

Consider the Background

This study was done by Gary Hampton and it is from the www.abiblecommentary.com web site

“To approach the study of any one of the books of the Bible without knowing something of its purpose or its principle theme would be like reading a newspaper without knowing anything about its date or its place of printing. In both cases the reader would not know whether he was reading of incidents or characters of his own time or of things that happened thousands of years ago. There can be but little profit in this kind of Bible study. In fact, it is not Bible study at all—it is no more than just Bible reading” (Harvey Scott, *Bible Study Guidance: “A Study of Right Living,”* Oklahoma City: Telegram Book Company, 1960, p. 57).

Become Acquainted with the Author

- Of course, every author was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21), so we could say God is the author.
- However, each writer wrote under circumstances peculiar to him and used vocabulary that would fit his occupation and education.
- The Holy Spirit helped the writer select words from his own vocabulary that conveyed the message exactly as he wanted it.

Examples of Unique Vocabulary

- In David's Psalms, there are many references to aspects of taking care of sheep and the role of the shepherd (i.e. Psalm 23)
- Luke, the physician, explains none could heal the woman with the issue of blood (Lk. 8:43-44)
- Paul authored 13 N. T. books
 - He was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, taught at the feet of Gamaliel, a Pharisee and a former persecutor of the church (Acts 22:1-5; Philippians 3:4-6)
 - Helps us understand references to the prophets and the great debt he owed because of the mercy God had shown him

Identify the Speaker

- The speaker may not be the same as the author
 - Matthew records the words of Jesus, Satan, the angry mob and Pilate, among others
- While the record of statements will be correct, the message presented maybe untrue
 - The speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are uninspired men's answers to the cause of Job's suffering and may mislead us
 - Gamaliel's conclusion will be true in judgment, but may cause us to fail to oppose error in a timely manner (Acts 5:38-39)

The Purpose

- The Preacher said he was going to search for something that was good for man (Ecclesiastes 2:3)
- As he tells how the search proceeded, he tells of much folly (1:16; 2:1, 15; 3:17-18; etc.)
- Using man's wisdom, he pursued courses that would not result in a good end for man (2:17)
- His conclusion is that the key to man's happiness does not lie in man's pursuit of what he thinks is good, but in fearing God and keeping his commandments (12:13)

The Date of Writing

- It is important to know the age, or time, in which instructions and promises were given
 - Noah did not leave his father's house
 - Abraham did not build an ark
 - The law of the Sabbath was for the children of Israel (Exodus 31:12-17)
 - The thief on the cross lived under the law of Moses (Luke 23:43; Hebrews 9:16-17)
 - It helps us understand the instructions of Mark 14:13 when we know carrying water was the work of women

The Addressees

- In what city did the addressees live?
- What occupations were common there?
- What is the racial mixture?
 - The writer of Hebrews often refers to Israelite history and Jewish figures of speech
 - Paul quotes a prophet of Crete (Titus 1:12)
 - Paul quotes a poet on Mars Hill (Acts 17:28)
- What person is being addressed?
 - Which Herod? Pharaoh? What is the nature and position of the man of whom the writer is speaking?

The Nature of Writing

- Is it biography, history, law, poetry or prophecy?
 - Poetry and prophecy often contain figurative language, while law and history seldom do
- Poetry uses “much more figurative speech, and the figures more bold and imaginative” (Clinton Lockhart, *Principles of Interpretation*, p. 51)
 - In Psalm 80:4, the translators used “angry,” when the literal word was “smoke,” because they understood it as a figure representing God’s anger

Figurative Language in Revelation 20

- Sometimes figurative language can only be recognized by careful examination of the text
- The 1,000 years of Revelation 20 are mentioned along with a bottomless pit and a physical chain being used to bind Satan, a spiritual being
- Obviously, the whole passage is figurative