But do we also conclude that the number of hills with cattle belonging to the LORD in **Psalms 50:10** is only 1,000? Or do ALL belong to Him, and we take this as poetry?
- **Wisdom Literature**
 - A proverb is not a promise but general wisdom and principle
 - **Proverbs 15:1** A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
 - **Proverbs 26:4 - 5** Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.
 - **Proverbs 22:6** Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
- **Prophetic**
 - Prophecy has meaning for the intended audience and timeframe.
 - **Jeremiah 29:11** – is this a good verse for a high school graduation card, or did Jeremiah intend it for those of Judah in the Babylonian captivity?
- **Epistles**
 - Written with immediate intention for the audience.
 - **2nd Thessalonians 3:10** - is this meant to be taken as an inditement against welfare, social services, and specific charities?
 - **2nd Timothy 2:15** – was this command written to every Christian or to Timothy, who was a pastor?
- **Apocalyptic Literature**
 - Written regarding the events of the Millennial Kingdom, Rise of the Beast, and the end of the age.
 - **Daniel 7:7 - 8** – should we try to find fulfillment of this by events in the Middle East right now?



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#2 Covenantal Differences

- The primary covenants of the Bible are:
 - Adamic Covenant – given in **Genesis 1 and 2**
 - God establishing covenant with mankind.
 - Noahic Covenant – given in **Genesis 9**
 - God establishing covenant with mankind after the fall.
 - Abrahamic Covenant – given in **Genesis 12 – 25**
 - God promising the fulfillment of redemption through the line of Abraham.
 - Mosaic Covenant – given in **Exodus** through **Deuteronomy**
 - God sanctifying the nation of Israel to be His people.
 - New Covenant in Christ – given in the **New Testament**
 - God accomplishing redemption through His beloved Son.
- There were three portions of the Mosaic law: Moral, Ceremonial, and Civil
 - Moral Law - laws about how to live a righteous life.
 - These are for *all* people at *all* times.
 - Ceremonial Law - laws about the tabernacle/temple worship and the sacrificial system for the Israelites
 - These were fulfilled by Christ and replaced by his one sacrifice for all.
 - Civil Law - laws that governed, preserved, and protected Israelite society.
 - Since the Babylonian captivity, the people of God have been and will be under the rule of gentile/secular governments until our King returns.
- So, how do these OT commands apply to NT believers?
 - **1st Timothy 1:8 – 11** Now we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the Law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.
 - The Law is good and to be used lawfully in accordance with the gospel.

Challenging Covenantal Examples:

- Clearly, the Ten Commandments and the moral laws are all still in effect, but how do we understand the application of the ceremonial and civil laws?
 - Ceremonial Laws (matters of sacrifice and cleanliness):
 - **Leviticus 11:7 - 8** And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. You shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.
 - **Deuteronomy 22:11** You shall not wear cloth of wool and linen mixed together.
 - Civil Laws (matters of societal justice and government):
 - **Leviticus 20:13** If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.
 - **Deuteronomy 23:3** No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever,



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#3 Cultural Distance

- The Bible story spans thousands of years, covers events on three continents, and records the cultures of numerous peoples.
 - These can feel very foreign to us, and their customs can be confusing or even troubling to us.

Challenging Cultural Examples Because of Distance:

- **Judges 6:11** – Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress
- **Ruth** – the right of a kinsman redeemer, coming under the covering, and removing the shoe
- **Luke 19:12** - a certain nobleman went to a far country to receive a kingdom
- How do we understand the several instructions about hair in the Bible?
 - Males shaved and unshaved – should we be like Joseph or David’s men?
 - Long hair or short hair for women? Braided or unbraided hair? Hair coverings?

#4 Cultural Sensitivities

- There are very harsh, violent, and vulgar acts recorded in the Bible that may come into conflict with our own cultural sensitivities.

Challenging Cultural Examples Because of Sensitivities:

- **Genesis 38:1-26** - Tamar’s seduction of Judah – understanding levirate marriage rights
- **Judges 19** - The rape and murder of a Levite’s concubine
- **2 Samuel 11** - David’s sin with Bathsheba and murder of her husband
- **Joshua 10** - the slaughter and torture of the five Amorite kings
- How are we supposed to understand slavery in the Bible?

#5 Promises and Participation (Indicatives and Imperatives)

- Often, challenges arise in discerning between human volitional choice and the work of God.
 - Candidly, these arise when we treat the Bible like a “promise checkbook.”
- God has redeemed humans for a *living relationship*.
 - He desires our heart to seek Him and to participate with him. We should learn to pray with our Lord in the garden “not my will, but yours be done.”
- However, there can be challenges in understanding what my part to do is and what is God’s.
 - Discerning between Christian identity(indicatives) and discipleship(Imperatives).
 - AKA our Christian standing and our walk.

Challenging Examples of Promise and Participation:

- **Romans 12:1 - 2** - Renewing your mind, which part is active, and which is passive?
 - What is my responsibility? What can only God do?
- **1 Peter 1:15 – 16** – Am I holy already? Or am I to grow in holiness?
 - Appreciating position and progress – the “already and not yet.”
- **James 2** – “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”
 - Being made righteous in Christ and living righteously.

