PHILIPPIANS THEME

Purpose: This homework assignment is designed to familiarize the audience with some basic hermeneutical principles in evaluating the theme of a book of the Bible.

Goal: Give the Bible reader some confidence in understanding the flow of thought across an entire epistle. Also, the reader should enjoy the process of self discovery in scripture.

Time Requirements: This assignment is designed to require approximately four hours of work; one hour each in four different sittings.

Materials and Helps:

1. Bible, two different versions are preferable.
2. Attachments included in the packet.
3. The last page of this packet is designed to provide assumptions so that reader does not become frustrated or bogged down in the details of the assignment.

Each of these “lessons” should take approximately one hour of time. After completing the lesson, please discuss with others, if possible, and sharpen your ideas. Children are a great creative resource, particularly on drawing the chart of the book.

Lesson #1:

1. Read the Letter to the Philippians in its entirety with a view toward familiarity with the theme of the epistle. (Try to read the entire four chapters in 15 minutes.)
2. Read the Letter to the Philippians in its entirety a second time. Use a different translation in this second reading if possible. Begin to categorize the different chapters by theme. Start to look for a theme verse that will encapsulate the theme of each chapter as subheadings under the one larger theme of the epistle. (This will be Lesson #2, to develop the overall theme)
3. Read the attached background material on the background of Philippians.
4. In a third reading of the epistle, identify terms and concepts related to the background of the Philippians that would communicate effectively with them.

Lesson #2:

1. Read the Letter to the Philippians in its entirety a fourth time with the objective of finding a theme verse for the overall epistle, plus theme verses for each chapter/section. For this exercise, treat each chapter as one major section, with the first section following the introductory material being 1:12-30.
2. For a help with the overall theme verse, see Attachment labeled “Assistance.”

Lesson #3:

1. Chart the book in one or two ways per items 2 and (3 optional).
2. Develop a handwritten chart of the book using the attached 17 traits (not all 17 will be needed) from Traina’s book. Make four columns, one for each chapter. Add an initial column for the introduction, and perhaps a final column for concluding greetings. Note keywords and concepts. Draw lines on the page connecting things that are repeated, contrasting, etc.
3. (Optional) Draw a pictorial illustration of the book of Philippians, in Synthetic chart fashion (see previous examples of Acts and Hebrews handed out in class).

Lesson #4:

1. Develop the argument of the epistle.
2. Describe how the four chapters support and contribute to the development of the theme verse(s). If you are not confident in the theme verse, look at the last attachment page for a proposed theme verse(s).
3. For additional work, break down each chapter into two or three subsections, and describe how each subsection contributes to the theme of that chapter.

Background

Philippi was a military town. It was founded 356 BC. It was named after King Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It was located on the Via Egnatia (the Egnatian Way), the major thoroughfare from the eastern provinces to Rome.

Philippi was a Roman colony. This means that in its Roman founding, around 42 BC, the city was located on the Roman frontier. Retired soldiers, having served 25-33 years in Roman military service were given land and Roman citizenship to live in this colony. Therefore, unlike the occupants of most of the cities in Greece, the residents of Philippi had full Roman citizenship with full Roman privileges. They were also an outpost against any enemy aggression into Rome. Notice the term, POLITEUMA, “citizenship” in Phil 3:20, and how that term would relate to the Philippian situation.

As a result of their situation, there were not enough Jews to permit the establishment of a synagogue in Philippi. Paul does not quote the OT in the epistle. The citizens of Philippi would have worn Roman dress and spoke Latin rather than the Koine Greek of the eastern portion of the Mediterranean.

Philippians, in a similar note, was the location of the first Christian church in Europe (Acts 16:11-40), essentially a Christian “outpost.”

Philippians is one of Paul’s four “prison epistles.” He is writing from prison in Rome. During this first imprisonment in Rome, Paul has relative freedom to communicate with the outside world, receive visitors unhindered (Acts 28:30-31), and engage in the local Roman setting.

Traina’s Structural Relationships

1. Comparison – association of like things.
2. Contrast – association of opposites.
3. Repetition – reiteration of the *same* terms, phrases, clauses, etc.
4. Continuity – repeated use of *similar* terms, phrases, clauses, etc.
5. Continuation – extended treatment of a particular aspect, completing an idea or series of events.
6. Climax – progression from lesser to greater and ultimately to the greatest.
7. Cruciality – using a “pivot,” where the subject matter changes direction based on one critical factor.
8. Interchange – exchanging or alternation of certain elements.
9. Particularization and Generalization – movement from general to the particular.
10. Causation and Substantiation – movement from cause to effect and from effect to cause.
11. Instrumentation – setting forth the means to the end as well as the end itself.
12. Explanation or Analysis – an idea or event, followed by and interpretation of that idea or event.
13. Preparation or Introduction – background or setting for events.
14. Summarization – abridgement of either the preceding or following material
15. Interrogation – employment of questions
16. Harmony – effecting unity by means of agreement
17. Proportion – the amount of time spent on one topic or series of events vs. time spent on another topic or series of events.

Assistance

Lesson #1:

1. Background correlation examples:
2. Personnel: “praetorian guard” – 1:13; “Caesar’s household” – 4:22
3. Combat characteristics: “courage” – 1:14; “do not be alarmed by your opponent” – 1:28; “boldness” – 1:20; “press on” and “lay hold” – 3:12-14; “conduct yourself in a worthy manner” – 1:27; “stand firm” – 1:27; “hold fast” – 2:16
4. Teamwork concepts: “striving together” – 1:27; “one another more important” – 2:3-4; “serves with me” – 2:22; “fellow soldier” – 2:25; “differing concepts/same standards” 3:15-16; “companion . . . fellow workers” – 4:3; “share my affliction” – 4:14; “fellowship” – 2:1; 3:10; “in harmony” – 4:2; “one purpose” – 2:2
5. Leadership characteristics: positions of authority, “slaves, overseers, deacons” – 1:1; “humility” – 2:3; “do not grumble or dispute” – 2:14; “risking life . . . in service” – 2:30; varying extremes of service – 4:12; “lacked opportunity” – 4:10
6. Military operations: “beware” of the enemy – 3:2; “enemies” – 3:18; “fully supplied” – 4:18-19
7. Roman military colony: “citizens” (POLITEUMA) – 3:20
8. Results of a successful combat experience: “joy,” “rejoice” – 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 18, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10

Lesson #2:

1. Assume that the theme verse for the epistle is 1:9-11. A supporting verse for this theme is found in the conclusion, 4:8-9.
2. Divide the sections into Introduction, 1:1-11, Chapter “One” 1:12-30, Chapter Two, 2:1-30, Chapter Three, 3:1-21, Chapter Four 4:1-20 and Conclusion 4:21-23.